

THE LIBERAL PROTESTANT INFLUENCE ON THE MUSICAL
PLAYS OF OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II CIRCA 1943-1959

Kathryn Anne Bradley

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

St Mary's College

**THE LIBERAL PROTESTANT INFLUENCE ON THE MUSICAL PLAYS
OF OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II CIRCA 1943-1959**

A Thesis Submitted by

KATHRYN ANNE BRADLEY

TO THE FACULTY OF DIVINITY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

4 February, 2013

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the American liberal Protestant religious influences on Oscar Hammerstein II, and investigates how they are manifested in his musical plays written with Richard Rodgers in the period 1943-1959. Identifying these influences, which stem from Hammerstein's Protestant maternal family and from his attendance during his youth at the prominent Universalist church, The Church of the Divine Paternity, enable a widening of the theological engagement with popular culture to include the neglected realm of musical theatre. Having identified the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play as a particularly powerful popular art form that explores the existential questions faced by human beings, I investigate the previously unexplored Unitarian and Universalist influences on Oscar Hammerstein II, refuting claims that he was part of the Jewish theatrical community on Broadway. Tracing these influences in Hammerstein's lyrics and libretti shows his response to these fundamental questions as human beings seek to create meaning and build identity in relation to that which is 'other'. Within Hammerstein's personal philosophy I distinguish, the relationship between human beings and God, and the ethical relationships between human beings in community. I begin by exploring the Unitarian moral philosophy and belief in the fatherhood of God found in *Carousel*, *The Sound of Music* and *Cinderella*, and engaging with the Universalist depiction of the restoration period of the soul found in *Carousel*. Having revealed Hammerstein's liberal Protestant understanding of this relationship, I turn to his social and political activism connecting it to a social gospel understanding of the brotherhood of man and assertion of human unity. Engaging with his 'American' musicals – *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, and *The Sound of Music* - and his 'Asian' musicals –

South Pacific, The King and I, and Flower Drum Song - separately, I question the theological implications of his late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century understanding of human unity have with regard to diversity. Throughout each of his musicals evidence is adduced of an unwavering belief in the progress of humankind onward and upward, as he reveals a significant liberal Protestant understanding of the nature of humanity, the brotherhood of man, and the possibility for human development and change.

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INTRODUCTION

The most important ingredient of a good song is sincerity. Let the song be yours and yours alone. However important, however trivial, believe it. Mean it from the bottom of your heart, and say what is on your mind as carefully, as clearly, as beautifully as you can.¹
- Oscar Hammerstein II

For Oscar Hammerstein II, lyric writing was intricately connected with an individual's personal philosophy and thus representative of his or her own beliefs and commitments. An individual's creative output, therefore, is revelatory in the sense that it reveals the influences, religious, political, social, on a person as well as their ethical and moral make-up. This thesis aims to explore the religious influences on Oscar Hammerstein II, and to investigate how they manifest themselves in his musical plays written with Richard Rodgers in the period 1943-1959. By locating Hammerstein in the context of liberal Protestant thought, rather than in the Judaism where he is usually placed, it is possible to see the theological significance of his musical plays as he explores the nature of humanity in relation to God, and also within human community. The Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play is a particularly powerful popular art form that addresses and expresses the deep concerns of the society at the time of its conception but also the eternal, existential questions faced by human beings across the generations as evidenced by the continuing popularity of revival performances, soundtracks, and film adaptations.

¹ Oscar Hammerstein II, "Where the Song Begins," *The Saturday Review*, December 3, 1949 p.p. 11-14, cont. 51-52, in the Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Library of Congress, OH2 Box 3 of 3.

When Sheldon Harnack wrote his commandment for the musical theatre, 'Enlighten if thou canst, but entertain thou must',² he highlighted one of the principal aims of the musical play, to entertain and provide enjoyment for a paying audience. However, he also alluded to the power of the musical play to enlighten, to educate, and to provide a forum in which individuals can safely explore what it means to be human. The musical play can be an intoxicating experience; audiences are caught up in embodied narrative, song, and dance in a way that is unique, but analogous to other forms of theatre. When conceiving this commandment for the musical theatre, Harnack could have been describing the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, which seeks to enlighten through entertainment, and earn a profit.

Oscar Greeley Clendenning Hammerstein II (1895-1960)

Grandson of theatre impresario Oscar Hammerstein I, Oscar Greeley Clendenning Hammerstein II was a prolific lyricist, librettist, director and producer of musical plays in the first half of the twentieth-century. Having abandoned law school, Hammerstein began his musical theatre career by working for his uncle, theatre producer Arthur Hammerstein, and his first collaboration with Otto Harbach, *Always You*, opened in 1920.³ The 1920s were a profitable time for the young Hammerstein and his attentions were largely given to operetta as he collaborated with many different composers including Rudolf Friml and Sigmund Romberg,⁴ but his most significant contribution to musical theatre in this period was the 1923 collaboration,

² John Bush Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2003), Foreword.

³ Hugh Fordin, *Getting to Know Him: A Biography of Oscar Hammerstein II* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 45-46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

Show Boat, with Jerome Kern. This musical play is attributed by many as the first serious attempt to write an integrated musical play, and marks the beginning of a life-long commitment to using the musical theatre as a forum to ask serious questions concerning love, equality, and justice. After an unpredictable decade of failures in the 1930s,⁵ Hammerstein collaborated with Richard Rodgers in 1943 to produce the ground breaking musical play *Oklahoma!*.

Rodgers and Hammerstein dominated Broadway between 1943 and 1959, producing eleven musicals: *Oklahoma!* (1943), *Carousel* (1945), *State Fair* (1945), *Allegro* (1947), *South Pacific* (1949), *The King and I* (1951), *Me and Juliet* (1953), *Pipe Dream* (1955), *Cinderella* (1957: a television production), *Flower Drum Song*(1958), and *The Sound of Music* (1959); as well as setting up a successful production company, *The Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization*, and *Williamson Music*. Differing significantly from their Broadway contemporaries, Rodgers and Hammerstein did not write diversionary musical plays, but tackled serious human issues such as love, death, suicide, domestic abuse, interracial marriage, modernisation, assimilation, and the U.S. expansion in Asia. The subject matter of these musicals appears to have been entirely driven by Hammerstein himself, which is one of the reasons why this study focuses solely on the religious influences on him and not those of Richard Rodgers. Following in the tradition of Gilbert and Sullivan, these musicals were word-led; while the musical play is a collaborative and integrated art-work, unlike opera, the lyrics and libretti almost always come first and drive the rest of the show. Combined with Hammerstein's insistence that a playwright must write what he truly believes in and

⁵ Ibid., 123.

not mimic or imitate anyone else's emotions, this validates a study that focuses predominantly on the lyricist. In this sense, musical theatre as a genre is particular to the Judeo-Christian world, as it is driven by the word and finds its core popularity in Protestant dominated countries⁶ with the United States and the United Kingdom dominating both the creation and the consumption of this popular art form.

Hammerstein fits into this concept of the Judeo-Christian musical, but not for the reason that many would assume. It is often wrongly asserted that Hammerstein was Jewish, and a significant member of the predominantly Jewish group of lyricists and composers who established and dominated Broadway throughout the twentieth-century. A recent example of this misrepresentation is Andrea Most's publication *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical*, which argues that the musicals produced by Lerner and Lowe, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers and Larry Hart, and Oscar Hammerstein II helped to shape Jewish identity in America. One error that Most makes is including Oscar Hammerstein II in this group; she strongly argues that the character Ali Hakim in *Oklahoma!*, whom she judges to be Jewish, represents his creators Rodgers and Hammerstein.⁷ My own research, however, reveals significant liberal Protestant influences, particularly from the Universalist faith, on the young Hammerstein, which had a considerable impact on his personal philosophy that is manifest in his lyrics and libretti. Letters written by Hammerstein to his son Bill Hammerstein in the 1950s, contained in the Oscar Hammerstein II Archives at the Library of Congress, provide essential insight into the religious influences on

⁶ Ian Bradley, *You've Got to Have a Dream: The Message of the Musical* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 45.

⁷ Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 114.

Hammerstein. He informs us that he has no knowledge of Judaism whatsoever and that his religious experiences resulted from the Scottish Presbyterianism of his grandparents, and time spent at the Church of the Divine Paternity, a Universalist church in New York City.⁸ Recalling memories of religious language and devotional practice in the home, as well as sermons and Sunday school at church, Hammerstein reveals a significant liberal Protestant influence that later comments and interviews reveal became a fundamental part of his personal philosophy, which in turn influenced his musical plays.

The religious aspects of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical plays have been largely unexplored whereas scholars often investigate their political and social message. The result of this is that the theological aspects of these musical plays, particularly those that do not reveal an explicit religious or confessional nature, are overshadowed by their political, social, and economic ramifications or assertions. Christina Klein's seminal work, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination 1945-1961*, and John Bush Jones' *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre*, both show how intricately connected the musical play is to American society. It is possible to read the musical play as a cultural artefact that enables us to understand the particularities of the context it was created in. In these studies we see a relationship between the education and enlightenment of society through the medium of the musical play. While studies such as these are crucial in developing our understanding of the function of popular culture art forms in

⁸ Oscar Hammerstein II, letter to Bill Hammerstein, 25 January, 1953, in the Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 2 of 9.

helping shape and develop individuals, communities, and cultures, the lack of a theological perspective is detrimental. This thesis aims to provide a theological perspective to this argument by revealing the religious influences that informed these musical plays, and the theological answers that they provide to questions concerning human existence in an ever-changing world.

Theological Engagement with the Musical Play

Theological engagement with popular culture has become ever more valued in recent years. In an increasingly secular environment in which people are constantly bombarded with various aspects of popular culture, it is essential for theologians to engage with the reality of people in the twenty-first century if they are to have any influence. Locating the musical play within the wider theological study of popular culture, this thesis aims to show how musical plays contribute significantly to human making, imagining, and creating community as individuals, and communities; ask questions concerning the nature of humanity; and question our relationships with each other, and our relationship with God. David Brown argues that the musical play's 'optimism conforms too closely to the individualistic utopias of the American dream, where underlying social problems are simply ignored.'⁹ I would refute this statement and argue that the musical play is a place where individuals and communities can address social, political, economic, and religious problems in society in a non-threatening environment. The power of the musical play lies in its collective expression

⁹ David Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 368.

of society but also in the challenges it poses, and the answers it gives to the concerns of a given society.

While theological engagement with theatre as a whole is a popular area of study, explicit engagement with musical theatre in recent years has been limited and only one academic, Ian Bradley, has devoted an entire volume, *You've Got to Have a Dream: The Message of the Musical*, to an exploration of the religious and spiritual nature of the musical play. Challenging what he sees to be a snobbish disdain¹⁰ towards the musical play found among academics, theologians included, he argues that the musical has a significant spiritual dimension and can provide ordinary people with a religious yet entertaining experience. Similarly, David Brown explores the relationship between the musical play and religious experience in his 2011 publication, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in the Ordinary*. Grouping the musical play with popular music, his attentions are predominantly given to musical plays that have explicit religious content such as *Godspell*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and *Jerry Springer the Opera*. Suggesting that the lack of religion in musical plays lies in the non-religious beliefs of the collaborators and the fear that religion might be seen to be too divisive, Brown implies that it might be difficult to discern theological significance in musical theatre. However, despite this he notes a spiritual significance in certain musical numbers, including "You'll Never Walk Alone" from *Carousel*, and reassures his reader that he does not want to judge the ability of any artistic medium to generate religious experience based on its explicit religious content.¹¹ While Bradley engages with the

¹⁰ Bradley, *Have a Dream*, 3.

¹¹ Brown, *God and Grace*, 371.

wider scope of musical theatre from Gilbert and Sullivan, Lerner and Lowe, Andrew Lloyd Webber, to Stephen Sondheim, Brown's study is peripheral to his wider project, which seeks to argue for wider religious experience. What neither does is engage solely and extensively with one musical theatre playwright to investigate the religious influences on his or her life that can be read from their creative output. This thesis aims to engage explicitly with Oscar Hammerstein II, tracing the liberal Protestant influences on him, and to investigate how this Unitarian Universalist understanding of the nature of humanity and God is implicit in his musical plays.

Aims and Intentions: Summary of the Thesis

This thesis aims to reveal the liberal Protestant and Unitarian Universalist influences on Oscar Hammerstein II, and to offer an exposition of how these influences impact upon the message of his musicals as he seeks to understand what it means to be human. Therefore, the thesis falls largely into three parts: firstly, it seeks to locate this study in the field of theology and popular culture, and to determine the religious influences on Hammerstein; secondly, it asks how these influences effected Hammerstein's understanding of humanity in relation to God and redemption; and thirdly, it asks how this understanding of God and humanity impacted upon Hammerstein's concept of community and human relationships.

Ch. 1 Chapter One locates this thesis within the wider field of theology and popular culture, and asks why the study of popular culture is important theologically. Engaging with recent theological discussions concerning popular culture, it asserts that popular culture art forms are locations for human making, imagining and understanding; a place where human beings can be seen asking and answering questions relating to what it means to be human in relation to one another, and to the

divine. Making a case for the musical play's inclusion in the field of popular culture, I focus on its dependence on embodied narrative and the multi-sensory experience of the audience. Identifying the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical as a popular art form that functions in this way, I show how their first collaboration, *Oklahoma!*, enabled musical theatre to play a significant role in society.

- Ch. 2** Engaging extensively with archival material from the Oscar Hammerstein II Archives at the Library of Congress, this chapter reveals the early liberal Protestant influence on Hammerstein coming from his maternal family and from the time spent at the Universalist church, The Church of the Divine Paternity. It traces the continuing liberal Protestant influence in Hammerstein's adult life through interviews he gave, articles he wrote, and the tributes made by others in the aftermath of his death. Having identified this liberal Protestant influence, the second half of this chapter traces the development on the Unitarian and Universalist denominations in America in order to gain an understanding of the type of Universalism Hammerstein would have encountered in the early twentieth-century. Revealing an ever-growing Arminian strain in the Universalist denomination as it veered ever closer towards Unitarianism following the Restoration Controversy, and the interdenominational nature of the Social Gospel Movement, this study asserts that both denominations are relevant for gaining an understanding of key liberal Protestant concepts that are evident in Hammerstein's musical plays.
- Ch.3** Turning predominantly to Rodgers and Hammerstein's second musical play, *Carousel*, with supporting evidence from *Cinderella* and *The Sound of Music*, Chapter Three traces the influence of Unitarian moral philosophy as expounded by William Ellery Channing in Hammerstein's thought. As the musical play that has the most explicit reference to the divine, I engage with the Boston try-out script as well as the Broadway script in order to seek an understanding of Hammerstein's concept of the divine, and humanity's relationship to God. Concluding that Hammerstein reveals a liberal Protestant understanding of the divine parenthood of God, and the essential goodness of humanity, it challenges Bradley's criticism that *Carousel* reveals a Pelagian strain, and asks if what we see is actually an increased sense of human responsibility for moral action and a Universalist understanding of the restoration period after death that restores that soul to God prior to redemption.

- Ch. 4** Having explored Hammerstein's concept of the relationship between humankind and God, this chapter turns to his subsequent understanding of just and ethical relationships between human beings. Engaging with the rise of the Social Question at the beginning of the twentieth-century expounded by Francis Greenwood Peabody, this chapter turns to Hammerstein's social and political activism revealed through his commitment to the Hollywood League Against Nazism, the Writer's War Board, the NACCP, and The United World Federalists, to name a few. Connecting Peabody's assertion that the artist as well as the theologian can provide answers to the Social Question to Hammerstein's belief in the power of art, this chapter provides illustrations of how Hammerstein's political and social activism is revealed by his musical plays
- Ch. 5** Having identified Hammerstein's commitment to peace, and the unity of humankind that transcends all boundaries and barriers, Chapter Five explores the influence of the Universalist concept of the brotherhood of man on his musical plays. Focusing on what I term his 'American' musicals: *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *The Sound of Music*, *Pipe Dream*, and *Allegro*; Hammerstein's commitment to the brotherhood of man reveals another important liberal Protestant influence. The work of Henry Churchill King reveals a growing sense of the oneness, likeness, and mutual influence of humanity in liberal Protestant thought at the start of the twentieth-century, which is prevalent in Hammerstein's work. Unitarian theologian James Luther Adams raises the issue of the treatment of diversity within the unified brotherhood of man, which leads to the question: How does Hammerstein treat the outsider within the community? Addressing criticisms made of Hammerstein for his elimination of the other in his musical plays, I argue that difference is permissible as every individual finds their place within community, their vocation, but disruption is not tolerated as illustrated by the figure of Jud Fry.
- Ch. 6** Engaging with Hammerstein's 'Asian' musicals, this chapter closely follows that preceding it by asking how Hammerstein portrays the importance of diversity in his global musical plays. It asks if in fervently asserting the oneness of humankind in his Asian musical plays he silences genuine diversity. In light of the importance of global diversity evident in Sack's theology, which builds on James Luther Adams argument for diversity in Chapter Five, and the risk that is run if unity leads to Western superiority diminishing the scatteredness of humankind, I turn to *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *Flower Drum Song*. Arguing

that each of these musical asserts the unity of humanity that transcends all racial and geographical boundaries, I address modern criticisms made of Hammerstein concerning the implications of his portrayal of diversity positing that at the time of conception these musical plays revealed a liberal Protestant progressive view of the world. While it is important to assert diversity, particularly in the increasingly multi-cultural world of the twenty-first century, there is a place for asserting the unity of humankind and Hammerstein's impact must be criticised, but should not be undermined as it is also important for a human understanding of relationships between differing communities and traditions.

THEOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENTS WITH POPULAR CULTURE AND MUSICAL THEATRE

A lack of serious theological engagement with popular culture can result in a misunderstanding of how human beings experience the world in which they live, and how they understand and express their relationships with each other and the divine. Popular culture can provide the theologian with a location to investigate human expression of ontological issues through popular art forms which shape the lives of millions of people on a global level. Robert Johnston, in *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue*, argues that film plays an important role as it is a means for human beings to understand and critique their own culture. He argues that: 'It is from movies that we get our "collective" images of ourselves, our values, and our social world. Movies both identify our anxieties and reveal our society's values; they "tell" us something about the age we live in.'¹² Despite dealing explicitly with film, Johnston reveals something of the nature of popular culture, suggesting that it is through popular artistic mediums that the majority of human beings seek to understand their existence. I would argue that this is a role that is fulfilled by art forms found across the entire spectrum of popular culture, as differing cultural expressions respond in unique yet analogous ways to the reality of human life. This chapter aims to explore various theological engagements with popular culture focusing on this human longing for meaning, and the human expression of ultimate concern found in Paul Tillich's *Theology of Culture*. It will then turn explicitly to the musical theatre, identifying the

¹² Robert K. Johnson, *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2000), 64.

integrated musical play as a popular art form that influences the lives of many people in the United States and the United Kingdom, arguing that the musical plays of Rodgers and Hammerstein are a rich source for exploring the relationship between theology and popular culture.

Identifying Popular Culture

Theories of popular culture have traditionally resulted in a negative assessment of an 'inferior' form of culture in contrast to the aesthetic principles of 'high' or avant-garde art forms. Popular art forms have often been demonised as the oppressor of the folk arts and assessed as a significant contributor to the encouragement of the non-thinking masses. Often described for what they are not, or in contrast to that which is 'superior', popular cultural art forms are often bundled together in a vague homogeneous mass that undermines and neglects the wealth and diversity found in this genre of culture. The risk run is that if popular culture is lambasted for being commercial, mass, or trash, the subtle nuances between the popular cultural expressions are overlooked, and the discovery of a positive account of popular culture is prevented. Popular culture may have its commercial side, but within the popular arts total dependence on this commercial drive inevitably varies. The musical play is in one sense commercial, made readily available to a wide demographic through professional productions on Broadway and the West End, ever-popular touring productions, amateur productions across the United States and the United Kingdom, cinematic adaptations, and television broadcasts of films and live shows. However, in order to create a meaningful account of popular culture, and the popular arts in particular, it is

essential to look beyond this commerciality and investigate how people use and respond to popular cultural art forms; how they use them to construct meaning in their lives. Through a theological engagement with popular culture it becomes possible to see beyond what popular culture is not and begin to see what individual strands of popular culture are, and what they can be. Taking the musical theatre as an example, it is possible to argue that it lies within the popular culture genre as it is neither high art in the same sense as Wagner's operas, but nor is it folk culture, as in Irish traditional music played spontaneously in a local pub.

At the turn of the twentieth century, America was transformed as a result of its emergence as one of the world's leading industrial powers. Greatly affected by industrialisation, the population of American cities expanded as immigrants flooded into the cities at the turn of the century.¹³ As young people began to frequent dance halls, amusement parks, cinemas, and vaudeville theatres, the Victorian ideals of the cultural elite were challenged and life changed dramatically for the American people. Immigration and race also had considerable impact on the coining of the terms 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' at the turn of the century as a means to distinguish between those of intellectual or aesthetic superiority and those deemed inferior. Derived from phrenology, this enabled the cultural elite to distinguish themselves from those they saw to be inferior, and they saw culture as a means to subordinate and morally educate the lower classes and immigrants.¹⁴ Fascinated by Matthew Arnold's concept of culture as the pursuit of humankind's total perfection, the Victorian elite

¹³ William D. Romanowski, *Pop Culture Wars: Religion & the Role of Entertainment in American Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 59.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

sympathised with his insistence that the governance and guidance of a cultural elite was necessary for democracy to flourish.¹⁵ Arnold's theory reasserted the Anglo Saxon culture as well as giving 'the Victorian middle class a paternalistic responsibility to convert others to their way of life, which to the Victorians meant to raise the standards of other groups in society.'¹⁶ Once this had been achieved there would be social and political order as the masses accepted the culture of the elite and achieved cultural hegemony.¹⁷ A division was thereby created, and while the intent was that the cultural elite would dominate, in America the popular entertainment of the middle and working classes would prevail in the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁸ While these distinctions between 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' culture have dissolved in America to a great extent, considerable traces have remained feeding into a continuing division between the 'high' and the 'low' among both the cultural elite, and the middle and working classes.¹⁹ Definitions of 'lowbrow' or 'popular' culture reveal the continuing sense of inferiority imposed upon these cultural expressions.

There has been a growing interest in the study of popular culture since the 1960s,²⁰ resulting in considerable debate as to how the term should be defined. Edgar and Sedgewick explain that a simple definition of popular culture, such as, 'the culture that appeals to, or that is most comprehensible by, the general public', neglects to take into consideration the complexities, tensions, and nuances of its use in cultural

¹⁵ Ibid., 77.

¹⁶ Ibid., 78.

¹⁷ Ibid., 79.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 80.

²⁰ Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 1.

studies.²¹ For this reason, universal definitions of popular culture are rarely given as popular culture has become a term that is used in a variety of ways by academics depending on their individual project.²² Traditionally popular culture has been defined in regards to what it is not; in contrast to high or avant-garde culture, folk culture, and mass culture. Gordon Lynch clearly sets out these distinctions in *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture*:

- A. Popular culture as an opposing cultural form to *high culture* or *the avant-garde*;
- B. Popular culture as a category that is defined in relation to both *high culture* and *folk culture*, or which is seen as displacing *folk culture*;
- C. Popular culture as a form of social and cultural resistance against *dominant culture* or *mass culture*.²³

From these definitions it becomes possible to determine what popular culture is not; for example, we can discern that while Bizet's *Carmen* is high culture, Oscar Hammerstein II's *Carmen Jones* belongs within the realm of popular culture. The third distinction between popular culture and mass culture is particularly interesting as it challenges assumptions that popular art forms are mass produced, commercial products. At once, the difficulty of defining popular culture is apparent as it is possible for a popular art form to fit into a variety of these categories, or none at all. Take *Carmen Jones*: as an adaptation of Bizet's *Carmen* it is an opposing cultural form to high culture; it is not 'folk' culture in the sense that it comes from the people, but rather was written by an Ivy League educated lyricist; as for the third you could argue that in writing for an entirely African American cast Hammerstein was writing against

²¹ Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgewick, eds., *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 285.

²² *Ibid.*, 2.

²³ *Ibid.*, 3.

the dominant culture, but this is different from protest culture which the term 'cultural resistance' might suggest. In this instance the popular culture art form chosen can be said to fit into these categories, but we have no positive sense of what *Carmen Jones* is, only what it is not. Had we chosen another popular culture product, take for example the *South Pacific* collector's plates, we could not have identified them by category C as they were mass produced. Herein lies the problem with attempts to define popular culture; because popular culture as a definition covers such a wide variety of cultural expressions from advertising to popular art forms, including musical theatre, it becomes difficult to pinpoint a precise definition of popular culture. Therefore it is understandable why people have been tempted to define it solely by what it is not. The problem with this sort of approach is that if we define the popular as an 'inferior' culture there is a hidden bias that leads us to assume that if something is popular it must be 'bad'.²⁴

Much of this results from early critiques of the 'popular' coming from advocates of the high arts and aesthetic judgement in the early twentieth-century who reacted against the increase of mass production resulting from industrialisation. They argued that these easily reproduced cultural products and arts could not be authentic, genuine works of art because they had become commercial products. Similarly, questions that asked who or what determines popular culture suggested that these new art forms could not be 'folk' culture as they were not genuinely coming from the

²⁴ Ted Turnau, *Popologetics: Popular Culture in Christian Perspective* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2012), 4.

people, but rather were being forced upon them.²⁵ The result of this was the Mass Culture debate which dominated the 1920s and 1930s, and traces of which still remain today in the suspicion of popular culture. Mass society theory argues that industrialisation creates 'atomisation'; a society of people who can only relate to one another like atoms in a physical and chemical compound, resulting in an erosion of moral or meaningful relationships.²⁶ Mass culture fuels this mass society by providing a 'surrogate and ineffective morality', as religious and moral truth claims are subsumed by individualism and secularism. Mass society and mass culture theory assumes a domination of the elite, a means of oppressing and manipulating the people, thus generating a suspicion of cultural forms that could not be labelled as 'high' or 'folk' culture. In mass society, community and morality break down as people are 'absorbed into an increasingly anonymous mass, manipulated by their own source of a surrogate community and morality, the mass media. In this society, mass culture suppresses folk culture and undermines the integrity of art.'²⁷ This theory, however, is problematic as it only argues for those cultural expressions that are produced by the industrial techniques of mass production and assumes that the audience is a passive group of consumers. In arguing that mass culture lacks intellectual challenge and provides fantasy, illusion, or escapism for a passive, uncritically receptive audience, it fails to see the value of these cultural expressions and how people use popular culture

²⁵ Dominic Strinati, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

expressions to build meaning in their lives, while ignoring the diversity and breadth of popular culture art forms.²⁸

Theodor Adorno, played a key role in ensuring popular culture expressions were treated with suspicion through the coining of the term, the 'Culture Industry', in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*.²⁹ Influenced by Marx's notion of 'commodity fetishism', Adorno argued that, in capitalist societies, the true value of culture lay in the price of a commodity rather than in the experience of the art form.³⁰ As with Mass Society theory, the audience (in this case the working class) is a passive receptor manipulated by the elite to accept capitalism through the provision of commodity.³¹ These people 'do not realise their real needs remain unsatisfied; as a result of the stimulation and fulfilment of false needs, they have what they think they want.'³² The working class is manipulated and controlled by the elite through the production and distribution of popular culture produce thus becoming completely powerless to the wants of the culture industry as their tastes are cultivated to crave false needs with the aim to ensure obedience to the capitalist system.³³ Once again, this theory eliminates the power of the audience in the survival of popular culture art forms and undermines the diversity and wealth of popular expressions.

One difficulty that arises in both Mass Society and Culture Industry critiques of popular culture is the tendency to lump popular culture expressions into a

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Edgar and Sedgewick, *Cultural Theory*, 103.

³⁰ Strinati, *Popular Culture*, 51.

³¹ Ibid., 53.

³² Ibid., 54.

³³ Ibid., 54-55.

homogeneous group, which at once undermines the diversity of popular culture. This diversity is twofold: firstly, popular culture is expressed in a variety of ways, be that genre, text, images and so on. Popular culture art forms can be manifest in musical theatre, cinema, graphic novels, popular song, advertisements, and therefore are produced in a variety of ways that cannot always be directly compared. For instance, the production of Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* is not produced in the same way as Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* yet both would be bundled together under the label of 'popular culture'. Secondly, popular culture's diversity lies in the variety of ways in which people use or interpret popular art forms individually and as part of a wider community. What results from this variety of popular culture forms, and the ever changing production, is the audience's ability to accept certain forms while rejecting others. The unpredictability of audience receptivity plays an important role in the success of a popular culture art form and can manifest itself in a variety of ways. An individual may love graphic novels, but despise pop music, for example, or even more interestingly, love one work of art by an artist and completely reject another. In the case of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musicals, for instance, while *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel* and *The Sound of Music* have all been accepted as household names, lesser known shows such as *Allegro*, *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream* have largely been rejected by all except ardent fans. Another flaw found in the critique of mass culture is the insistence that these cultural forms have been forced upon the people and therefore cannot arise from or be relevant to their lives.³⁴ Postmodern theories, and theological interpretations of popular culture challenge this and recognise that

³⁴ Ibid., 36-37.

popular culture is essential for human understanding of identity, and not only note the active participation of the audience in popular culture, but look at how people actually *use* it in their lives.

Postmodern approaches to popular culture bring with them new difficulties, but the emphasis still remains on the power popular culture has over people. One argument is that postmodernism describes a society 'in which mass media and popular culture are the most important and powerful institutions, and control and shape all other types of social relationships.'³⁵ Popular culture images surround us on a daily basis and help human beings to define themselves and the world in which they live.³⁶ Postmodern theory, therefore, is an attempt to understand this, and to question how these popular culture expressions function in the world. One particularly relevant area of debate concerns the way in which popular culture challenges the human sense of identity. Strinati explains: 'The erosion of once secure collective identities has led to the increasing fragmentation of personal identities. It is argued that we have witnessed the gradual disappearance of traditional and highly valued frameworks of reference in terms of which people could define themselves and their place in society, and so feel relatively secure in their personal and collective identities.'³⁷ With no substitutes in place that can provide the same stability as these traditional sources of identity society becomes increasingly fragmented and human beings begin to lose a sense of meaning or community as self-centred consumerism is encouraged. Popular culture and mass media, while not being genuine sources of identity and belief,

³⁵ Ibid., 205.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 219-220.

become the only frames of reference for human beings seeking to create identity and community.³⁸

It is at this point that a theological interpretation of popular culture becomes increasingly influential and powerful. As we will see, many theological engagements with popular culture focus on the creation of meaning and formulation of identity for ordinary people living in the world. From a theological perspective traditional frameworks of reference, such as religion, have not disappeared and continue to hold relevance for the world today. It is the way in which these popular art forms act as 'religion', or complement religion in aiding understanding of self, the world, and what is beyond that is of great interest for a variety of theologians. Rather than being in competition with theological understandings of life, popular culture can be seen challenging traditional ways of communicating religious or spiritual truths, but also acting in tandem with religion as a means of communication, and understanding both our relationships with one another and with God. Human beings are not merely victims of popular culture, but can, and do, use it in a meaningful and profound way. A theological account of popular culture can begin to step away from the negative definitions of popular culture and positively consider the role that popular culture plays in the lives of everyday people.

Theological Engagements with Popular Culture

Popular culture is approached in a variety of ways by theologians and academics from other disciplines. The general consensus is that popular art forms are a

³⁸ Ibid., 220-221.

human expression of meaning and existence. They help people understand the world that they live in and provide them with the tools to construct meaning and challenge political, societal, and religious norms. In this sense, popular culture acts as a cultural communicator, helping people make judgements about existence and to engage in social interactions. Popular culture can also be viewed as a form of popular religion, particularly in America where popular art forms are influenced by a unique brand of civil religion, and can be seen to be acting 'religiously' within communities. Theologically speaking this can be seen as a move from theology as doctrine to theology as practice.³⁹ Theologians such as Elaine Graham and Stanley Greeley pick up on Paul Tillich's *Theology of Culture* and argue that it is through popular culture that we can see expressions of the ultimate concern of humankind. Beginning with a non-Christian interpretation that popular culture is in fact replacing or diluting traditional Christianity, I will argue that the religious traces seen in popular cultural art forms are in fact human expressions of what it means to be human in relation to one another and the divine. By taking the human practice of making and using popular culture, it is possible to understand these popular art forms as tools to create and understand meaning in our world.

In 2008 atheist collaborators, Richard Santana and Gregory Erickson argued in *Religion and Popular Culture: Rescripting the Sacred* that popular culture acts as popular religion in the United States. As the primary source of popular mass culture, the United States partakes in an ever 'evolving national code of belief, a matrix of

³⁹ Elaine Graham, "What We Make of the World: The Turn to "Culture" in Theology and the Study of Religion," in *Between Sacred and Profane: Researching Religion and Popular Culture*, ed. Gordon Lynch (London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2007), 66.

consumerism, political ideology, patriotic fever, and religious faith based on a peculiarly American revision of old world tenets'.⁴⁰ Alluding to the religious nature of popular culture they argue that: 'Primarily through popular culture, American Christianity influences how all Americans think'.⁴¹ Undoubtedly this refers to the influence of American civil religion that permeates American culture and is evident in politics, patriotism and the arts. American culture has enduring themes and beliefs, which have shaped American identity, and are grounded within Christian motifs and imagery focusing on the Bible's exodus theme as the centrepiece for civil religion.⁴²

Fishwick argues that:

The use of symbols, rituals, holidays, and media have created an American civil religion - there is no other word for it. Admittedly, it is neither sectarian nor in any specific sense Christian. But it is central to our belief system and our understanding of the cosmos, reflecting both our private and public views.⁴³

This civil religion changes over time and American popular religion is 'against formal doctrines and structures of institutionalized religion'.⁴⁴ Rather, American popular Christianity is an experiential, individualistic religion, and the 'characteristic that separates American belief from historical Christianity is that most Americans believe that God and Christ love *them*, and love them in a personal way' regardless of their religious commitment or activity.⁴⁵ It is necessary to be careful when assessing this popular religion evident in popular culture, and we must question its authenticity as a religious form precisely because of its unregulated and non-doctrinal nature.

⁴⁰Richard W. Santana and Gregory Erickson, *Religion and Popular Culture: Rescripting the Sacred* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008), 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴² Marshall W. Fishwick, *Great Awakenings: Popular Religion and Popular Culture* (New York: Harrington Park Press, imprint of The Haworth Press, 1995), 100-101.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁴⁴ Santana and Erickson, *Religion and Popular Culture*, 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

Nevertheless, this argument suggests that popular art forms in the United States contain Christian imagery and ideology that increases their theological significance through the spread of these ideas throughout the world.

If this interpretation of the role of popular culture in the world is correct, it raises considerable concerns for the Christian theologian. Popular culture is viewed as acting 'religiously'; it acts as an unregulated medium that expresses variants of Christian truth-claims, but in fact it is a 'religious fake'. Does this mean that popular culture should be shunned by religious communities; something to be avoided by 'good' Christians? David Chidester argues that popular culture in America acts as a 'religious fake' because the popular arts 'involve artificial or fraudulent religious claims about transcendence, the sacred, or ultimate human concerns.'⁴⁶ However, defining religion as 'ways of being a human person in a human place', Chidester argues that these 'fakes' are doing authentic religious work as they forge community, focus desire, and facilitate exchange in ways that look like religion.⁴⁷ Despite admitting that labelling popular culture as religion does not always mean accepting its religious legitimacy,⁴⁸ in his view 'something is doing religious work if it is engaged in negotiating what it is to be human.'⁴⁹ He unpacks his concept of negotiating what it is to be human further explaining that:

By negotiating, I refer to the relational, situational, and contested character of the production of religious meaning and power in popular culture. Negotiating the sacred does not occur in a vacuum. These struggles over the production,

⁴⁶ David Chidester, *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture* (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 2005), vii.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 18.

significance, and ownership of sacred symbols take place within a political economy of the sacred.⁵⁰

What is meant by the 'political economy of the sacred' is the way in which the sacred is produced, circulated and consumed in popular culture.⁵¹ Chidester successfully reminds us that negotiating the sacred does not only take place in the confines of the Church or religious institutions, but ordinary people are constantly engaging with the transcendent and the sacred in their everyday lives, which can be seen to be manifested in their relationship with popular culture.

Popular culture, therefore, provides a place where believers and non-believers can engage with what it means to be human outside a Church context. For Elaine Graham, culture and cultural practices provide an environment for human being, making and imagining;⁵² something which is indicative of practical and liberation theologies. The religious element in popular culture indicates:

[A] shift from theology as doctrine or belief, to theology as practice: and thus an opportunity to conceive of theological reflection as one of the activities by which human beings build worlds of meaning and significance, and experience themselves as creative, moral, and purposeful beings.⁵³

Approaching popular culture from this angle raises significant theological issues concerning the nature of existence and what it means to be human in this world. Viewed in the light of practical theology, rather than from within a doctrinal vacuum (to use Chidester's term), popular culture no longer needs to be questioned in narrow theological terms. Instead of looking at the confessional appearance of a specific manifestation of popular culture, it becomes necessary to judge its value on artistic

⁵⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Graham, "What We Make of the World," 66.

⁵³ Ibid.

excellence and life perspective.⁵⁴ Rather than giving theological value to popular culture based upon its explicit confessional nature or ability to convert non-believers, it is essential to look beyond this to what is revealed by its essence. Graham posits:

Popular culture is conceived theologically not only as a vehicle for converting people to faith, therefore, but a vital medium through which ultimate reality itself is mediated and revealed. Popular culture is believed to constitute a central source and resource for theological understanding.⁵⁵

Popular culture is a resource for the theologian that embraces the entirety of humankind, believer and non-believer alike, in which the theologian can gain considerable insight into what is happening outside of the church and how people are expressing their understanding of humanity and divinity in their own language.

Popular culture as a human expression with the end to seek understanding of the world in which we live is becoming increasingly important for theological investigation. The transient nature of popular culture with its ever changing fads and trends may suggest to the sceptic that whereas high-art endures, the popular, with its lack of continuity and permanence, offers little in the way of theological significance. Two things can be taken from this: the first; that in a world that constantly changes it is natural that cultural responses develop, change and disappear; but more importantly, that what lies beneath all popular culture is an unchanging concern of what it means to exist in this world. The product or output may change, but the inspiration and yearning to understand our nature remains constant. All popular culture engages with questions of relationships: common are those between lovers, families, and friends,

⁵⁴William D. Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001), 93.

⁵⁵Graham, "What We Make of the World," 69.

but also prominent are relationships between humanity and human constructed systems, the earth, and the transcendent. Lynn Schofield Clark argues that popular culture is ‘a fundamental part of our social lives and our interactions with other; it provides an especially emotive language through which we communicate with others about those things that are especially meaningful to us.’⁵⁶

If Schofield Clark is to be believed, popular culture provides human beings with the tools required to interact with one another and to construct meaning. Not only does popular culture act as a location for communicating ideals and ideas through appealing to our emotions and helping us to understand ourselves, but it helps to create stories and narratives that bind humanity together, and help groups of people to make sense of their lives both as individuals and as communities. She continues:

It is through the stories, myths, narratives, sounds, and image of culture that we are able to make sense of our lives, both for ourselves and others. By communicating with others through reference to popular culture, we are able to place ourselves socially and to ascribe meaning to our own actions.⁵⁷

The power of story and narrative is of particular importance here as through creating scenarios and situations that are analogous to and recognisable in everyday life, people engaging with popular culture are able to assess reality and begin to create meaning or alter ideals. As De Gruchy posits in *Confessions of a Christian Humanist*: ‘Stories told with honesty, like all genuine works of art, break open reality, helping us to see things differently, to see ourselves differently and hopefully to live differently.’⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Lynn Schofield Clark, “Why Study Popular Culture? Or How to Build a Case for Your Thesis in a Religious Studies or Theology Department,” in *Between Sacred and Profane: Researching Religion and Popular Culture*, ed. Gordon Lynch (London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2007), 11.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ John De Gruchy, *Confessions of a Christian Humanist* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 7.

Romanowski also reminds us that culture is communicated through texts,⁵⁹ and as with stories passed from generation to generation through oral tradition it 'binds us together in the community of humankind.'⁶⁰

Popular culture not only acts as a cultural communicator, but it also plays an important role in 'world-building and maintenance'.⁶¹ Romanowski asserts that:

However commercialized they have become, the popular arts cannot be adequately described in terms of production and consumption, for they serve as cultural representations. They are part of the active process of generating and circulating meanings among people – believers and non-believers alike.⁶²

The wide spread nature of the popular arts only reinforces the power they have for spreading ideas and ideals across the globe as artists question the meaning and purpose of life, and the possibility of the divine.⁶³ They help human beings in creating a culture and in building a world to live in that they believe to be a better place than the situation they find themselves in presently. The popular arts not only reaffirm the culture of which the community is already a part of, but play an important role in challenging societal norms and questioning the right way to live in this world through cultural conversation. 'Popular art can', Romanowski discerns:

[P]rovide general knowledge, stimulate our thinking, and get us to look at things in new and different ways. It can raise disturbing political, moral, economic, or religious issues, question gender relations, point a finger at sexism, racism, elitism, social or economic injustices. It can comfort and affirm, challenge and provoke. Popular art can be seen as an arena for argument and debate in which different ideas and perspectives find voice in stories, videos,

⁵⁹ Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open*, 87.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶¹ David Morgan, "Studying Religion and Popular Culture: Prospects, Presuppositions, Procedures," in *Between Sacred and Profane: Researching Religion and Popular Culture*, ed. Gordon Lynch (London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2007), 21.

⁶² Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open*, 19.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 58.

songs, and pictures. In sum, the popular arts are a vital means of cultural conversation.⁶⁴

Popular culture acts as an expression and a criticism of humanity's situation, be that societal, political, economic or even religious. The popular arts can, therefore, be read as 'maps of reality',⁶⁵ as they represent human interpretations of the reality we live in together.

Paul Tillich's *Theology of Culture*

Throughout these discussions of theology and popular culture there are traces of German born theologian Paul Tillich's (1886-1965) *Theology of Culture*. Romanoswki's 'maps of reality' illuminate the role the popular arts play in acting as a cultural communicator, suggesting a close intertwining of the secular and sacred realms evident in Tillich's reading of culture. More explicit is Graham's use of the term 'ultimate reality', echoing Chidester's reference to 'ultimate human concerns'⁶⁶, both of which stem from Tillich. If we are to argue that popular culture mediates and reveals humankind's ultimate concern then it is important to investigate what is meant by this. Paul Tillich's *Theology of Culture* does not explicitly argue for the popular arts, in fact he specifies a preference for Expressionism, but it does provide a theological starting point for arguing the importance of religious engagements with culture that can be extended to encompass the popular. Tillich provides an insightful approach to the separation between theology and culture that he saw to be rooted in ontology. Asserting that 'religion is the substance of culture [and] culture is the form of

⁶⁴ Ibid., 144.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 56-57.

⁶⁶ Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, vii.

religion',⁶⁷ Tillich discerns that the spiritual life of humankind is lost underneath the mundane qualities of secular life, but there is the possibility of recovery; of uncovering the spiritual that lies beneath everything that is manifest in the ultimate concern of humanity.

In *Theology of Culture*, Tillich abstracts and redefines the concept of religion revealing his ontological approach. 'Religion,' he argues, 'is the substance, the ground, and the depth of man's spiritual life';⁶⁸ the religious aspect of the human spirit which is universal. By 'religion', Tillich is not referring to a traditional interpretation of religion defined by the Church, but he is alluding to something that is both conceptual and universal to all beyond the particularities of faiths and philosophies. Arguing that 'religion is being ultimately concerned about that which is and should be our ultimate concern', he posits:

This means that faith is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, and God is the name for the content of the concern. Such a concept of religion has little in common with the description of religion as the belief in the existence of a highest being called God, and the theoretical and practical consequences of such a belief. Instead, we are pointing to an existential, not a theoretical, understanding of religion.⁶⁹

This existential understanding of religion not only shows Tillich's rejection of the divine as a Supreme Being over and against all other beings, but it also shows that human beings are inherently and inescapably religious. Bulman's interpretation of this highlights how religion becomes a fundamental quality of existence that is evident in all spiritual or cultural expressions.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 42.

⁶⁸ Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 8.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 40.

[Religion] is rather a dimension or quality of finite reality that is present in all spiritual acts and culture creations. It is based upon the experience of an unconditioned and absolute reality, which is the correlative aspect of a no less radical and absolute experience of nonbeing and lack of meaning in all finite experience.⁷⁰

The human experience of the unconditional and absolute within finite reality is in essence what gives humankind its religious quality. The way in which human beings choose to express these experiences of that which is beyond provide a starting point for the exploration of theology and culture.

The religious and the secular should not remain polarised, as independent realms that are seen to have little reason to co-exist or interact with each other. For Tillich, the reason that they are separated is a direct result of the fallen nature of humanity, not because they have nothing to communicate to each other. Rather, both the religious and the secular are 'rooted in religion in the larger sense of the word, in the experience of ultimate concern.'⁷¹ Relevant to this is the second consequence of this existential concept of religion identified by Tillich in *Theology of Culture*: 'the disappearance of the gap between the sacred and secular realm.'

If religion is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, this state cannot be restricted to a special realm. The unconditional character of this concern implies that it refers to every moment of our life, to every space and every realm. The universe is God's sanctuary. [. . .] In all preliminary concerns, ultimate concern is present, consecrating them. Essentially the religious and the secular are not separated realms. Rather they are within each other.⁷²

The ability for humankind to be able to engage with the ultimate in this manner relies upon the immanent presence of the infinite and creative Ground throughout the world

⁷⁰Raymond F. Bulman, *Blueprint for Humanity: Paul Tillich's Theology of Culture* (East Brunswick, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1981), 73.

⁷¹Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 9.

⁷²Ibid., 41.

and in all cultural acts.⁷³ The ultimate is readily available in the sense that humankind can, and does, engage with aspects of it in a variety of ways including through cultural expressions.

Stemming from his ontological argument that all human beings are ultimately concerned with the ground of being as part of the nature of their existence, Tillich argues that cultural expressions do not need to be explicitly 'religious' by any traditional definition, but even in an artistic struggle with the problem of 'non-being' a work of art displays ultimate concern and theological significance. Both human doubt and human protest become locations in which to find traces of the ultimate concern of humankind. Even in doubt there is faith for, 'if this is experienced in its depth and as ultimate concern, the divine is present; and he who doubts in such an attitude is 'justified' in this thinking.'⁷⁴ The protesting element in humankind's artistic expression is even more important for Tillich as it reveals something of the existence of human beings and how they genuinely grapple with what it means to be alive in this world.

It appears that what Tillich is suggesting is that no cultural expression is exempt from theological significance providing that it displays artistic honesty,⁷⁵ and makes a genuine attempt to engage with human encounters with reality, and poses questions about the nature of existence. The ontological basis of Tillich's argument, therefore, enables art forms and cultural expressions previously seen as theologically insignificant or insufficiently high-brow to be introduced into serious discussions of the relationship between Theology and the Arts. He argues that these cultural voices must be listened

⁷³Bulman, *Blueprint for Humanity*, 68.

⁷⁴Ibid., x-xi.

⁷⁵Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 48.

to insofar as they are a part of culture and while they are not necessarily members of the 'manifest Church' they could be considered as part of the 'latent Church', which he goes on to define as 'a church in which the ultimate concern which drives the manifest Church is hidden under cultural forms and deformations.'⁷⁶ This supports Elaine Graham's argument that it is important to judge popular art forms for their own artistic value or cultural contribution rather than a specific role that they can play in the conversion of non-believers. All cultural expressions are of religious significance and Tillich's new definition of 'religion', of being concerned with that which is ultimate, is universal to all of humankind and acts as an underlying unifying presence throughout humanity.

Ultimate concern for Tillich is not to be confined to any human experience or special form, but must be free and unconditional. Therefore, there is no artistic style that can be said to exclude an expression of a human being's ultimate concern or be dismissed as incapable of creating a space for engagement with the ground of being.⁷⁷ Ultimate concern may be 'present and may be absent in any situation, but the ways in which it is present are manifold. It can be present indirectly as the hidden ground of a situation.'⁷⁸ An argument such as this could become problematic; it is one thing to argue that no artistic style can be rejected from the discussion of theology and culture because each style reveals something of the ultimate concern of humanity, but it leaves us with the problem of identifying which styles, or even subcategories within these artistic styles, are the most successful in revealing ultimate concern. How do

⁷⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 72.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

theologians identify which artistic styles represent the ultimate most successfully, and how do we ensure that it does not become a subjective exercise based on taste? Tillich himself suggests that each artistic style only indirectly represents the ultimate and that it is in fact the expressive style, which he himself favours, that represents it directly.⁷⁹ Tillich's argument may open up the entirety of culture to religious significance and for theological engagement, but certain cautions must be applied. Alongside the risk of subjectivity is the risk that if everything is religiously significant then deviant behaviour or fetish can become an expression of the ultimate. It becomes the responsibility of the theologian engaging with culture to read these cultural texts sensitively, and without becoming prescriptive, look for theological significance found across the cultural realm.

Paul Tillich provides a theological basis for an engagement between theology and popular culture by asserting that all of culture is 'religious', and is an expression of the ultimate concern of humanity. However, not all cultural expressions reveal this ultimate concern in the same way, or indeed to the same degree. As seen in the first section of this chapter, the argument is not that all of popular culture is 'good' or of the same artistic value, but certain popular art forms do hold religious significance and it is the task for the theologian to sift through popular culture expression to look for the expression of ultimate concern. Supporting arguments posited in the previous section of this chapter, Tillich provides a theological understanding of humankind's ultimate concern and the struggle for individuals and communities to seek meaning and understand what it is to be human in relation to each other and to the divine. If

⁷⁹ Ibid., 73.

the concept of religion is abstracted and focuses on the ultimate concern of humankind and theology as practice, then the relationship between the religious and the secular becomes an important place for theological engagement. The experience of ultimate concern cannot be restricted to one place, such as the Church, but permeates all of human existence. Popular culture, through its questioning of the nature of humanity and divinity, has a religious element that can be seen as an authentic place of religious activity.

Certain popular culture stories, therefore, can be seen to have an ontological, an ethical, and a spiritual nature as they are seen to grapple with human questions of existence, offer ethical solutions to our relationships with each other, and take on a spiritual nature. Once a theologian identifies a popular culture art form that holds considerable weight or influence in the world as human beings engage with it, these three categories are helpful in guiding a theological approach. Gordon Lynch sets out each of these approaches as follows:

- a. An Ontological Enquiry: The theologian must ask whether popular cultural understandings of God, suffering, evil, and redemption offer a true, adequate or meaningful account of existence in the light of the absolute reference point for life.
- b. An Ethical/Liberationalist Enquiry: Asking to what extent does popular culture involve just relationships between people, enable people to lead good and authentic lives, or promote human well-being.
- c. Then finally a Spiritual Enquiry: Concerning the extent to which popular culture offers constructive experiences of pleasure, beauty and transcendence?⁸⁰

While Lynch posits these three approaches as distinct ways in which to engage with popular culture, it is apparent that there is significant overlap between them all. If the

⁸⁰ Lynch, *Theology and Popular Culture*, 98.

theologian embarks upon an ontological enquiry into popular culture they will certainly expose the popular culture artist's understanding of what it means to be human with regards to that which is 'other' or regarded as the divine. An enquiry such as this will illuminate the answers the popular art form provides the audience in response to their existential questions, but it will also indicate the ultimate concern of the author. While the responsible theologian will assess these understandings via their understanding of God, such an enquiry will also make it possible to discern popular culture's portrayal of just relationships between people and its role in advocating human well-being. In order to allow a popular culture text to speak, it is essential that we do not impose our own theological ideas upon it, but rather apply these enquiries in order to get inside the true meaning of the body of work. First, however, it is essential to identify a popular cultural art form that is particularly influential in the lives of ordinary human beings.

Rodgers and Hammerstein, and the Integrated Musical Play: A Place for Theological Engagement

If religion is the substance of culture, as Tillich asserts, and cultural expressions are theologically significant in their existential explorations and revelation of the ultimate concern of humankind, then it logically follows that popular culture can be included within this bracket. It has been argued that popular culture is a theological place where human beings are seen to be grappling with existence and questioning what it means to be human. One popular art form that is largely overlooked in

academic theology where this can be seen occurring is the musical theatre.⁸¹ Of the theatrical art forms the musical falls within the popular culture bracket not only in contrast to its 'high art' relatives, the opera and the straight theatre; and 'folk' theatre, perhaps best seen in community theatre or pantomime; but also as a result of its popularity, accessibility, and commerciality. For example, in the Broadway season 2010-2011, the musical theatre made over \$915m with over 10 million attendees.⁸² The musical may be a commercial enterprise, but it is also an art form that challenges and explores reality thus fitting neatly into the concept of popular culture set out in this chapter. Following in the theatrical tradition, the musical play embodies narrative and embraces its audience in a unique way.

There is debate as to whether or not musical theatre productions fall into the category of popular culture, with scholars such as Stacy Wolf arguing that they sit uncomfortably between mass culture, high art, and popular culture. She argues that the musical can be seen in relation to mass culture through its commerciality, but asserts that it is not mass in the sense that it is readily available to every individual in the same way a film might be; neither is it regarded as 'art', but rather labelled 'middlebrow, middle-of-the-road entertainment' for a white middle-class audience.⁸³ For Wolf, the musical play enters into the popular realm once it is reproduced by university and community groups who assimilate it into the culture of the people.⁸⁴

⁸¹ One exception to this is the work of Ian Bradley whose publication, *You've Got to Have a Dream: The Message of the Musical*, engages explicitly with the musical theatre from a theological perspective.

⁸² "Broadway Statistics at a Glance," The Broadway League, accessed 02 May, 2012, http://www.broadwayleague.com/editor_files/broadway_statistics_at_a_glance.pdf.

⁸³ Stacey Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2002), 12-13.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Pantinken on the other hand argues that the musical is the most popular form of theatre,⁸⁵ reflecting American pop idioms of the day and engaging with the everyday lives and concerns of its audience.⁸⁶ This is part of what has made the American musical play so popular: 'it appeals broadly to the educated and non-educated alike; it responds shamelessly to commercial stimuli',⁸⁷ but it also reflects the particularity and context of the society that creates it.

American musicals represent a large slice of our national life and heritage and, as such, include much that we find dated and, worse, often obnoxiously so, embodying attitudes and traditions of representation that we have grown to detest.⁸⁸

In keeping with the theological understanding of popular culture in the previous section, the American musical can be included within this bracket of the popular precisely because it is 'a powerful vehicle of popular collective expression';⁸⁹ a continuing exploration of the political, economic, religious, and social concerns of individuals and communities. The musical play, therefore, is intricately connected to the society and culture from which it stems, and as culture changes so too does the form and content of each artistic output.

The development of the integrated musical in the first half of the twentieth century played an important role in enabling the musical play to become a reputable and legitimate art form that could ask serious questions about social, political and religious ideas and ideologies. The role played by Rodgers and Hammerstein is of

⁸⁵ Sheldon Pantinken, *"No legs, No Jokes, No Chance": A History of the American Musical Theatre* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸⁷ Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸⁹ David Walsh and Len Platt, *Musical Theater and American Culture* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 5.

particular significance as their 1943 production, *Oklahoma!*, is widely regarded as being the fulfilment of the integrated musical form. Furthermore, their musicals pose existential questions and reveal something of humankind's ultimate concern. Graham posited that in popular culture we can see religion being practised rather than religion as doctrine, and the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein as well as the ways their music has been incorporated into the everyday lives of their fans can be seen fulfilling this role.

The Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals have become ingrained in both the American and British societal consciousness. There is evidence that these musicals have, as Chidester would argue, become something of a 'religious fake'; significant contributors to non-doctrinal civil religion identified by Santana and Erickson both at the time of production and today. *Oklahoma!* played an important role in the Second World War as it provided support and hope for soldiers leaving New York, and the families they left behind. The show infiltrated society further when the tour reached Oklahoma state and Governor Robert Kerr decided to turn the event into a state wide celebration, a morale booster for citizens who had long been stigmatised as 'Okies', before making "Oklahoma" the official state songs a few years later.⁹⁰ It was not just *Oklahoma!* that would reveal the civil influence of Rodgers and Hammerstein. The one song that would have the most significant civil impact was *Carousel's* show-stopping song "You'll Never Walk Alone" becoming something of a 'universally accepted hymn.'⁹¹ Fordin describes it as follows:

⁹⁰ Richard Rodgers, *Musical Stages* (New York: Random House, 1975), 229.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 240.

The lyrics of “You’ll Never Walk Alone” embody the essence of Oscar’s optimistic and hopeful philosophy in a melody that matches the words in solid simplicity. [. . .] Irving Berlin believes this the greatest song Oscar ever wrote because when he heard it at a funeral he realised it had as much impact on him as the 23rd Psalm.⁹²

Treated analogously to a hymn, “You’ll Never Walk Alone” is sung by real communities at real high-school graduations, and funerals in the United States⁹³ and the United Kingdom.⁹⁴ Having become something of a ‘religious fake’, this robust anthem has been sung frequently by ordinary people at moments of great tragedy and disaster, and times of celebration. In May 2002 it was sung spontaneously by crowds on the streets of Rotterdam following the funeral of the Dutch politician, Pim Fortuyn and one month later in London’s Mall during the Queen’s Jubilee celebrations. More poignantly it was sung following the Hillsborough Disaster when 95 Liverpool fans were crushed to death and over 200 injured.⁹⁵ In America it closed the 2001 Emmy Awards two months after the destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York.⁹⁶ These musical numbers are but two examples of many, which provide evidence that the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein have taken on a religious role as they help individuals and communities make sense of their world both in times of great joy and great sorrow. It becomes obvious that popular culture art forms such as these musicals are religiously significant, but the question remains as to how they explore meaning, and if they do indeed express the ultimate concern of humanity.

⁹² Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 227.

⁹³ Mark Steyn, *Broadway Babies Say Goodnight: Musicals Then and Now* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1997), 110.

⁹⁴ Bradley, *Have a Dream*, 79.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Romanowski asserted that popular culture plays an important role in world-building and maintenance, and Schofield Clark posits that these art forms help human beings place themselves socially and create meaning. One way in which the musical theatre can be seen to do this is by utilising the communal nature of theatre prevalent in all theatrical forms. The experience of theatre, be that musical theatre or otherwise, is an experience of community. The experience of sitting in an audience watching actors on a stage, or of being part of a group of actors performing for an audience, is to be part of the wider community of theatre. Theatre is meant to be experienced in community⁹⁷ and given the nature of the art form is remarkably difficult not to be experienced in this way. The theatre audience is not passive, but plays an active role in interpreting and reflecting upon the performance as individuals filter their experience through their own political, religious and social worldviews.⁹⁸

Theatre audiences aren't lulled into being passive receptors; they are awakened and stimulated, made aware of their presence among the actors and other members of the audience. They are confronted with story, character, language, and ideas that engage the emotions and intellect together. Not just the content of the performance (the script, story, etc.) but the total experience can have a profound impact on audiences [. . .] Theatre, as interactive experience, connects with a deep human need for community and for interaction with other humans.⁹⁹

The theatre enables communities to question meaning and construct ways of living together, uniting individuals through the theatrical experience, and facilitating discussion and encouraging response.

⁹⁷ Todd E. Johnson & Dale Savidge, *Performing the Sacred: Theology and Theatre in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 9.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Reinforcing this concept of community, and part of what gives theatre such power to communicate ideas and ideals, is the use of live interaction between individual actors. Narrative is embodied on the stage, at once bringing an element of reality to the story and alluding to the analogous nature of popular culture and real life. Audiences are drawn into a live narrative unfolding in front of them and are invited to judge characters and actions as they would judge everyday life all within a safe environment where they can be easily challenged and asked to question the ordinary.

[T]he dramatic situation invites one to consider life through a borrowed perspective and to therefore go and think/speak/act in the world. The dramatic event, to put it forcefully, requires us to see the world from the point of view of another and to act as we would if this perspective were our own.¹⁰⁰

The immediacy of this embodiment not only invites the audience to see the world through another's eyes, but it also invites the audience to question their own lives.

Peter Brook's *The Empty Space* explores the 'Immediate Theatre' and reveals that:

The theatre is the arena where a living confrontation can take place. The focus of a large group of people creates a unique intensity. Owing to this, forces that operate at all times and rule each person's daily life can be isolated and perceived more clearly.¹⁰¹

More than this, the immediacy and embodiment in time of the theatre results in a growing intensity that makes it not only more real, but also so disturbing as it narrows life down guiding the audience to focus on specific issues.¹⁰² Whereas the cinema produces images of an event in the past,¹⁰³ the theatre acts in the present making it

¹⁰⁰ Ivan P. Morillo Khovacs, "Divine Reckonings in Profane Spaces: Towards a Theological Dramatury for Theatre" (PhD diss., University of St Andrews 2006), xvii.

¹⁰¹ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2008), 112.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 110-111.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 111.

one of the most powerful art forms for engaging human beings in questions of existence. Additionally, in contrast to the cinema, there is no true way for the director to focus the eye of the audience, no lens limiting where an audience will focus their attention. Not only does this enable fresh takes on performances when seen for a second, third or even tenth time, but it gives the audience member a certain power; the ability of free interpretation.

However, with soaring ticket prices for shows on Broadway and the West End the immediate accessibility to 'elite' musical theatre productions may be limited. The popularity of the musical film cannot be underestimated in this regard as for many this will be their first experience of a musical play. The power of these musical films is profound as evident in the BBC's decision to broadcast Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music* in the event of nuclear war during the Cold War.¹⁰⁴ Again the sheer popularity of the musical film in the 1940s and 1950s suggests that even when in its cinematic form, the musical play holds a place within the lives of many being broadcast into their own homes. Certain advantages can even be seen in the free-editing process that can intensify a viewer's experience of a particular musical number. Take for instance the iconic opening scene of *The Sound of Music*: following the logic of the song the combination of embodied singing and the sweeping camera work across the Alps defines music as 'spontaneity, freedom, the untrammelled outpouring of pure feeling.'¹⁰⁵ The film adds something to the narrative through a different form of media that enhances the viewer's experience. It does not, however, threaten the stage

¹⁰⁴ Bradley, *Have a Dream*, 86.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1992), 48.

musical as we might expect. When the Fox film version of *The Sound of Music* opened in London in the 1960s, rather than detracting attention from the stage production playing on the West End both theatres were filled daily.¹⁰⁶ Nor is the film found to be negating the experience of community found in the theatre for the popularity of events such as the *Sing-a-long Sound of Music* attracts hundreds of fans all of whom hold a fond affection for the film starring Julie Andrews, and come in droves dressed up as their favourite characters in order to watch the film and sing together as a community suggesting that it is not necessarily as much of an individualistic experience as we might suspect.

The popularity of amateur performances must not be underestimated both in the United States and the United Kingdom. With schools, community theatres, and churches putting on productions of musical plays across both countries, the professional quality might not be as high as we would expect on Broadway or the West End, but it is at this level that we can begin to see the accessibility and indeed the popularity of musical theatre plays among ordinary people. Communities are brought together and shaped by the practice of musical theatre and the content of the particular show. With the influence of the internet, fan sites and forums help bind these communities together both locally and internationally.

For Schofield Clark and De Gruchy, the narrative found in popular culture art forms holds considerable importance for the construction of meaning for human beings. Narrative performs a significant role in helping shape understanding of what it

¹⁰⁶ Max Wilk, *The Making of The Sound of Music* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 79.

means to be human and in investigating different ways in which we, as human beings, could and should live our lives. What distinguishes the musical theatre from other theatrical styles and genres is the combination of drama, music, dance and visual scenery, which engages the senses and provides a multi-dimension experience. By doing so, the musical theatre appeals to both the cognitive and non-cognitive realms of communication thus developing immediacy and intensifying the mode of communication as a fully embodied art form. Walsh and Platt remark:

The combination of song, dance, and drama, which distinguishes musical theater from other theatrical genres, is linked both to historical circumstances and ideological beliefs. The lyrics and qualities of movement, rhythm and structure create a fantasy that is at one level escapist but which is also not just entertainment. The musical show offers a characteristically open, direct, and ideologically unapologetic expression of the ideals, dreams, anxieties, feelings, fulfilments, and frustrations of its audience.¹⁰⁷

The musical play expresses the culture that it is a part of, whether it is seen to be embracing or rejecting the perceived societal norms. While this is not autonomous for all musical plays and will be achieved in a variety of ways depending on the artist and the historical context, the musical play has the ability to communicate ideas and ideals that are prevalent in society and it asks serious questions about what it means to be human through the use of embodied narrative. Walsh and Platt continue:

Musicals articulate values and ideologies through the crafted order, disjunctions, and restraint of their narratives. They can become powerful vehicles of popular collective expression by articulating symbolically, in the patterns of their narrative, lyrical harmonies, and dance, the tensions and reconciliation of everyday relations between individuals and society.¹⁰⁸

This embodied narrative is remarkably similar to Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which saw all the elements of theatrical production working

¹⁰⁷ Walsh and Platt, *Musical Theater*, 1.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

collaboratively to 'give the musical play auditory and visual expression and thereby communicate it to the audience.'¹⁰⁹ It is through the development of the integrated musical in the first half of the twentieth century, culminating in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* in 1943, that it became possible for musical theatre to take on this role as a cultural communicator and a theological location for determining meaning. Differing from vaudeville or early forms of musical comedy, each theatrical element is of equal importance to the advancement of the plot. At the turn of the twentieth century American musical theatre was anything but integrated, and the importance of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical was that it was the first to fully achieve successful integration in the musical theatre form. However, integration was not 'invented' by Rodgers and Hammerstein, and aspects of integration slowly began to appear on the American musical entertainment scene from the late nineteenth century.

American musical theatre throughout the nineteenth-century and the beginning of the twentieth-century largely depended upon European imports.¹¹⁰ The English partnership of W. S. Gilbert and A. Sullivan brought something new to the fore that was to revolutionise English-language musical plays. *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878) was Gilbert and Sullivan's most influential piece of work in America and can be viewed as the first English-language musical comedy that displays elements of integration. 'Pinafore Fever' hit America and *H.M.S. Pinafore* was the first musical comedy to show America a theatrical show where book, lyrics and music acted as an integrated whole

¹⁰⁹ Bush Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves*, 46.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

in an environment where writers were creating disjointed shows in which songs had little to do with plot, and dance numbers were included solely to create spectacle rather than to enhance the show.¹¹¹ In highlighting the significance of *H.M.S. Pinafore* for the development of American musical theatre, Bush Jones argues that Gilbert and Sullivan's influence extends to the pioneers of the integrated musical including Jerome Kern, Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers.¹¹² It is possible to discern that Gilbert and Sullivan are the grandfathers of the integrated musical; 'the primary progenitors of the twentieth-century American musical.'¹¹³

The early years of the twentieth century saw two major turning points in musical theatre. The first was an increasing emphasis put onto the word as, little by little, English librettists became more adventurous. Secondly, the influence of Viennese operetta on the musical world swept across the stage in the years leading up to the First World War bringing romantic composers such as Lehar, Fall and Strauss among others with it, who would quickly establish themselves as the international stars of the era.¹¹⁴ However, the popularity of these operettas ceased during World War I, opening up the opportunity for new American composers, such as Cole Porter and Irving Berlin, to work on Broadway.¹¹⁵ The largely influential George M. Cohan wrote, directed and starred in a series of patriotic musicals such as *Little Johnny Comes Home*, which reflected the xenophobic and mindless patriotism of the time. However, during the 1910s the pioneering figure of Jerome Kern was composing *The Princess Theatre*

¹¹¹ Ibid., 10.

¹¹² Ibid., 10.

¹¹³ Ibid., 11.

¹¹⁴ Kurt Gänzl, *The Musical: A Concise History* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 129-130.

¹¹⁵ Bush Jones, *Our Musicals*, 50.

shows with Guy Bolton, Philip Bartholomae, and P. G. Woodhouse.¹¹⁶ Bordman reveals that Kern had a revolutionary view of musical theatre: 'It is my opinion that the musical numbers should carry on the action of the play, and should be representative of the personalities of the characters who sing them.'¹¹⁷ Somewhat ahead of their time The Princess Theatre shows, such as *Oh Boy!*, displayed elements of integration that broke away from the 'boy meets girl' formula that was prevalent on Broadway and saw a blend of 'story, character, and song together in a charming and surprisingly intelligent way.'¹¹⁸

The Princess Street shows certainly took steps in the direction of a fully integrated musical, but it was not until *Show Boat* that a musical was recognised as a large-scale integrated Broadway musical play. *Show Boat* came at a time when musical theatre was largely concerned with the diversionary.¹¹⁹ The 1920s became known as the 'Golden Age of Broadway' with a larger total number of musicals being produced in the season of 1919-20 to 1929-30 than in any other 11 year period.¹²⁰ Broadway musicals largely reflected the mood of society who now in a time of economic growth wanted to be entertained in their newly found leisure time.¹²¹ Then, out of nowhere, came *Show Boat* from Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II, which had the potential to challenge audiences and change the face of musical theatre. Adapting Edna Ferber's

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 46.

¹¹⁷ Gerald Bordman, *Jerome Kern: His Life and Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 149.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Hischak, "Princess Theatre Musicals" in *The Oxford Companion to the American Musical*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), accessed 25 January, 2010, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t282.e1469>

¹¹⁹ Bush Jones, *Our Musicals*, 55.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 53.

epic novel was a formidable task and in doing so Kern and Hammerstein brought social issues to the theatre that it had never seen before. Steyn posits:

Accustomed only to racy musical comedy or florid operetta, the first-night audience at the Ziegfeld gave an audible gasp as the curtain rose on the most startling of any Broadway chorus to date – sweating black stevedores loading cotton and singing:

Niggers all work on the Mississippi

Niggers all work while the white folks play . . .

From that first shocking word, confronting midtown Manhattan with aspects of their society they preferred not to think about, Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II present their audience with something new: drama in music, with neither element constrained by the other, it is the ultimate opening number, because it is the opening number for all that follows.¹²²

From the very first word of opening number Kern and Hammerstein shocked their audience into submission as they toyed with contemporary social issues in an entertaining fashion.

The lyrics, the music and the book flowed together in a truly integrated way that leads to Steyn marking Hammerstein as ‘the first dramatist of the American musical.’ ‘When the songs started’, he writes:

[T]he story didn’t stop, but forged on, illuminating and enlarging. On that first night, the miscegenation scene had more impact, but ‘Ol’ Man River’ is the more impressive: the suffering and resignation and bitterness of an entire race compressed into 24 taut lines, and so naturally that more people think it’s a genuine Negro spiritual, as opposed to a showtune cooked up in 1927 by two guys who needed something for a spot in the first act.¹²³

Show Boat was unique, not only did it deal with serious social issues such as miscegenation, gambling and domestic abuse, it did so with a mixed-race cast, with African American performers playing three-dimensional, sympathetic characters for

¹²² Steyn *Broadway Babies*, 21.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 66.

the first time.¹²⁴ It is for these reasons that Bush Jones compliments *Show Boat* by calling it 'entertainment with a mission',¹²⁵ something that Hammerstein would soon become known for in his work with Richard Rodgers, and *Carmen Jones*. It is important, however, to remember that '*Show Boat* doesn't claim to be 'about' racial injustice, but it shows how a popular musical can paint individual stories on a larger social canvas'.¹²⁶ Perhaps the original audiences missed the social message of *Show Boat*, but nevertheless, whether it was intended or not Kern and Hammerstein's musical reached far beyond the stereotypical 1920s musical in that serious topical issues were being addressed in the musical theatre arena in a way that had not been seen before. Unfortunately, the rest of the musical theatre world did not follow the example set by *Show Boat*, and it would not be until Hammerstein collaborated with Richard Rodgers for *Oklahoma!* sixteen years later that the integrated musical would become the pinnacle of American musical theatre.¹²⁷

The Depression of 1929 saw to the end of the Roaring Twenties, and despite President Hoover's optimism, the beginning of a decade's worth of economic downturn in America. Following the actors, composers and lyricists moved west to Hollywood in search of more profitable work, resulting in the departure of many of Broadway's most talented men such as Jerome Kern, Rodgers and Hart, the Gershwin brothers and Cole Porter. Although most returned to Broadway in the mid-1930s, the closure of the theatres was to have a lasting impact upon Broadway and musical

¹²⁴ Bush Jones, *Our Musicals*, 73.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Steyn, *Broadway Babies*, 69.

¹²⁷ Bush Jones, *Our Musicals*, 77.

theatre.¹²⁸ The Second World War brought an end to the Great Depression bringing employment to an all-time low of 800,000 in 1944.¹²⁹ As a direct result, Broadway saw a great resurgence of attendees partly due to war-time prosperity, but also due to a lack of competition now that many of the theatres had closed during the Depression. Once again musical theatre largely lost all topicality. The Tin-Pan Alley was producing countless war songs ranging from the romantic “The Last Time I Saw Paris” by Kern and Hammerstein to the fleetingly topical “We’ll Knock the Japs right into the Laps of Nazis” by Burt Wheeler.¹³⁰ Broadway, however, largely avoided the topic of war on the stage, although it was ordered that the national anthem was to be sung as either the curtain raiser or the final, and in accordance to costal dimouts, Broadway’s marquees were to be dimmed for the duration of the war.¹³¹ Various reasons for Broadway’s avoidance of the war have been discerned, for example, Bordman asserts that while the war was a reality it was not something to be made fun with.¹³² Bush Jones develops this point by arguing that because New York was a major disembarkation point for the troops the war was the last thing that they wanted to be reminded of when they went to be entertained. Furthermore, unlike the media and the radio Broadway was not under scrutiny from Washington who had created committees to supervise almost every segment of the American public to ensure that the war was kept before the American people.¹³³

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 123.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 126.

¹³¹ Ibid., 129.

¹³² Gerald Bordman, *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 515.

¹³³ Bush Jones, *Our Musicals*, 129.

This was the environment in which Rodgers and Hart's *Pal Joey* came into existence. Just as Hammerstein had been working towards the integrated musical with Kern, Rodgers and Hart's *Pal Joey* shows an innovative move towards the modern integrated musical that he would eventually create with Hammerstein. *Pal Joey* broke free from the transitory war-related musical of the early 1940s approaching characterisation from a new psychological angle. Being asked to create a musical based on O'Hara's stories in *The New Yorker* excited both Rodgers and Hart. Rodgers writes:

The idea of doing a musical without a conventional clean-cut juvenile in the romantic lead opened up enormous possibilities for a more realistic view of life than theatre-goers were accustomed to [. . .]. Not only would the show be totally different from anything we had done before, it would be different from anything anyone else has ever tried.¹³⁴

Described as a 'slice-of-sleazy-life story' by Gänzl,¹³⁵ *Pal Joey* tells the story of club worker Joey Evans who is picked up by the wealthy socialite, Vera Simpson, who bankrolls him and buys him a club of his own. Finding out about the affair, two club-workers try to blackmail the Simpsons, which results in the blackmailers being arrested and Joey ending up back where he started.

In *Pal Joey* Rodgers, Hart, and O'Hara dared to depict fully fleshed-out, three-dimensional characters, not just the usual musical comedy types and stereotypes. They also avoided the contrived happy ending endemic to most musicals of the time. Instead, the resolution grows logically from the characters' psychological complexities.¹³⁶

'Rodgers and Hart were just the composer and lyricist to match O'Hara's toughness in their witty, often abrasive, always realistic, and richly human music and lyrics.'¹³⁷

Hart's candid lyrics were blunt and often funny, but always character appropriate,

¹³⁴ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 200.

¹³⁵ Gänzl, *The Musical*, 232.

¹³⁶ Bush Jones, *Our Musicals*, 137.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

something that was supported by Rodgers music. Rodgers wrote music that was directly appropriate to the character or the situation, which made little effort to charm the audience.¹³⁸ Rodgers comments: 'Throughout our score for *Pal Joey*, Larry and I were scrupulous in making every song adhere to the hard-edged nature of the story.'¹³⁹

Each of these developments in the history of the integrated musical from *H.M.S. Pinafore* to *Pal Joey* can be seen as a step in the direction of the 'Rodgers and Hammerstein Revolution'. Both Rodgers and Hammerstein can be seen experimenting with the musical theatre form, following in the tradition of Gilbert and Sullivan, and The Princess Street Theatre, in *Pal Joey* and *Show Boat* respectively. The development of the integrated musical enabled the musical theatre to become a legitimate and authentic place of human expression. It created a theatrical form that combined drama, music, and dance together as a multi-stimulus to engage an audience building upon the already potent powers of the theatre. The embodiment of narrative, through the live actors and the immediacy of the action, allows for an exploration of political, social and religious ideas and ideologies. However, this history of the musical theatre highlights the argument that popular culture is not a homogeneous category, but even within each subcategory there is a great diversity of topicality and diversionary, societal critique, and mindless entertainment. Building upon their experiences before their collaboration the partnership of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II was particularly potent as the integrated musical reached the pinnacle of its development

¹³⁸ Thomas Hischak, ed., *The Oxford Companion to the American Musical* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), accessed 25 January, 2010, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t282.e1390>.

¹³⁹ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 201.

in *Oklahoma!*. From *Oklahoma!* onwards Rodgers and Hammerstein tackled serious existential questions about what it means to be human, our relationships with each other and with the divine as well as seeking to construct meaning and activate political and social change.

The Rodgers and Hammerstein Revolution

The collaboration of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II was to be one of the most influential partnerships in the history of American musical theatre. From the success of *Oklahoma!* in 1943 until Hammerstein's death in 1960 they produced eleven musicals: two original pieces, one television adaptation, one film remake and seven musical adaptations from novels, autobiographies or short stories. Additionally, they set up a production company that produced shows such as *Annie Get Your Gun* among others in the 1950s, although neither man saw himself as anything but a writer for the Broadway musical theatre.¹⁴⁰ Collectively, the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals earned 35 Tony Awards, 15 Academy Awards, two Pulitzer Prizes, two Grammy Awards and 2 Emmy Awards.¹⁴¹ The musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein not only received critical acclaim but influenced American musical theatre in terms of structure and form. Book, lyrics, music, dance and all of the production elements of a show were treated with equal respect and care in a way that is taken for granted today, but at the time was unusual in the world of musical theatre. Forms and concepts that are now frowned upon for being clichéd were pioneered by Rodgers and Hammerstein as they tested the boundaries of the musical theatre form.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 237.

¹⁴¹ "Rodgers and Hammerstein," The Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization, accessed 29 December, 2012, http://www.rnh.com/people_detail.asp?sub=bio&div=people&id=R_Hamm&s=1.

Following on from their previous experience with *Show Boat* (Hammerstein) and *Pal Joey* (Rodgers), the musicals that they would produce in this 17 year period would be concerned with a realistic depiction of humanity that would give their shows an unusual longevity after the numerous transitory musicals of the 1920s and 1930s. However, while bringing contemporary social and political issues to the fore in their musicals, largely due to Hammerstein's personal philosophy and hatred of injustice rather than the intent to create 'message musicals', the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein rarely became 'preachy' in the sense of asserting an external authority, but rather remained entertaining. While it has been argued, for example by Bradley,¹⁴² that these musicals are indeed 'preachy', the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein open up for discussion questions of morality, of the nature of humanity and equality rather than dictating an unquestionable philosophy. Despite not preaching truth to the audience, a sense of holiness has been attributed to the music of Rodgers by fellow Broadway lyricist and composer Cole Porter.¹⁴³ Combined with a love for humanity and a permeating sense of hope, these liberating messages deeply affected the American people through the stories, the lyrics and the music. The impact of Rodgers and Hammerstein on their audiences was not (and is not) limited to the United States but is prevalent in the United Kingdom. In both the United States and the United Kingdom the songs of Rodgers and Hammerstein have infiltrated society in a unique way for musical theatre.

¹⁴² Bradley, *Have a Dream*, 72.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

Oklahoma! was the first modern integrated musical and was quickly followed by Rodgers and Hammerstein's second musical, *Carousel*. In time, this form would become common place across Broadway as the craze for the integrated musical took off. When the integrated musical form reached maturity with Rodgers and Hammerstein the musical theatre world began to be taken more seriously as an art form in the United States. American musical theatre was no longer the illegitimate love child of continental operetta and vaudeville, but a legitimate art form in its own right. The integration of the book, music and lyrics added an element of realism that resulted in the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein becoming more accessible to audiences. Quite the opposite from the diversionary musical, the integrated musical does not distract the audience from real life, but places them in a position where it can speak to them directly. It is important to remember that while a piece of integrated musical theatre has the potential to convey a message, as Sheldon Harnack comments: 'Had we written a commandment for the creators of the Broadway musicals, it would have been "Enlighten if thou canst, but entertain thou must."' ¹⁴⁴ While it is not necessary for a musical to 'enlighten', it is entirely possible, and this is something that can be found in the majority of the works of Rodgers and Hammerstein from *Oklahoma!* to *The Sound of Music*. The integrated musical is able to interact with the fundamental concern of humanity if carefully orchestrated whilst remaining entirely entertaining.

The integrated musical's ability to concentrate the attention of the audience, through realism and the cohesive nature of the show, allowed writers to convey serious social or political messages in their work as they engaged with ethical and

¹⁴⁴ Bush Jones, *Our Musicals*, Foreword.

moral issues. From the threat of rape in *Oklahoma!*, suicide and domestic abuse in *Carousel*, to the exploration of racial equality in *South Pacific*, the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein frequently tackled serious social and political elements. Whether this is secondary to the entertainment or not, the fact that these messages exist reinforces the suggestion that the integrated musical can represent human concern for justice and equality. Hammerstein's involvement in social and political activism suggests that these musicals, all of which tackle a serious social concern, reveal something of his yearning to understand what it means to be human in this world, an expression of ultimate concern. Hammerstein's background in social activism for racial equality suggests that there may be more to these songs than a character merely expressing his feelings. Hammerstein's involvement in the advancement of African Americans in musical theatre evident in *Show Boat* and in the all African American cast of *Carmen Jones*, suggests a sense of activism that insinuates there is a message in his lyrics. Furthermore, following Pearl Harbour Hammerstein's own brother-in-law, Jerry Watanabe, was put in internment being a Japanese American and his daughter lived with the Hammersteins as part of their adopted family.¹⁴⁵ Hammerstein's involvement with the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League and his overriding belief that all human beings should be treated equally, and willingness to give care and money to people whatever their status¹⁴⁶ shows him to be a politically and socially active man. The frequent appeal to race in his collaborations with Rodgers, seen in *Flower Drum Song* and *The King and I*, also shows a concern with humanity and the spiritual interconnectedness of

¹⁴⁵ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 183.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

humankind despite boundaries that exudes from the great Rodgers and Hammerstein shows.

A sense of hope and optimism emanates from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play that somehow does not appear idealistic or unobtainable. Rather the acceptance and the frequent representation of the harshness of reality puts these musicals in a position from which they can argue that there is more to life than disaster, and that happiness can be achieved. It is this acknowledgement of tragedy and suffering that ensures that the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein do not present a utopia in which man can hide from all his concerns, but show that man can triumph through adversity. This is seen to be reflected in Hammerstein's personal outlook on life.

I see plays and read books that emphasise the seamy side of life, and the frenetic side of life and the tragic side,' said Hammerstein, 'and I don't deny the existence of the tragic and the frenetic. But I say that somebody has to keep saying that that isn't all there is to life . . . We're very likely to get thrown off our balance if we have such a preponderance of artists expressing the "wasteland" philosophy.¹⁴⁷

The Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals represent a philosophy of life that is at once realistic and positive. In these musicals there is a desire for, a yearning if you will, for something beyond this life of suffering and strife. Not only is this yearning, which could be described as spiritual, expressed, but the certainty that this hope can be and will be fulfilled. The aim was the creation of a world at peace, where man is connected to all of nature, to each other regardless of race or class and even to this 'other' that he is aware of be that 'God' or something more abstract. Not only do these musicals mean a

¹⁴⁷ Steyn, *Broadway Babies*, 73.

great deal to a large number of people across the world, but they express fundamental truths about human nature and humanity's relationship to God and to the world.

Conclusion

Popular culture art forms are theologically significant in the role they play both expressing human ultimate concern, but also in providing answers to ontological questions and practical solutions to everyday difficulties faced by human beings. In helping build and shape societies, they take on a 'religious' role that both challenges and complements traditional religious institutions. The musical theatre is one popular culture art form that is particularly powerful, and can be seen to hold considerable civil influence, shaping the lives of many, and helping human beings create meaning individually and in community. Having identified the integrated musical plays of Rodgers and Hammerstein as significant popular art forms that engage with human ontological concerns and offer answers to questions about existence, and offer ethical and spiritual solutions, I will now turn explicitly to the musicals they wrote together during the period 1943-1959. Beginning with an ontological enquiry into Hammerstein's lyrics and libretto, it is important to place him within his religious context which is often grossly misconstrued, before investigating how these religious influences shaped his work, and what message they sent, and indeed continue to send out to his audiences.

A PRODUCT OF THE LIBERAL FAITH? THE RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES ON OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN LIBERAL PROTESTANTISM

In the preceding chapter, I ascertained that it was possible to approach popular culture art forms in an ontological way that would reveal their ethical and spiritual nature. Advocating the theological significance of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, I argued that the lyrics and libretti of Oscar Hammerstein II were fruitful for such an exploration. The reason for focusing the attention on Hammerstein's lyrics and libretti, setting aside the music of Richard Rodgers, is based both on Hammerstein's personal philosophy and the fact that in almost every case the lyrics and the libretti preceded the music. While the score is crucial in the musical theatre context for the embodiment of the narrative, in this thesis I aim to investigate the message of these musicals to reveal aspects of Hammerstein's ultimate concern. In this chapter, I will begin by approaching Oscar Hammerstein II from an ontological perspective, investigating the religious influences and outlook in his life to gain crucial knowledge of his religious and spiritual position before turning to his musicals specifically. This chapter will, therefore, consist of two parts. It will open with an exposition of Hammerstein's religious upbringing, his religious and spiritual views as an adult, and the relevant spiritual musings of those who knew him best. Having revealed the significant impact of American liberal Protestantism in the life of Oscar Hammerstein II, evident in his childhood attendance at The Church of the Divine Paternity, a Universalist church in New York, the second section of this chapter will investigate the

development of liberal Protestantism in America. In doing so an awareness of the type of Universalism Hammerstein would have encountered at The Church of the Divine Paternity will be gained as well as a wider understanding of the liberal Protestant faith. With this essential contextual knowledge, it will then be possible to address his lyrics and libretti from an informed position.

Searching for the Spiritual Hammerstein

Oscar Hammerstein II was born into the Hammersteins, a prominent theatrical Jewish family, in 1895, and he would continue to build on their Broadway legacy. This association with the Hammerstein family's rich theatrical heritage has led many to assume that Oscar Hammerstein II is part of the prevailing Jewish group that built Broadway in the early twentieth-century, and who would remain the dominant force throughout the century. Often grouped together with the likes of Cole Porter, the Gershwin brothers, and even Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II is all too often mistaken to be part of this Jewish legacy on Broadway. In fact, an understanding of Hammerstein's religious upbringing, gained from investigating daily religious influences in the home and more formal religious activities, reveals a far more complex and nuanced picture of religious and spiritual life in the Hammerstein household. These early experiences and influences appear to have had a lasting impact upon Hammerstein's concept of God, spirituality and religion throughout his life, as is evident in a series of autobiographical letters written to his son Bill in the 1950s. By providing these invaluable accounts of religious experiences in his early life, Hammerstein reveals the foundation of liberal Protestant ideals that remained with

him throughout his adult years. Supported by the answers given by Hammerstein when questioned about his religious convictions as an adult by interviewers, these largely untouched discussions of religion reveal the essence of Hammerstein's spirituality, which in turn are revealed through the lyrics and libretti of his musical plays. Not only do his own remarks allude to his personal spirituality, but the perceptions of those closest to him when he died suggest something of the nature of his faith, and the spiritual impact he was to have on others.

Early Religious Influences on Oscar Hammerstein II

Oscar Hammerstein II's paternal lineage was Jewish albeit non-practising. The theatre, rather than Judaism was the religion of the Hammersteins after their arrival in America, a tradition in which Oscar was destined to follow. His mother, Allie Hammerstein (nee Nimmo), was born to Scottish Presbyterian parents thus denying Oscar and his brother Reggie Jewish status within the Jewish community. Jewish influence in Hammerstein's life seems to have been scant; in a letter to his son Bill dated, 25 January 1953, he explicitly states that he had no education whatsoever in the Jewish religion, and that the Jewish side of his family were neither religious nor did they attend Temple.¹⁴⁸ While the brothers were circumcised, a ritual practice of Judaism, this was for medical reasons advocated by the family doctor rather than being of any religious significance.¹⁴⁹ Instead, Hammerstein was christened by the same Episcopalian minister Rev Dr Frank Montrose Clendenin, Rector of Old St. Peter's Episcopal Church, who had married his parents when they eloped to Westchester, New

¹⁴⁸ Oscar Hammerstein II to Bill Hammerstein, 25 January, 1953, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 2 of 9.

¹⁴⁹ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 19.

York, which incidentally is where his middle name originates from.¹⁵⁰ William Hammerstein's decision to marry a Christian woman and to christen his child in the Christian faith suggests that he did not feel it necessary to raise his children in the Jewish faith. This is reasserted by the decision to name the child Oscar after his living paternal grandparent, theatrical impresario Oscar Hammerstein I, breaking further with Jewish tradition. However, this dual-faith upbringing can be seen to have positive implications in the life of Oscar Hammerstein II as throughout his adult life he actively supported both Jewish and Christian cause groups advocating non-sectarian action, as well as providing support for action in Israel.¹⁵¹

If the paternal side of Hammerstein's family was to have little impact upon his religious upbringing, it was the Scottish Presbyterian faith of his maternal grandparents that would shape his spiritual outlook. Willie Hammerstein was somewhat absent in Oscar's life; with a busy life as a theatre manager at Hammerstein's Victoria Theatre, he left much of the upbringing of his two sons, Oscar and Reggie, to his wife Allie. In Hammerstein's own words: 'When I say that the impact of my father on my early life was limited, I must explain this by describing the overwhelming influence exerted by my mother and her family – her mother and father

¹⁵⁰ Oscar Hammerstein II, interview by Arnold Michaelis, transcript, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, X Box 3. This transcript contains certain spelling errors. Further research reveals that Hammerstein's middle name, 'Clandenning', is in fact a misspelling or variation of the Rev Dr Frank Montrose Clendenin's surname, who was the Rector of Old St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Westchester (not Westminster), New York from 1887 to 1917. The Rev. Clendenin was married to Gabrielle Greeley, the daughter of Universalist journalist, reformer, and politician Horace Greeley, as alluded to in the interview by Hammerstein. Accessed 29 December, 2012, <http://www.newcastlehs.org/historic-new-castleour-history/greeley-family>, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=70824737>

¹⁵¹ Paper for the Israel Bond Drive and a thank you letter from David Kluger, the Campaign Chairman of Bonds of Israel Government, 21 February, 1952, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 1 of 9.

and her sister Annie.¹⁵² Allie Hammerstein's parents, James and Janet Nimmo, played a formative role in the upbringing of the Hammerstein children, having moved into the family home after the revelation of an affair left James unemployed.¹⁵³ Oscar would in fact have to share a bedroom with his grandmother until he was five years old, which fostered a close relationship between the boy and his grandmother that continued until her death.¹⁵⁴

Grandfather James Hunt Nimmo was born in Glasgow to middle-class Presbyterian parents in 1836,¹⁵⁵ although his daughter Allie would attend the Episcopalian church in America and send her sons to the Sunday School at The Church of All Saints.¹⁵⁶ In the same letter to Bill, in which Hammerstein tells his son about his lack of Jewish education, he reveals the Christian influences that were around him. He writes of religious language that pervaded the house when he was young; his grandmother would say, 'Lord have mercy on his soul', if someone passed away, or when making future plans would add, 'If God spares us'. One particularly touching image Hammerstein recalls is that of his mother reading from her prayer book on a daily basis despite not attending church regularly. He discerned: 'I think my mother had the capacity for religion, but somehow never gave herself to it. Only perhaps in secret, and when she was in the mood.'¹⁵⁷ This relaxed approach to religion suggests a relationship with the divine that is not based upon doctrines and creeds, or the

¹⁵² Oscar Hammerstein II to Bill Hammerstein, 28 October, 1952, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, Box 28.

¹⁵³ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 9.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁵⁶ Hammerstein II to Bill Hammerstein, 25 January, 1953.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

necessity to conform to ecclesiastical particulars. Instead, the combination of consistent informal religious actions, as well as annual fasting on Good Friday and the consumption of fish most Fridays, suggest that the presence of God was acknowledged in the house, but that the family's conception of God was based upon love and acceptance rather than tyranny and fear.

On numerous occasions, Hammerstein would recall a story of his beloved Grandfather Nimmo and posit that his understanding of the problem of evil stemmed from their morning trips to a local park. Alluding to the bond between Grandfather Nimmo and Oscar, Philip Hamburger (*The New Yorker*) acknowledges that he was both young Oscar's idol and companion before continuing to recall one of Hammerstein's early character forming memories. He continues:

[A]nd then the two of them would head for Mount Morris park. Mr. Nimmo and Oscar always arrived at a bell tower in the park a few minutes before seven. In those days, an attendant climbed the winding staircase to the bell tower and, at seven, rang the bell seven times. Grandfather Nimmo told Oscar that the Deveil [sic] climbed the stairs and rang the bell, and that the Devil was a little old man whose heart was filled with kindness and whose pockets were filled with sour, or "devil," balls.¹⁵⁸

This humorous and endearing tale provided the foundation in Hammerstein's mind of his basic understanding of humanity, and his concept of good and evil. He argued that while his love of the theatre came from his paternal grandfather, his positive outlook and the attitude towards life that is found in his lyrics stemmed from these experiences with Grandfather Nimmo and the Devil.¹⁵⁹ This is not the type of religious education that would be expected from a Scottish Presbyterian grandfather in the

¹⁵⁸ Philip Hamburger "The Perfect Glow – II", *The New Yorker*, 19 May, 1951, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, Box 22.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

early 1900s and undoubtedly had Hammerstein been taught the Calvinistic doctrine of sin his outlook might have been less openly optimistic. However, these experiences taught Hammerstein that no person was truly evil, not even the 'devil', and that every human being was redeemable. It is fairly safe to assume this time spent with his grandfather in Mount Morris Park encouraged his belief in justice and equality, and perhaps even influenced his approach to God as Judge in *Carousel* as will be explored in a subsequent chapter. Hammerstein's experiences of religion and religious practice as a child were certainly systematic through encounters with family members, the repetitive rituals of his mother, and his attendance at Sunday school, and each was based in a liberal understanding of a loving God who did not condemn human beings, but accepted and loved them for their ultimate goodness.

It is interesting that Hammerstein felt his experience of Sunday school was significant enough to include when giving accounts of his childhood to his son. As previously mentioned, the boys first attended the Sunday School at The Church of All Angels, an Episcopalian church in New York, but after the family moved to Alysmer following the death of Grandmother Nimmo they attended The Church of the Divine Paternity, a prominent Universalist Church in New York. The Sunday School teacher, Miss Judson, made quite an impact on the boys largely due to her beauty rather than her religious instruction, but nevertheless Oscar seemed to have been influenced not only by her, but also by the nature of the church and the Pastor, Dr Hall.¹⁶⁰ The acceptance of each individual, no matter who they may be, by the Universalist church

¹⁶⁰ Oscar Hammerstein II to Bill Hammerstein, 8 February, 1953, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 2 of 9.

seems to have been the main draw for Hammerstein to the liberal faith. He describes the Universalist church to his son in a second autobiographical letter as follows: 'The Universalists admit anyone and are an all embracing Christian faith.' He then recalls one particular sermon that he claims profoundly affected him; a sermon which was largely concerned with honesty to the self and the acceptance of the individual. He writes:

When we went to the church occasionally and heard [Hall's] sermons we were never bored. I remember one day hearing him talk about Theodore Roosevelt, and how Theodore Roosevelt was many men. He was Teddy, the rough rider and he was President Roosevelt and he was the African Hunter, (maybe he wasn't a hunter yet). He was an athlete, a good boxer. He was many different things and different people thought of him as many different things. This was an eye-opener to me, this sermon, and the theme of it was that the hardest thing in the world to be was to be yourself and to know just who you were. What is yourself? This didn't go over my head at all. It went straight into the middle of it and has never left it.¹⁶¹

These accessible sermons, focusing on the progress and goodness of humanity, appealed to Hammerstein's sense of human goodness and optimism. An individual, this particular sermon that he recalls elucidates, is made up of many different aspects and qualities that make up a whole. Each of these attributes is valuable and it is the individual's task to discover who they are and in turn to accept others for who they are.

Dr Francis Hall was a prolific figure in the Universalist church during this period, being called to The Church of the Divine Paternity in 1902 and serving as their minister twice, from 1902-1919, and again from 1929-1938. His published book of sermons, *Soul and Body*, preached at The Church of the Divine Paternity from 1909, does not

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

include this sermon that Hammerstein recalls in his letters, but it does contain ten sermons many of which follow a similar vein. In 'Making a Soul' he asserts that regardless of circumstance each individual has the responsibility for their own success in life. Taking inspiration from Ephesians 4:13, Hall argues that: 'This world is an institution the function of which is the perfecting of manhood.'¹⁶² Identifying three elements in the process of soul making; heredity, environment, and personality, Hall discerns that it is the responsibility of the individual to discover who they are and to follow the right path:

The raw material of the soul is supplied by heredity. It is moulded in the rough by environment. But after all that a man is the master of his own fate. He has the power to seize upon the material that has been bequeathed to him and shape it accordingly to his desire.¹⁶³

Using the example of Jesus, Hall argues that it was not the circumstances of his life that made him great, but rather that the supreme element in him was his own personality.¹⁶⁴ In a later sermon in the volume, 'Lost Souls', Hall asks his congregation: 'where are you going? [. . .] Do you want to go to the heights? Or do you want to go wandering round and round in the fog [. . .]?'¹⁶⁵ It is in this sermon that he preaches that under the providence of God no person is left to find their own way unassisted, but rather is offered a map of life in the form of the Bible and a compass in the form of the moral sense or conscience.

Hall's sermon, 'Making a Soul', also reveals his philanthropic spirit and social gospel teaching. He optimistically asserts that the individual's ability to overcome

¹⁶² Frank Oliver Hall, *Soul and Body: A Book of Sermons Preached in the Church of the Divine Paternity, New York City* (Central, Hong Kong: Forgotten Books, 2012), 33.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

adverse circumstances in order to become a successful adult 'means that this world can be saved and saved very quickly and will be as soon as men become sane enough to work together toward the end for which they pray.'¹⁶⁶ He continues:

When we begin to pray in unison not only with our lips but with our lives, "Thy kingdom come" and really mean what we say and organize the forces of society so that not a single child shall be permitted to grow up amid circumstances which make for cruelty and crime but so that every child shall be nourished physically and psychically into health and hope, love, beauty and intelligence, one single generation will be enough to transform this world into at least a suburb of the Holy City New Jerusalem.¹⁶⁷

Being an advocate of the social gospel, Hall continued in the philanthropic spirit of Universalism throughout his ministry and bolstered many social programs such as the development of a settlement house on New York's East Side and the sponsorship of a Sunshine Farm for inner city children to visit during the summer. He strongly advocated social gospel issues within the Universalist denomination, persuading the Universalist General Convention in 1909 to establish a Commission on Social Service in 1910. Acting as chair, Hall was supported by Clarence Russell Skinner, an old colleague who had previously been his assistant at The Church of Divine Paternity between 1904 and 1906. Skinner, renowned as one of the leading men of Universalism, and an advocate of the social gospel movement, was at this time placed in charge of the youth work, and it is plausible that Hammerstein would have also come into contact with him.¹⁶⁸ In Skinner, it is possible that we find the inspiration for Hammerstein's lifelong commitment to the brotherhood of humankind. In *The Social Implications of*

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 42.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 42-43.

¹⁶⁸ Alan Seaburg, 'Frank Oliver Hall,' Dictionary of Unitarian & Universalist Biography, accessed 28 August 2012, <http://www25-temp.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/frankoliverhall.html>.

Universalism, for example, Skinner asserts the belief in the solidarity of the race of humankind arguing that:

Universalism triumphantly holds to the universal salvation of all mankind. It believes that all human souls are children of God with a spark of divine in their nature, and that eventually, after the varied experiences of this world and the next, those souls will reach a perfect harmony with God. Never was there such a bold proclamation of brotherhood as this; never such implicit faith in the solidarity of the human race.¹⁶⁹

Revealing the influence of the Universalist faith in his early life further to son Bill, Hammerstein expounds emphases that are common across the American Liberal Protestant faith: 'Our faith is the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the leadership of Jesus, salvation by character, the progress of mankind, onward and upward forever.'¹⁷⁰ Although he attributes these somewhat inaccurately to Universalism specifically, the points that Hammerstein recalls are in part a paraphrase of 'The Five Principles' of 1899, drawn up by the Universalist denomination as the essential principles of the faith, although the classic phrase, 'the progress of mankind onward and upward forever', is attributed to Unitarian, James Freeman Clarke.¹⁷¹

The Universal Fatherhood of God;
The spiritual authority and leadership of His Son Jesus Christ;
The trustworthiness of the Bible as containing a revelation from God;
The certainty of just retribution for sin;
The final harmony of all souls with God.¹⁷²

It is interesting to note principles such as the Fatherhood of God and the Leadership of Jesus remained with Hammerstein; however, he asserts other principles of the liberal

¹⁶⁹ Clarence Skinner, *The Social Implications of Universalism* (Central, Hong Kong: Forgotten Books, 2012), 35.

¹⁷⁰ Hammerstein II to Bill Hammerstein, 8 February, 1953.

¹⁷¹ Conrad Wright, *The Unitarian Controversy: Essays on American Unitarian History* (Boston, MA: Skinner House Books, 1994), 168.

¹⁷² "The Five Principles of 1899," accessed 29 December, 2012, <http://uuchristian.org/Articles/Avowals.html>.

faith, some of which stem from Unitarianism, such as the progress of humankind. His removal of the concept of sin, and the addition of salvation through character is particularly revealing and suggest that he is adhering to the liberal Protestant emphasis on morality as an innate human capacity, which would link him to a Unitarian understanding of the relationship between God and humanity, although evidence suggests that he was not exposed to the Unitarian faith until later in life. The character of Universalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, however, shows a movement towards a more Arminian-Unitarian understanding of religion as will be explored further on in this chapter thus providing an explanation of Hammerstein's encompassing of the liberal faith in more generalised terms.

The early religious experiences of Hammerstein were of a liberal Protestant rather than Jewish nature, and the acceptance, individualism, and brotherhood asserted by the Universalist church that he was exposed to seem to have made a lasting impact on his own faith and personal philosophy. While the mature Hammerstein did not attend church or subscribe to any particular denomination, the principles of love, human progress and goodness, and the brotherhood of humankind, remained central to his understanding of humanity's role in the world. It is entirely plausible that these beliefs stem from his childhood experiences with his family and his attendance at the Universalist church in New York.

The Mature Hammerstein and Religion

It is impossible to tie the adult Hammerstein to one particular religious denomination although it is tempting to claim he was a Unitarian Universalist due to

his childhood experiences and his Unitarian Universalist funeral service. In February 1986, F. Forester Church sent a letter to the president of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization, Ted Chapin, to ask if Hammerstein was a Unitarian having made similar assumptions. When Chapin forwarded the question to Bill Hammerstein the response via telegram on 3 March, 1986, reads as follows: ‘OH was not a Unitarian,’ although he does continue, ‘if he feels that his work reveals the attitudes of U-Uism [sic], perhaps he’s right.’¹⁷³ Despite the difficulty of pinpointing the precise religious beliefs of Hammerstein, it is evident that for many other people in America and across the globe his lyrics and libretti hold religious significance and reveal certain divine meaning. There is considerable evidence that Hammerstein was exposed to liberal Christian principles as a child, but the development of his relationship with religion as an adult is equally revealing. Hammerstein was occasionally questioned about his religious convictions, and the answers he gave suggest that he was still influenced by the liberal Protestant influences of his childhood.

In an interview with Mike Wallace on 15 March, 1958, Hammerstein was asked directly about his religious convictions. He recalled an incident that occurred the previous year while they were rehearsing the television version of *Cinderella*. Recounting how he was stopped by a police officer while jay-walking, he recalls a particularly poignant conversation which began with the officer thanking him for *Carousel* and telling him how much his family loved it. Hammerstein continues:

“He said are you religious?” and I said, well I don’t belong to any church and then he patted me on the back and he said – “Ah, you’re religious alright.” And I went on feeling as if I’d been caught, and feeling that I was religious. He has

¹⁷³ Bill Hammerstein to Ted Chapin, 3 March, 1986, held by the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization

discovered from the words of my songs that I had faith, faith in mankind, faith that there was something more powerful than mankind behind it all. And faith that in the long run good triumphs over evil. If that's religion - I'm religious, and that is my definition of religion.¹⁷⁴

What is interesting here is that Hammerstein refers to being 'religious' rather than being 'Christian' or as part of any particular denomination. Religion, for Hammerstein, is an abstract concept rather than being subject to a larger, external authority which dictates all of human existence. He expresses a faith in humankind, but also a faith that there is something beyond humanity, and he suggests that this might be defined as 'goodness'. In a letter to Bill Hammerstein dated 18 January, 1953, Hammerstein posits that this goodness can also be referred to as love or even God:

All these whirling atoms are held together loosely and kept going slowly in the same general direction by one element – love. You may substitute another word for this if you please. You may call it God or you may call it goodness. You may call it Seventh Day Adventism or Free Masonry or Democracy or Communism or the American Legion or the Doylestown sewing circle or Local 802 – but it is desire to be with a group of other people, all working with one another in an effort to do something which all consider a good thing to do.¹⁷⁵

For Hammerstein it does not matter what it is called, this can change depending on the individual trying to understand their existence in relation to others and that which is beyond, but this 'love' is what binds the world together and makes order out of the chaos. What he does imply is that human beings have a responsibility to partake in this process as part of a community of individuals united by this ultimate concern.

Hammerstein touches upon the responsibility of human beings to participate in the world in another interview, this time with Arnold Michaelis in the late summer of

¹⁷⁴ Oscar Hammerstein II, interview by Mike Wallace, *The Mike Wallace Interview*, 15 March, 1958, transcript, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, X Box 3.

¹⁷⁵ Oscar Hammerstein II to Bill Hammerstein, 18 January, 1953, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 2 of 9.

1957. In this interview, Hammerstein expresses his concept of religion and the relationship between humankind and God in more depth. The subject is approached by Michaelis in relation to Hammerstein's love of humankind, and he opens the discussion by asking if Hammerstein separates an interest in man from his understanding of the term God. Stating that he thinks 'that is one and the same thing', Hammerstein explains: 'Our interest, our belonging to one another, the oneness on earth is the same thing as our oneness with God. God is that oneness in my own conception. He is all of us; we all are Him.'¹⁷⁶ Unity is integral to Hammerstein's understanding of goodness and this he sees to be represented through divine interconnection; human beings are intricately connected to each other and to God through their very existence. God is immanent, both a part of humankind and nature but also a separate force.

Due to this connection, it is essential that human beings participate in the advancement of the world in order for it to reach perfection. He controversially states that God is not perfect because if he were, and if he were as powerful as we believe him to be, he would fix the misery and evil found in the world.¹⁷⁷ Michaelis follows this by asking: 'Do you think that we can help God become perfect?' Hammerstein's response is remarkably interesting theologically: 'Oh, yes, indeed, because if, as I say, we are part of Him, He is part of us. It's certainly our function to help Him if we don't get anywhere either. We are all together.'¹⁷⁸ Theologically this is a complicated and controversial statement, which echoes aspects of Process Theology, although it is

¹⁷⁶ Oscar Hammerstein II, interview by Arnold Michaelis.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

incredibly unlikely that Hammerstein would have any knowledge of this theological movement. Having been described by his grandson as ‘Emersonian’,¹⁷⁹ it is more likely that this line of thought falls into a Transcendentalist category. Emerson’s belief in the divine indwelling in every created entity, and the ability to project god-self out of person seems to be at work here,¹⁸⁰ as well as a belief in the doctrine of progress that was so vital to the liberal faith. What is interesting about Hammerstein’s response is the idea that God is not perfect, but can be helped to become so thus suggesting a mutual influence between humankind and the divine. Whether he is trying to assert the role of human beings in creation and the development of the world alongside God, or is asserting human beings are equal to the divine is difficult to discern. What follows, however, is an exploration of what it means to be perfect for Hammerstein, which reveals that he is not suggesting human beings are in any way perfect or complete.

Provokingly Michaelis asks Hammerstein: ‘If there isn’t any such thing as perfection in the universe or in the world on earth, I wonder where this desire comes from for perfection?’ Hammerstein argues that perfection is not the thing to seek, but rather:

I think we should try to do our best all the time, knowing that there is going to be imperfection, certainly in our present state of development, which in the history that is to be written over the next million years is a very short time. And we are, perhaps, very primitive people. I believe we are. We must be. We are so far from perfect that I, myself, don’t live with any hope that we are going to get anywhere near perfection.

¹⁷⁹ Oscar Andrew Hammerstein, *The Hammersteins: A Musical Theatre Family* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 2010), 173.

¹⁸⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Divinity School Address,” in *Emerson: Essays and Poems*, edited by Joel Porte, Harold Bloom and Paul Kane (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1996), 80.

I just hope we get better all the time. I think we do get better all the time.¹⁸¹

Hammerstein reveals that he is not the blind optimist that he is so often accused of being, but that he accepts humankind is imperfect and in many ways remarkably primitive. However, he sees the potential in humanity to develop towards perfection, and argues time and time again, that it is humanity's responsibility to work towards this even if it seems to be a pipe dream. He admits that he does not live in any hope that humanity will achieve perfection, but implies that it each individual's responsibility to try their utmost to become better all the time. In this he touches upon the Arminian emphasis on the cultivation of the personality towards the goal of progress that is prevalent throughout the liberal faith.

For Hammerstein, the unity and brotherhood of humankind is essential in order to better society and the world. Once more, as a way of indicating his liberal take on religion and his lack of creedal or doctrinal connections, he received an award from the Massachusetts Committee of Catholics, Protestants and Jews at a large interfaith event recorded in Thomas F Downey's, "4 Leaders Honored at Hub Dinner" in the *Boston Post*, 9 May, 1952.¹⁸² Accepting his award Oscar Hammerstein II, said:

Let us acknowledge our weaknesses as a prelude to increasingly our strength. Let us use the admission of weakness not to excuse our own self-indulgence, but to help us understand and forgive others, for this is the secret of brotherhood, its pattern and its aim – to create a world of men, each of whom can feel secure in the conviction that all other men are his brothers – not his enemies.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Oscar Hammerstein II, interview by Arnold Michaelis.

¹⁸² Thomas F. Downey "4 Leaders Honored at Hub Dinner", *Boston Post*, 9 May, 1952, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, Box 22.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

The insistence on forgiveness, brotherhood and development once again take precedence as is further reflected in his involvement with a special symposium presented in *Collier's* magazine to honour Brotherhood Week, which took place in the United States 17-24 February, 1952.¹⁸⁴ Organised by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, with whom Hammerstein had various connections, this week with the slogan, 'Brotherhood for Peace and Freedom', worked through schools, colleges and churches in order to promote good will and peace rather than violence and force. By way of tribute, *Collier's* magazine published 'The Favourite Bible Passages of 25 Famous Americans', which asked famous Americans to share a biblical passage that they felt was significant as 'a light and guide for us today'.¹⁸⁵ Hammerstein chose 1 John 2: 10-12:

Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks in the darkness.¹⁸⁶

Brotherhood is integral to Hammerstein's understanding of faith, and he uses this biblical passage to suggest that in order for humankind to progress and achieve their potential it is essential for each individual to love the other. It is this love which will achieve unity and bring peace to the world.

It is highly probable that this emphasis on human brotherhood was first taught to Hammerstein at The Church of the Divine Paternity by Francis Hall and Clarence Russell Skinner. Hammerstein's letters provide evidence that he was aware of the Universalist emphasis on brotherhood, and the sermons of Francis Hall reveal that it

¹⁸⁴ "The Favourite Bible Passages of 25 Famous Americans", *Collier's*, 23 February, 1952, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, Box 22.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid

¹⁸⁶ Ibid

was a common theme in his preaching. In his sermon 'Soul Strength', Hall teaches his congregation about the biblical emphasis on brotherhood signified in the life of Jesus Christ. He discerns that the secret lying behind Jesus' influence was love, shown in his relationship with his fellow human beings:

He was a powerful personality whose ruling motive was love. He dared not only to preach the love of God but to live as if God really loved. He dared not only to proclaim the doctrine of human brotherhood but to live as if all men were his brothers. He went about among his fellow men as a good man moves among the members of his own family.¹⁸⁷

The liberal Protestant principles that Hammerstein expounded to his son of the brotherhood of humankind and the progress of humanity onwards and upwards under the fatherhood of God resurface as he articulates his religious convictions. He seems to be suggesting that active participation in the brotherhood of humankind leads to this progression of humanity. Each individual has the utmost responsibility to take part in this process, and is called by God, and Hammerstein, to love one another and treat each other with respect and dignity.

Hammerstein's Spiritual Impact on Others

Hammerstein's non-sectarian approach to faith led to a large number of people finding his lyrics, and even his personality, spiritually significant for them and the wider world. The tributes paid at his Memorial service, carried out by Rev Donald Harrington (known to Hammerstein through their involvement in the World Federalist Organization), and personal messages sent to his wife Dorothy Hammerstein after his death, show those who knew him personally saw him to be a spiritual man whose

¹⁸⁷ Hall, *Soul and Body*, 68.

message of brotherhood and love was of vital importance for humanity. Furthermore, church services conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom suggest that he was deemed to be spiritually and religiously significant.

Rev Dr Harrington wrote to Bill Hammerstein on the 25 August, 1960,¹⁸⁸ requesting permission to conduct a church service in memory of his father. However, Harrington was careful to ensure Bill Hammerstein did not think that he was trying to claim his father belonged to any particular religion. He writes: ‘Only, I should not want anyone to think thereby that I was “claiming” him in any special way. Oscar was no sectarian – but a true world spirit.’¹⁸⁹ This service took place on 23 October, 1960, and was entitled ‘Oscar Hammerstein II: In Memoriam: A Service in Song and Story to celebrate the Spiritual and Social Significance of OHII’s Life and Work.’¹⁹⁰ Hammerstein was not without influence in the United Kingdom either, and the service for the dedication of a memorial plaque and in commemoration of the founding of the Hammerstein Chanters at Southwark Cathedral in London on 24 May, 1961,¹⁹¹ shows how the spiritual impact of Hammerstein’s philosophy spread out across the Atlantic. Acting Provost, Canon Colin Cuttall, not only said that ‘there was a strong element of mysticism and sensitivity in his make-up’, but also that his outlook and words, like so many others, ‘brought healing on the wings of their art.’¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Rev Dr Harrington to Bill Hammerstein, August 25, 1960, in Oscar Hammerstein New Collection, Library of Congress, OH2 Box 3 of 3

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Community News Vol. XV, No. 7, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, OH2 Box 3 of 3.

¹⁹¹ “Oscar Hammerstein 1895-1960.” Order of Service for the Dedication of Memorial Plaque and in Commemoration of the Founding of the Hammerstein Chanters,” Southwark Cathedral, London, May 24, 1961, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, OH2 Box 3 of 3.

¹⁹² Ibid.

The Memorial Service for Oscar Hammerstein II, held on 24 August, 1960, at Ferncliff, Hartsdale, New York, provides considerable insight into the way in which those closest to Hammerstein viewed his personal philosophy, and his spiritual impact on them as individuals, and the wider world. Biblical readings and poems carefully selected by close friends reveal something of Hammerstein's spirituality. Harrington opened the service with a reading of a hymn by New York Jew, Abram S. Issacs, which emphasised Hammerstein's focus on simple faith and the ultimate brotherhood of humankind. It reads:

A noble life, a simple faith, an open heart and hand;
 These are the lovely litanies that all men understand.
 These are the firm-knit bonds of grace, though hidden to the view,
 That bind in sacred brotherhood all men the whole world through.¹⁹³

The universality of these words, that is so characteristic of Hammerstein's approach, focus on the intrinsic value of humankind and the interconnection of each individual person. Supporting his choice of this opening hymn for the service, Harrington asserts in his closing remarks that Hammerstein 'nudged us gently along into a sense of affectionate loyalty for the whole human family.'¹⁹⁴ Hammerstein was seen as an advocate of the brotherhood of humankind across geographical and cultural boundaries, asserting the commonality and universality of humankind. There is a sense from this memorial service that friends and family recognised this as Hammerstein's vocation, or calling; in Howard Lindsay's address, he informs the congregation that Dorothy and Richard Rodgers shared a passage from a book about Dr Rudolph Matas who had said: 'Death must be invested with a certain grandeur and poetry, if it comes

¹⁹³ 'Memorial Service for Oscar Hammerstein II,' August 24, 1960, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box C.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

to a man who has completed his mission.¹⁹⁵ Hammerstein's simple approach to faith and his message to humanity of equality, brotherhood and love is almost seen to be prophetic, especially in post war America, where Harrington claims he, perhaps more than any other, helped Americans to develop a deep awareness of the kind of world they were living in.¹⁹⁶ This sense of prophecy is reinforced by the choice of biblical readings included within the ceremony. By choosing Isaiah 52:7 as the Old Testament reading, not only does Harrington suggest Hammerstein's worth for proclaiming peace and goodness, but also suggests that in doing so he was publishing salvation and playing a significant spiritual role in God's plan for humanity.

Following Isaiah, the New Testament reading came from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 13:1-13. Love was an essential part of Hammerstein's ethos as Howard Lindsay expresses in his memorial address:

No matter what today's critical fashion, it was always part of him to celebrate the decencies of life. He approved of that sentiment. The love of men and women for their children, the love of a man and a woman for each other. I do not know of any voice that sang affirmation as strongly since the days of Walt Whitman.¹⁹⁷

Dr Harold Hyman, close friend and family doctor of the Hammersteins, read a selection of stanzas from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, which reveal a lot about how those closest to Hammerstein perceived his spirituality. Love and inclusivity feature strongly in one of these selected poems and suggest a universality of faith that Hyman felt encompassed Hammerstein's outlook. Hammerstein's love for humanity, and belief in the interconnectedness of humankind and the divine are revealed through this poem.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

The universality of his faith is alluded to in the following selection: 'My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths, enclosing worship ancient and modern, and all between ancient and modern.' The most interesting selection chosen by Hyman from Whitman's *Song of Myself* is stanza 48,¹⁹⁸ which alludes to the immanence of the divine in the world, and is worthy of closer attention. Even more curious are the lines which Hyman chooses to omit, leading the listener to understand these words in a subtly different way. He includes: 'I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least', which alludes to the divine immanence. However, the following line: 'Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself' is excluded as if to suggest that the addition of this line alters the sentiment that he is trying to attribute to Hammerstein. Through the use of this poem at Hammerstein's memorial service, Hyman is suggesting that the intrinsic value he saw in each and every human being, as well as his supreme love of nature perhaps stemmed from a sense of the divine in the world.

In his closing remarks, Harrington describes the words of Hammerstein as immortal not only because of their simplicity, or their beauty, but because they 'somehow managed to say that something more eludes most of use except in the wordless feelings of our hearts.'¹⁹⁹ The ability for his poetry to encapsulate these sentiments and emotions was not merely poetic genius, but rather spiritual in that it, 'stems from an inner quality of life and of the human spirit that is rarely beautiful, true

¹⁹⁸ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: The "Death Bed" Collection* (New York: Modern Library, Random House Inc., 1993), 111.

¹⁹⁹ 'Memorial Service for Oscar Hammerstein II'

and good.’²⁰⁰ His ability to communicate what others could not, to understand the true nature of humanity and to see something of the divine in the world was essentially what made him an artist and affected his friends, family and audiences. Harrington asserts that:

It must be clear that such a man cannot die. Already he is part of the flesh and blood and bone of the millions who have laughed and cried with him, and thereby loved more deeply and more nobly. And we who now ache with the thought that we cannot again take his hand, know that we cannot really be robbed of his bright spirit.²⁰¹

Hammerstein was seen to be communicating that which was beyond through his art, something of the divine to humanity sharing goodness, love and hope. In the previous section of this chapter reference was made to a chance meeting between Hammerstein and a policeman who was utterly convinced Hammerstein was in fact religious regardless of not subscribing to any one particular faith. This man was not alone in his conviction as theatre critic Brook Atkinson also suggested that Hammerstein’s faith ran deep and that he, like Billy in *Carousel*, was ‘prepared to be judged by the highest judge of all.’²⁰² Throughout all of the perceptions his contemporaries had of him is a deep sense that Hammerstein truly believed all that he was communicating through his words and lyrics. A tremendous sense of hope, and a longing for a better world was accompanied with a genuine faith in the possibility of human beings achieving this together. In the same editorial, Atkinson eulogises:

But the theatre has also lost a man of character who stood for all that is decent in life. His point of view was implicit in everything he wrote. The concern for racial respect in ‘South Pacific,’ the sympathy and respect for a difficult through

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Brooks Atkinson, *New York Times Editorial*, 24 August, 1960, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box D.

aspiring monarch in 'The King and I,' the indomitable faith that runs through 'Carousel' were not clever bits of showmanship. They represented Mr. Hammerstein's faith in human beings and their destiny.²⁰³

This honesty and genuine faith was what gave Hammerstein's lyrics such power and makes them relevant for theological discussion. If Hammerstein's lyrics and libretti reveal something of the divine, and can be read as honest expressions of his personal convictions then it becomes possible to attribute these liberal Protestant beliefs to him more directly and reassert the theological significance of his musical plays. Hammerstein spoke to Stephen Sondheim directly about how essential these qualities of truth and honesty are in the art of lyric writing. He advised: 'Don't imitate other people's emotions. Speak your own. You know, you don't believe any of this stuff. Write what you feel. Don't write what / feel. I really believe all this stuff. *You* don't.'²⁰⁴ If the lyrics of Hammerstein reveal what he truly believes, rather than existing for mere entertainment, then it becomes possible to look at his lyrics and libretti in order to understand his religious and spiritual convictions further. If honesty and simplicity of faith do spiritually enhance the lives of human beings and reveal something of the divine then perhaps the words of Oscar Hammerstein II are more theologically significant than previously assumed.

The continuing impact of Hammerstein's religious upbringing in his adult life as the foundation of his personal philosophy is revealed through his spiritual musings and the impact he made upon other people. His philanthropic work and continuing belief in the brotherhood of man further suggests the lasting influence of the liberal faith he

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 241.

was exposed to as a boy in the home and more significantly at the Universalist church. Hammerstein, however, cannot be classed solely as a Universalist, but displays qualities of belonging to the larger liberal faith indicated by his diverse approach to religion. Before turning to his libretti to explore how these liberal principles are expounded in his work, it is first necessary to investigate the character of the Universalist faith, and the wider liberal faith that he was exposed to.

The Development of American Liberal Protestantism

While the merger between the Unitarian and Universalist movements in 1961 came after the death of Hammerstein II, it is possible to see how similarities developed that make both denominations important sources for investigating the liberal Protestantism in his work. Tracing the development of each movement separately, until the late eighteenth century, when Universalism began to lose its distinctive elements and starts to read more like Unitarianism, I will explore the unique elements of each movement, which are essential to an understanding of the liberal American faith that influenced Hammerstein. In doing so, it will become possible to create a picture of the nature of the Universalism that Hammerstein would have experienced at The Church of the Divine Paternity as a child in New York, and reinforce the argument that he was a product of the liberal faith rather than an adherent of any one given denomination. Once we reach the social gospel movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, I will bring the two movements together, suggesting that at this stage in its development American liberal Protestantism had a far more universal influence as religious groups began to work together. The shared values of the liberal

faith, revealed by the study of the Unitarian and Universalist denominations that was recognised by Clarence Russell Skinner, make it applicable to look at both movements in relation to the liberal theological tendencies of Oscar Hammerstein II. Skinner states:

The Liberal movement, led by Universalists, Unitarians, and Friends made a distinctive contribution to the large life of humanity by contributing to it a larger faith. It gave a larger outlook to men's intellectual conceptions of the universe; it meant the deepening and enriching of spiritual experience by liberating ideas and emotions of infinite love; it bound men together in a new unity of divine origins; it dignified common humanity with the potentialities of the Christian life. The larger faith gave sweep, vision, cosmic consciousness to the individual by pouring into his nascent soul the infinitudes of a universal religion.²⁰⁵

Revival in New England: American Unitarianism

The American liberal Protestant tradition emerged as a rebellion against Puritanism in New England, and the resurgence of revivalism in the 1700s. The New Light Divinity of Jonathan Edwards and his successors reaffirmed and defended traditional Calvinist doctrine through the use of revivalism. While this strengthened the conservative churches, it also led to distaste for Calvinism, which created a divide in New England Congregationalism and led to liberal rebellion.²⁰⁶ This particular brand of Calvinism, steeped in theological dualism stemming from the Covenant of Grace, 'deeply affected the fabric of American living and thinking', and provided a common theological rival for the liberals, Unitarian and Universalist alike.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Skinner, *Social Implication*, 86.

²⁰⁶ Sydney E. Ahlstrom and Jonathan S. Carey, *An American Reformation: A Documentary History of Unitarian Christianity* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), 21.

²⁰⁷ David Robinson, *The Unitarians and the Universalists* (London: Greenwood Press, 1985), 3.

Influenced by the Age of Reason, the New England liberals assumed the universality of reason, the world picture of Newtonian physics, and the potential to read 'the Divine Book of Nature' through the application of reason.²⁰⁸ Supernatural Rationalism provided a third philosophical approach distinct from evangelical orthodoxy and Deism, which 'agreed with the deist that there is such a thing as Natural Religion, but denied its adequacy, insisting that it must be supplemented with additional doctrines which come to us by a special divine revelation of God's will.'²⁰⁹ Additionally, the New England liberals turned to the Scottish Realists and Common Sense philosophy, which profoundly influenced the early Unitarian concept of the divine.²¹⁰ The eighteenth century British moralists discerned that human beings were able to make moral judgements without any special revelation in Scripture.²¹¹ Scottish Realism asserted, 'that the active and moral powers of man provided the basis for ethical theory just as the intellectual powers enabled man to understand the world and interpret the Word.'²¹² Human beings possessed moral powers and had been gifted a conscience that enabled them to discern right from wrong, ensuring that they remained responsible for their own actions.²¹³

Against this optimistic philosophy, the God of Calvin, expounded by Jonathan Edwards and the New Light Divinity, appeared judgemental and hateful.²¹⁴ The liberal

²⁰⁸ Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805-1900* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 2.

²⁰⁹ Conrad Wright, *The Liberal Christians: Essays on American Unitarian History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 5.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 35.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

faction of the Congregational Church of the Standing Order began to speak out against the orthodox emphasis on the taint of Adam, objecting to the interpretation that Adam's sin was hereditary and that humanity was ultimately depraved. To the liberals, the Calvinist doctrines of original sin and election to salvation suggested that there was no possibility of a moral life.²¹⁵ The taint of Adam rendered human beings incapable of moral action, and predestination based on faith alone, with no regard for human action, eliminated all possibility of humanity's desire to act morally in this life.²¹⁶ With a stress on morality, free will, and humanity's potential for goodness, the liberal Congregationalists advocated the benevolence of a loving God rather than a tyrannical God and a helpless humanity subject to his irresistible grace.

Charles Chauncy (1592-1672) and Jonathan Mayhew (1720-1766) were at the forefront of this liberal interpretation. Opposed to total depravity, Chauncy argued that human beings have innate God-given powers that they are encouraged to use and improve upon to attain divine likeness;²¹⁷ a concept that would receive further attention from William Ellery Channing in the 1800s and soon became a cornerstone of the Unitarian faith. With a similar emphasis on morality, Jonathan Mayhew countered the Calvinist doctrines of irresistible grace and total depravity by insisting that human beings have the God-given capacity to make moral judgements and make a decision to act accordingly.²¹⁸ Arguing that human beings 'resemble God' by all the moral virtues respected in humankind and by virtue of reason, Mayhew discerned that human

²¹⁵ Robinson, *Unitarians and Universalists*, 17.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Dorrien, *Progressive Religion*, 3.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

beings possess the ability to distinguish right from wrong.²¹⁹ Chauncy and Mayhew both placed a new emphasis on the individual; no longer powerless in their own spiritual welfare, human beings were able to cultivate divine likeness by the development of the personal conscience and moral action, inspired by an active relationship with God.

Until the early nineteenth century, the liberal ministers remained largely unorganised and co-existed alongside their more orthodox colleagues peacefully until the election of the liberal Henry Ware as Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard in 1805, which sparked the Unitarian controversy.²²⁰ The conservative response, spearheaded by Jedidiah Morse, led to an ever-increasing split between the orthodox and liberal factions of the Church of the Standing Order. Morse's discovery of Thomas Belsham's *Life of Theophilus Lindsay* in 1815 confirmed his suspicion of the Arminians, and enabled him to connect the American Unitarians to the Socinian christologies of the English Unitarian Movement in his pamphlet 'American Unitarianism'.²²¹ The challenge Morse and Evarts posed to the liberal theological movement was met by William Ellery Channing (1780-1842), culminating in his famous Baltimore Sermon of 1819, 'Unitarian Christianity'. Preached at the ordination of Jared Sparks, 'Unitarian Christianity' expressed Channing's belief that the differences between Calvinism and liberalism are based primarily in the interpretation of Scripture, which resulted in doctrinal differences.²²² This sermon reveals that questions concerning morality and human nature were central to the Unitarian critiques of Calvinism rather than the doctrine of

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²²⁰ Wright, *Liberal Christians*, 83.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 81-82, 83.

²²² Robinson, *Unitarians and Universalists*, 32.

the Trinity alone. Theologically this period offered very little in the way of new theological insights, but was ‘the final stage of a confrontation between Arminian and Calvinist, Arian and Trinitarian that had been developing for two generations.’²²³

The Transcendental controversy, led by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), posed a challenge to the growing Unitarian movement as it outwardly criticised its reliance on Common Sense philosophy, arguing that the great truths of religion are not grounded in logic, but are primal intuitions.²²⁴ Introduced to higher German criticism at Harvard by the new lecturer Everett, Emerson was exposed to new philosophical ideas about beauty and imagination.²²⁵ Described as the American prophet of self-religion by Dorrien, Emerson was influenced by Schleiermacher and Rousseau, and wholeheartedly embraced Coleridge’s concept that religion is about being and not about knowledge.²²⁶ The result of this new spiritual interpretation of religion was a split within the Unitarian movement and by 1839 there were two distinct groups: on the one hand were the philosophical realists; and on the other, the Emersonian spiritualists. The consequence of this split was the Transcendentalist Revolt, which followed Emerson’s Divinity school address (1838), when he proclaimed that the divine dwells in everything throughout creation, but within creation the most profound revelation of the divine is found in human nature.²²⁷ For Emerson, genuine Christianity concerned the divine indwelling in all that lives, especially the union between God and

²²³ Wright, *Unitarian Controversy*, 84.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

²²⁵ Dorrien, *Progressive Religion*, 45.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

man in the soul.²²⁸ Following this address, Emerson became an outsider and the orthodox Unitarians warned of his pantheism and heresy.²²⁹

In the aftermath of the Civil War, it became essential for the Unitarians to organise themselves in order for the denomination to survive. Throughout the civil war, Henry W. Bellows noticed a shift from traditional theological formulas, and with the increase of non-sectarian philanthropic work and the assertion of human dignity, he noticed an opportunity for the Unitarian movement to make a significant mark on American society. The only barrier he saw preventing the movement from achieving this was the considerable tension within the denomination.²³⁰ The polarisation of the conservatives and the radicals looked to be destroying the denomination from within, and Bellows felt that if the Unitarianism was to survive the two factions would have to find a middle ground.²³¹ Insisting upon a Christian basis for the National Conference (1865), and discerning that no organised religion could come into being without a willingness to define the essence of its theological stance, Bellows came under considerable scrutiny from the radical wing.²³² Octavious Brooks Frothingham (1822-1895) accused the convention of undermining the principles of the liberal faith, yet James Freeman Clarke's opening sermon and the Conference as a whole argued for an increased inclusivity.²³³ The conference resulted in the movement maintaining its minimal tie to historic Christianity, but reduced the use of Christian religious language thus liberalising enough 'to become a comfortable home to a wide continuum of

²²⁸ Emerson, "The Divinity School Address," 80.

²²⁹ Dorrien, *Progressive Religion*, 75.

²³⁰ Wright, *The Liberal Christians*, 82-83.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

²³² *Ibid.*, 88, 90.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 100, 105.

liberal Christian, neo-Christian, and non-Christian ethical humanists.’²³⁴ The importance of this organisation of the Unitarian denomination cannot be stressed too much, and the nature of its inclusivity can be seen as a precursor to the merger with the Universalists in the twentieth-century.

American Universalism

Ann Bressler argues that the 1961 merger of the Unitarian and Universalist denominations has led many to assume that the differences between the two movements are merely superficial: ‘Unitarianism was an elite, Enlightenment reaction to the harshness of Calvinist doctrine; Universalism was its rustic, less intellectual counterpart.’²³⁵ The Universalist movement in America may have shared a common theological rival in Calvinism with the American Unitarians, but Bressler reminds us that Universalism remained closer to Calvinism than we might have assumed, as it drew upon eighteenth century Calvinism as well as Enlightenment liberalism.²³⁶ Seeking to ‘improve’ Calvinism, the Universalists identified the extension of salvation from the elect few to all of humankind as the rational concept separating them from the Calvinists.²³⁷ From the earliest days of Universalism, however, there was an eschatological and communal emphasis based in the doctrine of salvation that would pose a challenge to an ever-increasing sense of individualism in America.²³⁸ The key basis of Arminian thought was an individualism, closely tied to a hierarchal social

²³⁴ Dorrien, *Progressive Religion*, 108.

²³⁵ Ann Bressler, *The Universalist Movement in America 1770-1880* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2003), accessed 10 September, 2012, <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0195129865.001.0001/acprof-9780195129861, 7>.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

perspective, which led to the belief that the individual pursuit of happiness was essential for the welfare of the community; an attitude that did not change when the Arminians later became Unitarians.²³⁹ However, from the offset, the Universalist movement was concerned with community and brotherhood rather than the individualism seen in the Arminian Unitarian movement.

John Murray (1741-1815) migrated to America in 1770 having been converted to Universalism in England by James Rely. ²⁴⁰ It is interesting to see the parallels between Murray, the first great organiser of Universalism²⁴¹ as a distinct movement, and Unitarian, Chauncy. Both shared the belief that there would be no eternal damnation, but each reached this conclusion from a very different perspective. Preaching a message of hope, that salvation was for all, Murray remained faithful to Calvinist christocentric understandings of God, but following Rely, he widened the category of the elect to include all of humankind. Murray maintained human sinfulness and the atonement of Christ, revealing the continuing early Universalist belief in evil and the sinfulness of humankind. Murray posited that Adam's sin was also Christ's sin, which was atoned once and for all in his crucifixion;²⁴² human beings were inherently sinful as a result of Adam's sin, but Christ's sharing in that sin, and his atonement, resulted in the universal salvation of all of humankind. Human beings still remained helpless to the will of God, but that divine will had decreed that all would be saved, as evidenced in the atoning work of Christ. The early Universalists held to the doctrine of

²³⁹ Ibid., 13.

²⁴⁰ Robinson, *Unitarians and Universalists*, 48.

²⁴¹ Ernest Cassara, ed., *Universalism in America: A Documentary History* (Boston: Beacon Press 1971), 55.

²⁴² Ibid., 70, 71.

human depravity, and this was fundamental to their understanding of universal salvation despite a later move towards more Arminian lines.²⁴³

Hosea Ballou's (1771-1852) 1805's 'Treatise on Atonement' pushed Universalist thinking in a new direction, and 'a unified and truly distinctive Universalist theology emerged [that was] a fully-fledged synthesis of evangelical piety and Enlightenment reason.'²⁴⁴ Ballou's understanding of atonement set him apart from his predecessors and Calvinist orthodoxy as he rationally discerned that while God did not require appeasement, humankind did need to be reconciled to him.²⁴⁵ Going beyond rejecting the salvation of an elect few, he also rejected the necessity of Christ's atonement on behalf of humanity.²⁴⁶ Like the Unitarians, Ballou posited that a rational approach to Christianity was essential and he began to rationalise away the 'corruptions' he saw in historical Christianity such as the doctrine of the Trinity.²⁴⁷ Replacing the triune God with the benevolent God of the liberal faith, Ballou concluded that it was God's desire to 'happify' human beings.²⁴⁸ Careful not to make light of sin, he insisted that the misery of humanity was synonymous with sin and Christ was sent to conquer this misery and to lead humankind away from sin, not to die in order to satisfy a wrathful God. Jesus was seen as the true embodiment of God's love for humankind, and it was through following Jesus that humankind could be reconciled to God.²⁴⁹ Despite having identical views on God, Christ, Reason, and Scripture, the Boston Unitarians shunned

²⁴³ Robinson, *Unitarians and Universalists*, 52.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

²⁴⁷ Cassara, *Universalism in America*, 20.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 21, 22.

Ballou on account of his view of universal salvation.²⁵⁰ Ballou's doctrine of salvation challenged the Arminian individualism that led to a sense of social hierarchy,²⁵¹ and followed the Universalist tradition of asserting a religious message that reduced all human differences, and was universal and non-sectarian.²⁵²

Universalism would come under attack for undermining the role of free will and character from both the Arminians and the Anti-Universalist evangelicals.²⁵³ The latter group were concerned about the lack of importance of character but also the denial of the human need to see justice obtained as: 'The belief that all were ultimately saved, no matter how monstrous their sins or great their infidelity, was antithetical to the human sense of justice and so had to be false.'²⁵⁴ One attempt to address these issues can be seen in the Restorationist movement, when certain Universalists made an attempt to give faith a more explicit moral dimension and subsequently moved away from Ballou's more egalitarian model. The Restorationist Controversy dominated the 1810s to the 1830s as they tried to combat the two major objections to Universalism: that justice was left unsatisfied and that it ignored free will, while maintaining God's omnipotence and explaining sin by rectification in the afterlife.²⁵⁵ While the general consensus among Universalists was that human beings experience universal salvation, there was debate as to what this meant in practical terms and what happened to human beings after death. The Restorationists held to Murray's concept that the period after death would be one of 'restoration', when the human soul would continue

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Bressler, *Universalist Movement*, 6.

²⁵² Ibid., 21.

²⁵³ Ibid., 38.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 44.

in misery until it could be reconciled to God. They greatly influenced the denomination by forcing it to face the moral and social implications of universal salvation, and despite being unable to convince the denomination to change its doctrinal position they won the larger battle.²⁵⁶

In opposition to the Restorationists were a group of Universalists who did not believe in limited punishment after death. Discerning that there was no suffering after death, the Ultra-Universalists insisted that sin was the cause of the more immediate suffering of human beings during their lives on earth.²⁵⁷ Ballou, influenced by his close friend Edward Turner, through a series of debates for the journal *Gospel Visitant*,²⁵⁸ finally succumbed to the idea that there is no punishment after death. Having previously equated sin with misery, it seemed logical that human beings experienced punishment for sin in this life before entering paradise after death due to God's benevolence and love.²⁵⁹ For the Restorationists, Calvinism may have led to anxiety, but Ultra-Universalism could potentially encourage apathy and moral sloth, so they sought to create a balance that took into consideration individual accountability.²⁶⁰ By the 1850's ultra-Universalism was declining and most Universalists seemed more comfortable with the belief that limited punishment lay in the future, particularly as there seemed to be no method of ensuring sinners were suffering sufficiently in this life.²⁶¹ Arminianism would win the day, and the pietistic Universalism of Ballou that

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 43.

²⁵⁷ Robinson, *Unitarians and Universalists*, 68.

²⁵⁸ Peter Hughes, "Restorationist Controversy" Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography, accessed 29 December, 2012, <http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/restorationist.html>.

²⁵⁹ Cassara, *Univeralism in America*, 25.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 43-44.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 27.

focused on the essential brotherhood of humankind was largely left behind in favour of moral distinctions. Bressler discerns that, despite paving the way for Universalist involvement in moral and social reform projects, the result of this was that: 'Universalist teachings appeared more and more over the course of the nineteenth century to be simply a popular reflection of the sort of moralism espoused by the Unitarians.'²⁶²

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the Universalist denomination was losing its distinctive nature and making a theological shift towards the Unitarian movement. The Universalism that Hammerstein encountered at The Church of the Divine Paternity was not that of Ballou, but rather a Universalism with Arminian-Unitarian tendencies. Evidence suggests that both the minister Rev Dr Hall and the associate minister Clarence Skinner were profoundly influenced by and involved in the social gospel movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Elements of the social gospel movement were preached from the pulpit in The Church of the Divine Paternity by Hall, informing the mission of the church in the New York City neighbourhood, and almost certainly influencing Skinner's youth work. The ecumenical nature of the social gospel movement and its influence throughout the liberal faith further enables Hammerstein to remain free of any one particular denominational tie, but be seen as expounding the liberal faith in the wider sense. Hammerstein's liberal Protestant upbringing, predominantly in the Universalist church, can be seen to have led to a life-long commitment to the brotherhood of humankind and involvement in philanthropic work.

²⁶² Bressler, *Universalist Movement*, 48.

The Social Gospel Movement and the Rise of Social Ethics

Dorrien attributes the development of the social gospel to eighteenth-century Enlightenment humanitarianism and the postmillennialist passion for social redemption, the response to the oppression of the Gilded Age, and inspiration from the Christian Social movement in England.²⁶³ The most significant factor, however, was a response to the criticism from Union leaders that the churches were ignoring the suffering of the poor and working-class people.²⁶⁴ For thirty years the social gospel was known as 'Applied Christianity,'²⁶⁵ and was distinct in attempting to create a theology of social salvation. Prior to the social gospel movement, Christian movements held to abolitionist and temperance convictions, but the concept that Christianity had a 'social mission to transform the structures of society in the direction of equality, freedom, and community was something new in Christian history.'²⁶⁶ It marks an interest in social Christianity, with a focus on human experience as people were suffering due to industrialisation and ever deteriorating urban living conditions.²⁶⁷ As middle-class Americans were experiencing an optimism based in moral idealism they became increasingly sensitive to moral reform.²⁶⁸ Initially coming out of the evangelical traditions, the social gospel movement was an ecumenical one, embracing activists, or 'social gospellers' from all religious movements including Unitarianism and Universalism. Unitarian social ethicist, Francis Greenwood Peabody signifies the

²⁶³ Gary Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 10.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 61.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 60-61.

²⁶⁷ Robert T. Handy, ed., *The Social Gospel in America 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press 1966), 4.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

denominational diversity of the social gospel movement, and the Unitarian involvement in the development of social ethics.

One result of the social gospel movement was the development of social ethics, which succeeded the old moral philosophy and Scottish Common Sense Realism that had informed the liberal faith.²⁶⁹ Resisting an ascending social Darwinism and an ascending radicalism in the socialist movement, they updated the liberal third way between orthodoxy and secularism affirming a socially orientated idealism, and arguing for the continuing relevance of Christianity for modern society. It was important to the founders of social ethics that this new moral philosophy was more Christian than the old one, while upholding the unifying, moral, and spiritual efficacy found in the old moral philosophy.²⁷⁰ Believing that the old moral philosophy had obscured the essence of the gospel, they aimed to strip away human invention to reveal the true religion of Jesus.²⁷¹ A prominent example of this can be seen in the Unitarian theology of Francis Greenwood Peabody (1847-1936). For Peabody, approaching religion from a study of human nature and ethical activity would make it possible to defend Christianity in the modern era.²⁷² In *Jesus and the Social Question*, he discerned that Christ's ultimate concern was to show the movement of God's life in human souls.²⁷³ He argued that Jesus approached human life from within, by inspiring individuals who would then participate in an 'unfolding process of social

²⁶⁹ Dorrien, *Social Ethics*, 6.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 26.

righteousness.²⁷⁴ While Dorrien argues that Peabody's concept of social salvation was more individualist than Gladden or Rauschenbusch, he nevertheless displays an understanding that personal and social salvation are intricately connected.²⁷⁵ Despite his ethics not providing much in the way of an answer to the social problem, his contribution to the growing field of social ethics reminds us of the ecumenical nature of the social gospel movement.

Turning to Clarence Russell Skinner, it is possible to ascertain how the social gospel might have been construed to Hammerstein through the social activity and teaching at The Church of the Divine Paternity. Given the congregation's commitment to social action in the local area, it is possible to discern that elements of the social gospel pervaded the life and work of the congregation as a whole. In *The Social Implications of Universalism*, Skinner reveals that religion is most compelling and dominant when it is at its most contemporaneous and local because religion is 'a spiritual interpretation of the whole of life.'²⁷⁶ Defining Universalism as a battle for the freedom of common man, Skinner asserts that if a man's spirit is emancipated he will carry freedom with him in all his words and actions.²⁷⁷ Basing his argument on the Universalist concept of the Universal Fatherhood of God, which asserts the innate spirituality and worth of man,²⁷⁸ Skinner discerns that there is a universal brotherhood of man that implies common interests and mutual helpfulness.²⁷⁹ The assertion of the

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 27.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Skinner, *Social Implications*, 4.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 10.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 27.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 35.

universal brotherhood of man raises awareness of the ‘new social consciousness’²⁸⁰

and with it a commitment to and enthusiasm for humanity:

It is evident that the philosophy of Universalism implies social motive, since from its beginning it has interpreted all life as being essentially good, and the world as being capable of salvation. This belief is the true dynamic of social endeavour. Those who have faith in the world are the ones upon whom rests the tremendous responsibility of redeeming the world. Skepticism [sic] as to human nature cuts the nerve of social effort, and causes paralysis of accomplishment. Abundant faith in humanity lights the flame of our vision and steels our nerve to mighty efforts.

“God so loved the world” that He gave Christ to it. Then religion should so love the world as to give its best and holiest to it.²⁸¹

Skinner’s theology and interpretation of the social gospel highlights several key themes to be looked for in Hammerstein’s work. He emphasises the goodness of humanity and the world, and by challenging doubt and negativity, asserts that it is the responsibility of those who have faith in humanity to spread love and truth throughout the world. There is a focus on the brotherhood of man and its relationship to democracy; the ideal political system to foster and develop brotherhood in America.

Conclusion

The development of the liberal faith traced through the development of the Unitarian and Universalist movements reveals the foundations of American Protestant liberalism. It is critical to look at both movements in order to note the subtle nuances of each, but also in order to be aware of the nature of Universalism at the turn of the twentieth century, which Hammerstein would have come into contact with. As Arminianism began to creep into Universalism, following the Restorationist Controversy, it brought with it an emphasis on morality, human action and progress,

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 39.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 49-50.

and weakened the Calvinistic conception of God. This will become increasingly important when we start to look for Hammerstein's concept of God (or the 'divine') in his musical plays with Rodgers. We know that Hammerstein heard sermons by Hall at The Church of the Divine Paternity, and that he was a youth in the congregation during the associate ministry of Clarence Skinner, which makes social gospel theology relevant to his understanding of humanity. Beginning with the Unitarian Universalist understanding of the goodness and potential of humankind, the following chapter will explore Hammerstein's depiction of humanity, the divine, and the afterlife in *Carousel*, *Cinderella*, and *The Sound of Music*.

UNITARIAN MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND UNIVERSAL SALVATION IN *CAROUSEL, CINDERELLA, AND THE SOUND OF MUSIC*

We have identified the liberal Protestant influence on Hammerstein and the ever increasing Arminian strain in the Universalism he would have encountered. With this in mind, this chapter aims to investigate the liberal Protestant moralism found in his lyrics and libretti. With a focus on original virtue and the potential of humankind, rather than on original sin and total depravity, the liberals developed a theology that enraged the conservative Calvinists, and offered a new understanding of God and humanity. These new emphasises in the liberal faith distinguished the movement as much as the rejection of the Trinity, and still remain keystones of the Unitarian Universalist faith today. Stemming from a belief in the original virtue of humankind, a Unitarian moral philosophy developed, which held that human beings could attain an actual likeness to God as a result of being made in his image. The development of this liberal Protestant moral philosophy provided an alternative understanding of humanity in light of a new concept of God. God was not cut off from humanity, but very much a part of daily life; a supportive parent aiding individuals in their journey to become more 'god-like' or divine. With a rejection of Calvinism came an emphasis on the importance of the individual's actions in attaining this divine likeness or perfection. The individual, no longer subject to irresistible grace and predestination, assumed a new responsibility for their own life. With this emphasis on essential goodness, notions of eternal punishment began to be challenged as no human being could be seen as unredeemable.

Having identified William Ellery Channing as one of the influential figures in the beginnings of Unitarianism, this chapter will address his emphasis on moralism and the perfection of humankind that influenced the liberal faith. It will then examine Rodgers and Hammerstein's second musical play, *Carousel*, in order to assess whether traces of these fundamental Unitarian principles can be seen in Hammerstein's lyrics and libretti. Investigating the final draft of *Carousel*, as well as the pre-Broadway script, it is possible to ascertain something of Hammerstein's concept of God, humanity, and his understanding of redemption. Supporting the argument from *Carousel* that the individual must take a new responsibility for their own life, *Cinderella* and *The Sound of Music* will also be addressed in order to show that Hammerstein advocates individual affirmative action under divine guidance. *Carousel's* second major theme is that of redemption: while it has been argued that this reveals a Pelagian theme running through Hammerstein's musicals, I will ask whether or not in *Carousel* we encounter a Universalist Restorationist understanding of salvation, and whether the portrayal of Billy's afterlife is characteristic of the restoration period before his salvation.

Unitarian Moral Philosophy: William Ellery Channing

Inspired by the Enlightenment, and heavily influenced by Scottish Realism and Common Sense philosophy, the American liberals developed a theology that was deeply rooted in moralism. Asserting that human beings have an innate moral capacity regardless of any kind of revelation, the Scottish Realists argued that human beings could judge right and wrong actions, thus taking responsibility for their own

behaviour.²⁸² This philosophical thought would prove to be a fundamental source of inspiration for the American liberals throughout the nineteenth century (although it would be challenged by the Transcendentalist Revolt) until the rise of Social Ethics at the turn of the twentieth century.²⁸³ In response to Calvinism, the liberals began to develop a theological moral system that affirmed the human potential for goodness, which was supported by the moral sense universal to all of humanity. This moral optimism and emphasis on the goodness of humanity, which developed out of the early Arminian days of liberal Protestant theology in New England, would remain central to the Unitarian understanding of humankind, and their relationship to God into the early years of the twentieth century. It would find its most succinct expression in the theology of Unitarian leader William Ellery Channing, whose continuing influence on the Unitarian movement, and indeed the wider liberal faith, is undisputable.²⁸⁴ Robinson argues that Channing became the representative of his generation and that from him almost every strand of Unitarian strand of thinking radiated.²⁸⁵ While the innocence, naivety and optimism of Channing's theology suffered considerably during World War One and in its aftermath, the foundations of his theological premises remain fundamental to certain branches of the Unitarian faith to this day manifested in the Unitarian Universalist Church.

Despite being recognised as the founder of Unitarian theology, Channing was a reluctant leader of the liberal movement. Entering the Congregationalist church while there was a growing schism between the liberal and conservative factions he

²⁸² Wright, *Liberal Christians*, 14.

²⁸³ Dorrien, *Social Ethics*, 6.

²⁸⁴ Dorrien, *Progressive Religion*, 59.

²⁸⁵ Robinson, *Unitarians and Universalists*, 33.

frequently found himself siding with the liberals. Initially, Channing did not want to identify himself with any faction, and preached a doctrine of inclusivity and tolerance that was in direct contrast to the Calvinistic teaching prevalent in America in this period. His famous 'Baltimore Sermon' of 1812 set him apart as the successor of Joseph Buckminster and became a manifesto for early Unitarian theology. By way of his response to Morse and Evarts, Channing showed that human nature, rather than the doctrine of the Trinity, was central to the liberal critique of Calvinism.²⁸⁶ Continuing in the tradition of Chauncy and Mayhew, Channing developed a theology with the radical affirmation of human nature at its heart, which rebelled against the five points associated with the Synod of Dort - total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the Saints - and the Westminster Confession of Faith. The alternative was a focus on the benevolence of God, 'the spiritual nature of humanity, the moral likeness of God and humankind, and the correlation of revelation and reason.'²⁸⁷

Channing's moral philosophy focused on the 'moral perfections of God', the 'moral deliverance brought by Jesus', and the 'moral nature of man'.²⁸⁸ Knowing God through knowing ourselves became the basis of Channing's understanding of the moral perfections of God, which altered the theological understanding of the relationship between God and humanity. Resemblance rather than contrast became the emphasis on which Channing based his liberal affirmations. It is this resemblance that enables humanity to know God: the divine attributes are first identified in the human soul and

²⁸⁶ Dorrien, *Progressive Religion*, 32.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁸⁸ Robinson, *Unitarians and Universalists*, 32.

are then transferred to the Supreme Being.²⁸⁹ Identifying the perfection of every amiable quality of humanity in God, as the American Arminians had before him, Channing deduced that there is a divine likeness to God that must be developed and cultivated in human beings. He appointed a new responsibility to humanity that Calvinism had withheld from it; rather than being powerless in matters of life, in Channing's view, human beings are able to identify moral principles and act accordingly with the aim to become 'perfect' thanks to a unique spiritual gift granted to them by God. It is through this gift of likeness that God communicates himself directly to humanity, and it is through intellectual and moral affinity with the Divine that man reaches perfection.²⁹⁰

In order for humanity to progress and achieve perfection, Channing asserts that individuals must enter into relationship with the Divine Father. Developing an analogy between the father educating the mind of his child, and the Divine Father educating the mind of his own children,²⁹¹ he radically altered the Calvinist picture of the divine parent. Davis suggests that, for Channing, the darkest side of Calvinism was found in the doctrine of irresistible grace, which exposed the cruelty of the Calvinist God.²⁹² In Channing's view, God yearns to see humanity progress and reach perfection; like a father, God wishes to see his children flourish and succeed. Christianity reveals this perfection of the human soul as the great purpose of God as he seeks to elevate

²⁸⁹ William Ellery Channing, *The Complete Works* (London: Routledge & Sons, 1884), 232.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 231.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 234.

²⁹² Thomas Davis, *John Calvin's American Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 151.

humankind 'above the imperfections, temptations, sins, sufferings, of the present state, to a diviner being.'²⁹³

In order to make this possible, God has gifted humanity with moral and rational faculties that enable human beings to transcend the physical limitations of humanity and see the divine faculty that is contained within their soul. It is the Moral Principle, or the conscience, that helps to develop and enhance the divine aspects of humanity.²⁹⁴ Channing describes the conscience of man as the 'handwriting of the Divinity in the soul',²⁹⁵ which 'speaks not as a solitary independent guide, but as the delegate of a higher Legislator. Its convictions of right and wrong are accompanied with the idea of an Authority more awful than man's, by which these distinctions will be enforced.'²⁹⁶ While it may not be possible to escape the sense of the divine presence, Channing is not asserting a doctrine of irresistible divine influence on the human mind, but arguing that if human beings are not able to act morally out of their own free will then no person could be judged to be virtuous. Following this revelation of the divinely appointed Moral Principle, duty becomes natural to humanity; awareness of this greater authority encourages human beings to fulfil their duty wholeheartedly and faithfully. However, what is interesting here is the acknowledgement that even without a belief in God the sense of duty remains, the Moral Principle is not lost but appears as a 'whisper'.²⁹⁷

²⁹³ Channing, *Complete Works*, 44-45.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

Moral goodness is the crux of Channing's understanding of the relationship between God and humanity. Basing much of his argument on his conception of the altruistic nature of human beings, Channing asserts that human beings are 'like' God in their moral faculties. It is through this resemblance that we know and can begin to understand the divine. It is God's ultimate goal to perfect the human soul as it develops to attain divine likeness; however, human beings now have the added responsibility that the doctrine of irresistible grace did not demand of them. The individual has been gifted with the ability to recognise the moral principles through their conscience and has the free will to act accordingly. The gift of the conscience represents the support of God in this relationship, but the ultimate responsibility of the individual's development towards perfection lies within themselves.

God and Humanity in *Carousel*

Channing's account of moral goodness provides an excellent depiction of the moralism fundamental to the liberal faith throughout the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, which asserted the goodness of humanity as a result of their creation in the likeness of God. Having previously identified Oscar Hammerstein II as heavily influenced by the liberal Protestant faith, we can see traces of this moral philosophy in his personal philosophy and his musical plays. Renowned for his morally optimistic philosophy that focused on the 'good' rather than the darker side of life, he responded to his critics expressing his faith in 'goodness' as such:

“I believe not that the whole world and all of life is good,” he once said, “but I do believe that so much of it is good, and my inclination is to emphasize that side of life. It’s a natural inclination, not one that I’ve developed.”²⁹⁸

It is this ultimate goodness, and belief in the potential of humanity, that is evident in Hammerstein’s lyrics and libretti. Turning to his musical plays in the period 1943-1959, it is possible to see a correlation between the fundamentals of Unitarian moral philosophy propounded by Channing, and Hammerstein’s own conceptions of the divine and humanity illustrated by these dramatic works. While all of these musical plays reveal something of his understanding of goodness and the progress of humankind; *Carousel* reveals a connection between the divine and the human being through the use of resemblance, that reveals the divine likeness between humankind and the divine, as well as the divine support that lies behind human progress and growth. Hammerstein’s other musical plays, *Cinderella* and *The Sound of Music*, also reveal the moral responsibility of individuals, which is prevalent in his work. However, *Carousel* offers us something more; an account of redemption in light of this liberal Protestant understanding of the goodness of humanity.

Rodgers and Hammerstein’s second musical play, *Carousel*, opened at the Majestic Theatre on 19 April, 1945, and spent almost two years playing opposite *Oklahoma!* at the St James Theatre, on what is now known as Rodgers and Hammerstein Row (West 44th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues, New York City).²⁹⁹ Produced by the Theatre Guild, and adapted from a successful Hungarian play by

²⁹⁸ Stanley Green, *The World of Musical Comedy* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1980), 213-214.

²⁹⁹ Stanley Green, *Broadway Musicals: Show by Show* (Milwaukee: HAL LEONARD CARP., 1996), 127.

Ferenc Molnár, *Carousel* was a theatrical success, and is renowned for being Rodgers' favourite musical. In his autobiography, *Musical Stages*, Rodgers writes:

Oscar never wrote more meaningful or more moving lyrics, and to me, my score is more satisfying than any I've ever written. But it's not just the songs; it's the whole play. Beautifully written, tender without being mawkish, it affects me deeply every time I see it performed.³⁰⁰

The Other features heavily in *Carousel* as a heavenly undercurrent is present throughout: although this is initially less obvious in the musical play than in the 1956 musical film, this direct appeal to the divine is undisputable. Hammerstein appeals to a benevolent, loving representation of the divine, which is in direct contrast to the expectations of his protagonist. In effect, Hammerstein challenges the orthodox expectations of his protagonist with a liberal understanding of God based upon a concept of moral goodness and forgiveness. This chapter will explore the portrayal of the divine in *Carousel* and the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, and in doing so seeks to understand Hammerstein's conception of the relationship between human beings and God in light of Channing's philosophy. Beginning with the pre-Broadway script of *Carousel*, it will then assess the final script before exploring similar aspects of the relationship between human beings and the divine found in *Cinderella* and *The Sound of Music* in order to support the claim that Hammerstein's concept of the divine reveals a theologically liberal understanding.

Carousel is an adaptation of Jewish Hungarian playwright Ferenc Molnár's 1909 play *Liliom*, which had been produced by the Theatre Guild in 1921 and 1932. Following the success of *Oklahoma!*, also produced by the Theatre Guild in 1943,

³⁰⁰Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 243.

producer Theresa Helburn brought *Liliom* to Rodgers and Hammerstein and suggested an adaptation. *Liliom* is a play devoid of morality that tells a bleak story of domestic violence, misguided decisions, and divine retribution. Set in Budapest, *Liliom* centres on the lives of a Hungarian carousel barker, Liliom, and a young maid named Julie. Their volatile relationship escalates when they both fall into unemployment, leading Liliom to mistreat Julie, emotionally and physically. On hearing the news that Julie is pregnant, a jubilant Liliom chooses not to return to the carousel, but to embark on a robbery with his friend Fiscur, which ends in disaster culminating in Liliom's suicide. Liliom's accomplice, Fiscur, was not wrong when he said that the likes of them would not be taken before God, but would have to be content with police magistrates. After committing suicide, Liliom is immediately collected by two heavenly figures who take him to the heavenly police court for suicides to be given a number, 16,473; placed in a queue; and subsequently tried by the Magistrate. His experience of heaven is impersonal, and rife with condemnation and judgement, and he is soon condemned to sixteen years of punishment before he is finally given the opportunity to return to earth to redeem himself. Unfortunately, Liliom fails and rather than being given a second chance is sent straight to Hell.

Certain aspects of the original play would prove difficult for Hammerstein to engage with, and the most significant changes he would make reveal his liberal Protestant understanding of God and redemption. Whilst the hellfire and brimstone of *Liliom* would have made for unrivalled dramatic effect, Hammerstein's personal philosophy made him question its theological message. In an interview with Arnold

Michaelis, Hammerstein addresses the theological problem he faced when adapting

Liliom:

The other problem of adapting Lilian [sic] was the end. The end of Lilian [sic] when, after his first visit back to earth he is offered another chance, he refuses it. And the implication is that he is going to go down unchanged, down through the years in purgatory or wherever he is going to lie with his soul. / And I couldn't – it was not the anxiety to have an happy ending that made me shy away from that original ending, but because I can't conceive of an unregenerate soul. I can't conceive of a dead end to any kind of existence.³⁰¹

Insight into this theological struggle reinforces the theologically liberal approach Hammerstein had to the divine: could it be that the universal salvation for all that he would have been taught at The Church of the Divine Paternity as a child remained with him throughout his adult life? Certainly his self-proclaimed inability to conceive of an unregenerate soul is evident of universal salvation, but even more so is his reluctance to believe that *Liliom* would remain unchanged forever. Perhaps this different understanding of salvation and the afterlife accounts for the dramatic changes Hammerstein made to his protagonist's experience of the divine.

These changes, however, were not initially met with great critical acclaim. *Carousel* is the one musical play by Rodgers and Hammerstein that has an explicit reference to the divine, and the pre-Broadway script from the Boston try-outs reveals that it was Hammerstein's original intention to star Mr and Mrs God in his musical. Neither this dramatic change to *Liliom* nor the dilution of the divine in the final Broadway production went down well with the critics or Richard Rodgers. The divine figures that Hammerstein created in his original script were to suffer considerably by

³⁰¹ Hammerstein II, interview with Arnold Michaelis.

the time they made it to Broadway, but to the benefit of the show. Norton records the conversation concerning He and She:

Richard Rodgers, walking back to the hotel with his collaborator afterwards put it to Oscar Hammerstein bluntly:
 ‘We’ve got to get God out of that parlor!’
 Mild Oscar Hammerstein agreed.
 ‘I know you’re right’, he said, ‘But where shall I put Him?’
 ‘I don’t care where you put Him,’ said Richard Rodgers. ‘Put Him up on a ladder, for all I care, only get Him out of that parlor.’³⁰²

From this, as well as Rodgers’ own recollections of the depiction of a Mr and Mrs God as a New England minister and his wife in his autobiography *Musical Stages*,³⁰³ it is possible to discern that the Starkeeper is to be read in divine terms. Nevertheless, the explicit depiction of God through the characters of He and She did not work theatrically and the critics agreed. Having attended the first night of the Boston try-outs, critic Elliot Norton argued that:

Mr. Hammerstein has seen fit to fool Billy Bigelow, who expected the same sort of divine court [as *Liliom*], but who is, instead, ushered into a celestial living room wherein an impatient He and an organ-playing She are divine rulers, a concept which is theologically and dramatically foreign to the New England of Billy Bigelow and alien to the whole tone of the play. It is hard to see why the original police court [of *Liliom*], perhaps attended by some of Miss De Mille’s ladies and gentlemen, wouldn’t be perfectly wonderful.³⁰⁴

The shadow of the Theatre Guild’s 1921 production of *Liliom* hung over *Carousel*, and the theological changes Hammerstein made did not go unnoticed in the United States or the United Kingdom. Comparisons with *Liliom* also led to negative reviews from the London critics; R. L. Mannock (*London Daily Herald*) commented on the ‘touch of

³⁰² Elliot Norton, “Broadway’s Cutting Room Floor,” *Theatre Arts* 36 (April 1952): 80.

³⁰³ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 241.

³⁰⁴ Elliot Norton, “Some Lovely Music and Some Errors in ‘Carousel’ Second Thoughts of a First-nighter,” *Boston Sunday Post*, 1 April, 1945, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, *Carousel* Scrapbook.

religious spookery [made] in shocking taste',³⁰⁵ and John Barber (*London Daily Express*) disparagingly wrote: 'The film version of the original play *Liliom* was banned in Britain as blasphemous. *Carousel* solves all problems by drenching them in treacle.'³⁰⁶

Regardless of the criticism, it is possible to discern that Hammerstein's insistence on adapting *Liliom's* dramatic journey to heaven complete with judgement, hell-fire and brimstone, reinforces his commitment to the redemption of all souls, and emphasises how genuine his difficulty with *Liliom's* damnation truly was. Hammerstein's difficulty with damnation can be seen to stem from his faith in ultimate goodness and the potential of humanity rooted in liberal Protestant ideas. From a close reading of *Carousel*, beginning with the pre-Broadway script, with an awareness of the background of Arminian moral philosophy and the Universalist understanding of salvation, we can gain deeper understanding of Hammerstein's concept of God. It is important to begin with the script from the Boston try-outs as it reveals the religious undercurrents that remain in the final script of *Carousel*. The protagonist's journey through the afterlife with the 'Heavenly Friend' and 'the Starkeeper' are a diluted reference to the divine characters, He and She, in the original Pre-Broadway run in Boston. This knowledge of the original divine figures of *Carousel* reinforces the argument that this musical play reveals something of Hammerstein's liberal Protestant concept of God and humanity.

The Significance of the Boston Try-Outs

³⁰⁵ Stanley Green, *Rodgers and Hammerstein Factbook* (Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II: New York City, 1955), 488.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 489.

In Hammerstein's original draft of *Carousel* we encounter a relational image of God, represented by an old married couple sitting in their New England parlour. In an outline for the adaptation of *Liliom*, Hammerstein describes their relationship: 'They talk over all problems together. A woman's viewpoint is needed as well as a man's.'³⁰⁷ The conversations between He and She, as they come to be known in the script, in the original Act Two, scene four, reiterate this relational aspect of the divine. The balance of gender within the divine figure is also of interest, and He comments on Billy's surprise, musing: 'Strange that the world doesn't realize it needs a mother as well as a father.'³⁰⁸ Hammerstein shows that he understands the parenthood of the divine to go beyond the particularities of fatherhood. Whether this reflects his personal childhood relationships with his own parents remains unseen, but it is possible to speculate that the strong, spiritual female characters seen in each of his musical plays had something to do with the prominent female influence in his youth. This experiential reasoning for including a mother as well as a father in the figure of God certainly appeals to a liberal theological approach. The divine She reiterates the message of *Carousel* in a succinct and motherly fashion. As He exits, frustrated with Billy's indignation and reluctance to accept responsibility, She informs Billy that 'He always loses His heavenly patience with people who complain and don't do anything.'³⁰⁹ Reinforcing the responsibility of human beings in the world, she reminds Billy, and the audience, that providence is not a one way system, but human beings play a significant role in shaping their own lives

³⁰⁷ Oscar Hammerstein II, *Carousel Draft Script*, 9, January, 1945, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, Box: Carousel. Excerpts from CAROUSEL (BOSTON TRY-OUT SCRIPT) reprinted by permission of Rodgers and Hammerstein: an Imagem Company © 1945 by Oscar Hammerstein II. Copyright Renewed. International Copyright Secured.

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³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

and developing their personality. The heavenly mother, represented by She, gently approaches Billy in a way that He could not; soft yet determined, She encourages Billy to think about his daughter's life and to go back to earth. He would not be successful without She and vice versa. In this original scene, the audience not only experiences the divine fatherhood of God, but also, somewhat radically in the 1940s, the divine motherhood.

The heavenly figures insist that it is essential for human beings to take responsibility for their own lives and not simply rely on the divine. Throughout this scene Billy is challenged by He and She, and held accountable for his earthly actions. He is encouraged to repent, to ask for help from the divine characters for his shortcomings. In this short piece of dialogue, Hammerstein communicates the necessity for divine aid and the responsibility each individual has to seek it.

HE. (Rising, his voice betraying a loss of heavenly patience.)
You make it difficult for use to help you.

BILLY. I didn't ask fer any help. Never did and never will.
(“HE walks upstage and looks out through the door.)
Why don't you tell me what you're goin' to do with me and have it over with?

SHE. We're not going to do anything with you. You must do something with yourself. Then you'll feel better.³¹⁰

Hammerstein seems to be suggesting that in order to receive help from the divine it is essential to ask for it; the individual must help themselves before they can be helped. Rather than acting as a magical entity who fixes the problems of the individual instantaneously, Hammerstein's God of *Carousel* is a divine support, guiding and upholding the penitent soul as he seeks to improve his own life. In a way that is

³¹⁰ Ibid.

reminiscent of Channing's assertion that the moral conscience is the handwriting of the divine on the soul, waiting to be awakened and reinvigorated by faith in God, She informs Billy that he already has this capacity; it is something that the divine parents wish to help him develop. She says: 'What you are looking for is hidden deep in your own heart. We want to help you find it.'³¹¹

This is supported by a further exchange concerning Billy's most pressing sin; the domestic abuse inflicted upon his wife, Julie. Making excuses and expecting punishment, Billy is challenged rather than chastised:

BILLY. My life. It never was any good. I always knew it and I always said so.
 HE. Did you ever do anything about it?
 BILLY. I even told Julie.
 HE. But did you ever do anything about what seemed wrong to you – except talk – or strike out blindly – and hit those you loved?³¹²

Here the divine is challenging their human child, asking him what he did to change the things that he felt were wrong; they appeal to the human ability to recognise moral actions, and their divinely bestowed faculties to initiate change and to develop their lives accordingly. It is an awakening of the conscience and a challenge to the free will of the individual. If an individual deems their life to be bad, or the world to be unjust, then it is within their power, as well as being their responsibility, to work to change injustice for the better. This scene helps alleviate the problem of the domestic abuse in *Carousel*, which is lost in the post try-out rewrite. While Billy does not receive the punishment that he expects, or feels he deserves, the divine characters appeal to his

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

God-given conscience. Billy's punishment is not divinely handed out, for as He expounds: 'If we were concerned with the foolish business of punishment we couldn't improve on what you are doing to yourself.'³¹³ Rather, the divine parents appeal to what Channing would refer to as Billy's God-given conscience that has been awakened and reinforced through faith. His moral judgements are challenged, and he is spurred on to take action to change both his fate and the life of his daughter in order to restore his soul.

While Billy receives the parental advice that he presumably was never offered during his earthly life, he is encouraged to redeem himself by making a conscious decision to make a moral act and be a dutiful father. Through this encounter something of how Hammerstein defines faith can be seen. She remarks that she wishes Louise could be as happy as the other children in her graduating class, but that she has 'no faith – thinks she "doesn't count" – "nothing to live for."³¹⁴ This reflects Billy's lack of faith, which he has expressed throughout *Carousel*. Despair is the antithesis of faith, as a lack of faith results in a sense of emptiness and an existential crisis causing the individual to see that there is no hope and they are of no worth, which in Billy's case culminated in his suicide. What Louise, and by extension the rest of humanity, is meant to have faith in is disputable; perhaps she is meant to have faith in herself, or perhaps she is meant to have faith in the divine. The definite presence of He and She in *Carousel* strongly suggests that if the individual has faith in the divine

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

they will be supported, and in turn have faith in themselves and be able to improve their life.

The heavenly couple, who represent God, express a deep concern and love for their child Billy. The final few lines of this scene are particularly touching and reflect Hammerstein's inability to conceive an unregenerate soul. The amusement expressed in these few simple lines reveal how fond the couple are of Billy and how they want him to succeed:

HE. He's a wild one, isn't he?
 SHE. Yes. He's wild and he's bad – and he's not very bright. . . . Still –
 HE. Still – you're hoping very hard for him. Aren't you?
 SHE. Yes.
 HE. (Looking out, through the door)
 So am I . . . so am I.³¹⁵

Once again, Hammerstein suggests that the individual is supported by the divine, but must take responsibility for improving their own lot in life. We can see a resemblance between human parents and the divine; the loving figures guiding and helping their child to progress, but who cannot live life on their behalf. One problematic line in this scene comes when Billy asks if he cannot simply 'rest in peace' and is told by He that first he must earn his rest. This taps into a familiar Pelagian strain that Bradley sees running throughout the musical theatre:³¹⁶ the question remains as to whether Billy earns his salvation through good works, or if he takes responsibility for his actions and personal development in the presence of the divine. This will be explored in due course once *Carousel* has been looked at in depth, and similar strains in *Cinderella* and *The Sound of Music* have been addressed.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Bradley, *Have a Dream*, 78.

The continuing presence of God is further reflected in the original Act 2, scene 6, where the speaker at the high school graduation is not a Doctor (as in the final script), but the local minister, Reverend James Reed.³¹⁷ The audience is still aware that the same actor is playing the minister as played He, and He is recognised by Billy (as he recognises the Starkeeper in the Broadway script). The minister's speech has significant religious tones, which reinforce the religious nature of *Carousel* as a whole. He points to the relational nature of human beings, which resembles the relational nature of the divine portrayed by Hammerstein: 'Try to stand close together always – as you stand to-day. For, standing so, you are close to God.'³¹⁸ Going on to remind his audience that they all need one another, he continues:

If those who are successful turn against those who fall, they too shall be failures in the eyes of heaven. If the strong and happy turn against the weak and lonely, they too shall be weak and lonely. And those of you who become desperate and need help, don't be ashamed to ask it.³¹⁹

This reflects the conversation between He, She and Billy in Act 2, scene 4, when Billy is taught that there is no first or last in heaven, but rather a sense of complete equality.³²⁰ Here the minister is preaching the same message to his congregation; the graduating class on stage and the individuals in the audience. It is also reminiscent of Hammerstein's faith in the brotherhood of man and the relational nature of human beings, which will be explored in Chapters Five and Six.

³¹⁷ Hammerstein, *Carousel Draft Script*. Excerpts from CAROUSEL (BOSTON TRY-OUT SCRIPT) reprinted by permission of Rodgers and Hammerstein: an Imagem Company © 1945 by Oscar Hammerstein II. Copyright Renewed. International Copyright Secured.

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³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

The original script of *Carousel* reveals aspects of Hammerstein's concept of the divine. The audience sees a benevolent, loving God represented by two parents, a father and a mother. They are seen awakening the moral conscience of their child, Billy, by challenging his immoral behaviour on earth, and offering him the opportunity to act morally as a dutiful father. Divine Parenthood is asserted, but so too is the moral conscience of humankind. While it may be more implicit in the final Broadway script of the musical play, aspects of this still remain in the final draft of *Carousel*.

The Broadway *Carousel*, *Liliom*, and the Starkeeper

Having looked at the pre-Broadway script of *Carousel* and Hammerstein's concerns over the redemption of his protagonist, we can discern that rather than sentimentalising or drowning *Liliom* in treacle, Hammerstein is adapting the play with a liberal Protestant flavour, which edges away from the contractual representation of a judgemental God prevalent in *Liliom*. When contrasted with the original figure Liliom, Hammerstein's belief in the goodness of humanity becomes all the more apparent. In the original play there is no possibility for the salvation of Liliom, and the play ends with a rather difficult sequence between Julie and Louise remembering the protagonist. An account of the mood and tone of the Broadway script of *Carousel* reasserts the optimistic moral philosophy of Hammerstein and his unbridled faith in humanity. The point of course is that Hammerstein did not, and could not, subscribe to the orthodox theology that characterised *Liliom* and Billy Bigelow's New England, but felt an affinity with New England liberal theology. The divine characters, He and She, did not make it to Broadway, which benefited the show artistically, but the heavenly

characters that remain in *Carousel* still show the same liberal Protestant understanding of the divine that can be seen in the original script. We also can see the same understanding of salvation and redemption that was prevalent in Hammerstein's philosophy as well as in the pre-Broadway *Carousel*.

Unlike Hammerstein, Billy and Jigger believe in the possibility of an unregenerate soul and eternal damnation, and fully expect to be treated in much the same way Liliom was in the original play. Billy's attitude towards the Heavenly Friend is typical of his rebellious nature as he refuses to accept responsibility for his suicide despite his choice of death over prison. He seems somewhat excited to be taken before the judging Lord God of heaven Himself and reacts aggressively when the Heavenly Friend asks what he has ever done that he should go before Him.³²¹ Triggering memories of a previous conversation with Jigger, Billy demands that he will be judged by "The Highest Judge of All". In this musical number, Billy's forceful and determined performance suggests that he believes he has been predestined to hell; he fully expects hellfire and brimstone from an aggressive God, who will cast him down, his thunderous voice shouting and eyes flashing with flames. In this short description of Billy's image of God, Hammerstein conjures a portrait of something more satanic than divine. Even Billy's use of heavenly imagery is given a violent twist as the angel's fingers are red and sore from playing their harps, the loud bellow of the organ music rolls over him like the wave of a storm, and the stars of heaven blind his eyes with

³²¹ Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Carousel* (New York: Williamson Music Inc., 1956), 57-58. Excerpts from CAROUSEL reprinted by permission of Rodgers and Hammerstein: an Imagem Company. © 1945 by Oscar Hammerstein II. Copyright Renewed. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved

their shining brilliance.³²² “The Highest Judge of All” might appear to be an indignant tantrum of a character who feels as though he has been neglected, but on another level Billy is in fact judging himself in the place of God. Billy does not actually need to be judged by the highest judge of all because his guilt has led his conscience to turn on his character. Billy judges that his sins are as bad as anyone else’s, and we can presume these include his suicide and subsequent abandonment of his pregnant wife, and his violence towards her, not to mention the gambling and stealing. This concept of God is at odds with Hammerstein’s own understanding of the divine, but this dramatic use of contrast between the God Billy expects, and the one he encounters, reasserts Hammerstein’s understanding of grace, love, and forgiveness. Billy is certain that he will meet the judgemental God of Calvinist New England, but instead is brought face to face with the loving, accepting God of liberal Protestant theology.

The divine characters represented by the Heavenly Friend and the Starkeeper could not be further from Billy’s assumptions. Rather than being condemned by a great judge, Billy and the audience are greeted with an ambiguous pair whose divine nature is disputable. Even before the audience meet the Starkeeper, Billy’s conversation with the Heavenly Friend prior to “The Highest Judge” suggests that he will not be taken before the Lord God himself:

HEAVENLY FRIEND.	I ain’t going to do anything. I jest came down to fetch you – take you up to the judge.
BILLY.	Judge! Am I goin’ before the Lord God Himself?
HEAVENLY FRIEND.	What hev you ever done thet you should come before Him?

³²² Ibid., 58.

BILLY. [His anger rising]. So that's it. Just like Jigger said: "No Supreme Court for little people – just perlice magistrates!"

HEAVENLY FRIEND. Who said anythin' about . . . ³²³

While this may suggest that Billy is not worthy of being judged by God himself, what is more interesting is that, when viewed within the context of the image of the divine Hammerstein creates, the Heavenly Friend is almost asking Billy to judge himself; as He said in the pre-Broadway script, Billy is judging himself well enough. In what could be read as some sort of test of conscience, Billy judges himself with all of the zeal expected from the aggravated divinity. Once again problems arise when Billy is taken to heaven: not only is the Starkeeper never addressed in divine terms by the Heavenly Friend, but the dramatic action of dusting the stars with a silver handled white feather-duster as he hangs them out on the 'celestial clothes line', which is seen 'stretching back through infinity',³²⁴ suggest that he is of a lower order, a servant with a menial task. Furthermore, when Billy asks where he is, the following dialogue conflicts with his views of heavenly grandeur.

STARKEEPER. [Although the question was not addressed to him]. You're in the backyard of heaven. [Pointing off R.] There's the gates over there.

BILLY. The pearly gates!

STARKEEPER. Nope. The pearly gates are in front. Those are the back gates. They're just mother of pearly³²⁵

Hammerstein's heaven does not live up to the Billy's expectations and the audience is easily led to assume that he has not been deemed worthy enough to get the five star

³²³ Ibid., 57.

³²⁴ Ibid., 59.

³²⁵ Ibid.

treatment. However, the positioning of the Starkeeper up a ladder, in light of Rodgers recollections and Norton's paper addressed at the beginning of this section, enables the audience to safely assume that he is the divine figure of the musical play.

Billy encounters the divine in *Carousel* as a figure in a humble role, who is seen serving the people on earth; in this case the Starkeeper provides for the people of Philadelphia as he asks the Heavenly Friend to hang the newly cleaned star above their state. Once more, Billy is encouraged to judge his own behaviour as the Starkeeper gently teases out his feelings of guilt and repentance; he is not judged, but given the opportunity to finally fulfil his potential for goodness and love.

STARKEEPER. You couldn't bear to see her cry. Why not come right out and say it? Why are you afraid of sayin' the right word? Why are you ashamed you loved Julie?

BILLY. I ain't ashamed of anything!

STARKEEPER. Why'd you beat her?

BILLY [As if to say "What else could I do"]. I didn't beat her – I wouldn't beat a little thing like that – I hit her.

STARKEEPER [Smiling]. Why?

BILLY. Well, y'see – we'd argue. And she'd say this and I'd say that – and she'd be right – so I'd hit her.

STARKEEPER. Hmm! Are you sorry you hit her?

BILLY. [Crossing down to C.] Ain't sorry fer anythin' –

STARKEEPER. [Takes his basket and comes down off the ladder]. You ken be as stubborn and pernicketty as you want. Up here patience is as endless as time. We ken wait.³²⁶

The physical distance between the Starkeeper and Billy in this sequence is particularly poignant. The initial words of the Starkeeper are authoritative; he is looking into Billy's character and alluding to emotions that have been suppressed. His words and his elevated position above Billy on the ladder further suggest this omnipotent paternal power. Spoken with the authority of one who is not remotely threatened by Billy's temper, the Starkeeper directly questions his behaviour. Billy may deny beating Julie, trying to justify his action by applying the verb hitting, which sounds less severe, but it hardly excuses his behaviour. Again his negative attitude gets the better of him when he refuses to admit that he regrets hitting her, although at this stage the audience is aware that he does feel immense guilt, but does not know how to process his emotions. The final words of the Starkeeper in this excerpt are vital as they suggest that Billy is going to be given all the time he could possibly need in order to repent for his wrongdoings. 'Patience is as endless as time', and the Starkeeper is willing to wait for as long is necessary for Billy to accept and make peace with his actions on earth. Again it would appear that self-recognition and repentance, rather than judicial judgement, is what is to be experienced in Hammerstein's heaven.

It is during this dialogue that Hammerstein's libretto could be seen to be explicitly Pelagian if we follow Bradley's argument. The conversation between the Starkeeper and Billy continues:

³²⁶ Ibid., 60.

- STARKEEPER [He turns to BILLY in a more friendly way.] Now look here, son, it's only fair to tell you – you're in a pretty tight corner. Fact is you haven't done enough good in yer life to get in there – not even through the back door.
- BILLY [Turning to R.] All right. If I can't get in – I can't.
- STARKEEPER [Testily]. I didn't say you can't. Said you ain't done enough so FAR. You might still make it – if you tried hard enough.
- BILLY [Crossing to R.C.]. How?
- STARKEEPER. Why don't you go down to earth fer a day like I said you could. Do somethin' real fine fer someone.³²⁷

The suggestion that Billy could do something 'real fine fer someone' implies that in doing so he will redeem himself in the eyes of the divine, reflecting He's words in the pre-Broadway script that Billy must earn his rest. It is this twist to the original plot of *Liliom* that enables Billy to fulfil the goodness of his humanity. Although the Starkeeper informs Billy that he has not done enough good in his life to enter into heaven, his suggestion that Billy perform a good action on earth is not accompanied with a promise of salvation. Instead, Hammerstein exposes Billy's capacity for goodness further as he uncovers the workings of his conscience and his sense of responsibility. While Billy claims he does not want to watch his daughter on earth if she is not happy neither the Starkeeper nor the audience believe him. The Starkeeper's gentle encouragement leads Billy to realise his parental responsibilities as he generates a connection between Billy and Louise through their similar behaviour on the beach,

³²⁷ Ibid.

causing Billy's curiosity to unfold and uncovering his deeply suppressed sentimental nature.

In doing so, the Starkeeper assumes the parental character of God that is central to much Christian theology, including Unitarianism and Universalism, and explicitly seen in the pre-Broadway script of *Carousel*. Focusing on the parental nature of the divine rather than wrathful and condemning perceptions of God, Hammerstein remains true to a liberal Protestant account of divine parenthood. Throughout Channing's theology various appeals are made to the Parental Character of God; to refer to God as 'Father' is to express a spiritual relation between God and humanity, and for Channing between God and the Human Soul.³²⁸ The Starkeeper represents both the love and authority of the parental figure as he not only chastises Billy for his actions, but encourages him to make amends. The character of Bigelow is particularly childlike in his approach to other characters, and the world around him, in that he allows immaturity and irrationality to take precedence over reason. The Starkeeper, however, communicates a morality which is tailored in such a way that Billy, as an individual human being, can understand. It is suggestive of a personal God, who approaches an individual within their own context. This is something that is further argued by Hammerstein in the final scene of the musical.

³²⁸ Channing, *Complete Works*, 46.

DOCTOR. I can't preach at you. Know you all too well. Brought most of you into the world. Rubbed liniment on yer backs, poured castor oil down yer throats – Well, all I hope is that now I got you this far, you'll turn out to be worth all the trouble I took with you!³²⁹

Billy recognises the doctor as the Starkeeper, and the Heavenly Friend's response that, 'a lot of these country doctors and Ministers remind you of him', alludes to the possibility of divine presence in the world. This suggests that figures of authority and of pastoral guidance are connected to the divine, and take on a role of mediating divine presence through their parental natures.

The Starkeeper communicates his own parental nature to Billy, educating him, and guiding him to show love to his daughter as she faces difficulties in her everyday life. For Channing, 'to be a parent is to communicate a kindred nature, and to watch over, educate, and guide this nature to perfect development.'³³⁰ Not only does the Starkeeper educate Billy in the error of his ways, but he also offers the opportunity for reconciliation, the restoration of his soul through moral action. Billy is given the opportunity to fulfil his relationship with his daughter that we see to be analogous to his relationship with the divine figures in the musical. The audience are already aware of Billy's expectations and beliefs concerning fatherhood from "Soliloquy". Written as a device to reveal Billy's psychological understanding of fatherhood, this song is widely regarded as the musical number that enables *Carousel* to function as a unique piece of

³²⁹ Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 71. Excerpts from CAROUSEL reprinted by permission of Rodgers and Hammerstein: an Imagem Company.

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³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

musical theatre.³³¹ Without “Soliloquy”³³² the audience could not possibly identify with Billy, and would feel as little for him as Molnár’s audiences felt for Liliom. Beginning in a pensive tone, Billy characteristically puts himself at the forefront of his thoughts, ‘I wonder what he’ll think of me!’,³³³ before admitting to the audience that while he may be able to ‘lick ev’ry other feller’s father’ he is also ‘puddin’ headed.’³³⁴ While Billy hopes that his son will not inherit this trait, there are plenty of things that he is excited to teach him, such as wrestling and swimming as well as how to charm women. Billy chooses to impart the good of what he knows to his unborn son and to allow Julie to teach the child how to behave. This displays early signs of joint responsibility for the child and shows a developing maturity that encourages the audience to sympathise with Bigelow. Young Bill, named after his father of course, will be encouraged to achieve whatever he wishes be that working on the railroad or being the President of the United States. This imagined support of his child exposes Billy as having the potential to be a decent father.

Billy Bigelow’s journey though *Carousel* is consistent with the Unitarian belief in the potential of humankind and humanity’s relationship with the divine. Rather than presenting a doctrine of salvation through works in *Carousel*, Hammerstein shows the capacity of human beings to change their circumstances and achieve the perfection of

³³¹ Ken Bloom and Laurence Maslon. “Turns on the Carousel featurette,” Disc 2. *Carousel 50th Anniversary Collector’s Edition*, special ed. DVD. Directed by Henry King. Los Angeles, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment LLC, 2006.

³³² Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 36-38. Excerpts from CAROUSEL reprinted by permission of Rodgers and Hammerstein: an Imagem Company.

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³³³ *Ibid.*, 36.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

virtues when guided by the divine other. Humanity is not restricted, but individuals are free to use their own reason and conscience in order to develop themselves. This theme is explored again by Hammerstein in his later musical plays *Cinderella* and *The Sound of Music*. Once more we see a resemblance between the divine and human characters: the heavenly characters are a fulfilment of the moral goodness and indeed parenthood evident in humanity.

Human Independence and Divine Support in *Cinderella* and *The Sound of Music*

The characters that can be recognised as ‘other’ or ‘divine’ in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play tend to act as a support for the protagonist, often found fulfilling a parental role as they encourage the individual to find their own path in life and to develop into fully human beings. *Carousel* provides us with an extensive example of the role the individual plays in cultivating their own life, but *Cinderella* and *The Sound of Music* provide further examples of this. Made for television in 1957, Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Cinderella* starred Broadway sweetheart Julie Andrews and attracted 100,000,000 viewers when it was broadcast all over North American on 245 television stations,³³⁵ a record that was not to be broken until the 2011 Super Bowl.³³⁶ In his adaptation of *Cinderella*, Hammerstein goes out of his way to reduce the magic and mysticism of the story. His notes to *Cinderella* reveal that his Godmother (note, not his Fairy Godmother) is a ‘sensible type of woman, showing no

³³⁵“An Act of Magic” CBS Advertisement, *The New York Times*, 2 April 1957, 70, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, Box: Cinderella (Misc. Notes).

³³⁶Bert Fink, “Background on Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Cinderella*,” The Rodgers and Hammerstein Organisation, accessed 17 January, 2012, <http://www.rnh.com/show/22/Cinderella#shows-history>.

sign of any mystic fairy qualities'.³³⁷ The audience, however, is reminded that she has mystical qualities through dramatic action, for example, her entrance into the house – 'I just flew – I just climbed in the window.' – but these aspects of the Godmother's character are withheld from Cinderella herself. That is, until Cinderella takes the initiative to improve her own life. As with Bigelow in *Carousel*, Cinderella receives support and encouragement from the divine figure; her Godmother visits because she was certain Cinderella would be lonely, and she also encourages Cinderella to think about how she could change her life. Fordin suggests that the Godmother is won over by Cinderella's innocent faith and hope,³³⁸ but more than that, she appears to be convinced by Cinderella's determination that life could be different and that impossible things do happen every day so why should the seemingly impossible not happen to her.

The Godmother is careful, as are the heavenly figures in *Carousel*, to ensure Cinderella's independence and her awareness of the moral responsibility she has for her own life. Throughout this scene, Cinderella questions her Godmother about the nature of dreams and whether or not they can come true, which leads to some revealing answers from Hammerstein. Cinderella's insistence on wishing is counterbalanced by the Godmother's gentle encouragement, which enables Cinderella to create the very scenario that will ultimately change her life. She is given this responsibility and reminded that she should not rely too heavily on fairies or guardian angels to change her life:

³³⁷ Oscar Hammerstein II, notes to *Cinderella*, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, Box: Cinderella (Misc. Notes).

³³⁸ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 333.

- CINDERELLA. For, instance, do you believe in fairies and guardian angels?
- GODMOTHER. Y – yes [sic]. I can't say I don't believe in them. Only this is, it's dangerous to believe too much in good fairies and guardian angels.
- CINDERELLA. Why?
- GODMOTHER. You get to lean on them too much. You get in the habit of sitting back and expecting them to do all the work for you. You've got to help yourself, you know.³³⁹

Hammerstein is not negating the existence of the divine other, but he is arguing that human beings have an individual responsibility in shaping their own lives. In a subtle twist to the original Cinderella story, the protagonist uses her imagination to envision a pumpkin turning into a carriage, and mice into horses; the responsibility is on the individual to imagine a better world, but behind this is the support of that which is beyond. Cinderella is seen taking further action in the shaping of her own life at the very end of the television film as instead of waiting for her Prince to come to her house with the slipper she is found hiding in the garden of the Palace. No longer sitting in her own little corner, Cinderella has the confidence to take responsibility for her own future, having been guided by her Godmother. The Rodgers and Hammerstein version of *Cinderella* does not encourage young girls to sit and wait for their Prince, but to realise that they are not alone, and to go out and make their dreams a reality.

The final musical collaboration of Rodgers and Hammerstein is the second to make explicit reference to the divine through its subject matter of young novice Maria.

³³⁹Oscar Hammerstein II, *Cinderella: A musical version by Rodgers and Hammerstein*, 10-11, in Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Library of Congress, Box: Cinderella (Misc. Notes). Excerpts from CINDERELLA reprinted by permission of Rodgers and Hammerstein: an Iagem Company.
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Unlike *Carousel*, *The Sound of Music* does not address issues of redemption, but it does continue to explore the divinely appointed responsibility human beings have for their own lives. It is necessary to be careful when looking at *The Sound of Music* as it is the only one of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical plays Hammerstein did not write the libretto for, but rather Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse. However, it is safe to presume that Hammerstein would have had significant say over the libretto, and while we must be cautious to attribute dialogue to him, it is possible to say that it reflects his personal philosophy to a certain extent. Fordin records that Hammerstein told his son Jimmy that he would have given up book writing years ago had he found people good enough to do it for him, like Lindsay and Crouse, which is an endorsement and acknowledgment of their talent.³⁴⁰

The Sound of Music hinges on the pertinent question posed by the Mother Abbess in Act 1, scene 12: ‘What you must find out is – how does God want you to spend your love.’³⁴¹ The source of this question can be found in a series of letters between Mary Martin and her husband, Dick Halliday, and Sister Gregory, a nun working at Rosary Collage, River Forest, Illinois. Sister Gregory was the head of the Drama Department at Rosary College, and Mary Martin and Dick Halliday sought advice from her on convent life.³⁴² In a letter to Mary Martin, dated 23 February, 1958,

³⁴⁰ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 345.

³⁴¹ Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *The Sound of Music* (London: Williamson Music Ltd., 1960), 65. Excerpts from THE SOUND OF MUSIC reprinted by permission of Rodgers and Hammerstein: an Imagem Company.

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³⁴² Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 349.

Sister Gregory reveals that she agrees that Maria's search to find her own vocation was central to the entire story. She continues:

The whole purpose of life, it seems to me, is pin-pointed in Maria's struggle to choose between two vocations. Like every adult human being, she must find the answer to the question: "What does God want me to do with my life? How does He wish me to spend my love?"³⁴³

This sense of vocation and the search to find the answer to this question is very much of the Hammerstein ethos, and the individualism of liberal Protestant morality. The individual is responsible to find the path that is intended for them and must not hide from the world merely wishing it might happen to them. Love may be a strong focus for Sister Gregory, but it is also crucial for Hammerstein as is evident in his musical plays and personal philosophy, and in his lyric sketches and notes for *The Sound of Music*. Two pages entitled 'Love' show Hammerstein's exploration of these themes as he muses about divine and earthly love, beauty and holiness, and he writes: 'all love is love of God, love of God includes all love'.³⁴⁴ This reflects the quote from Hammerstein presented in Chapter Two of this thesis in which Hammerstein talks about the whirling atoms of life that are 'held loosely and kept going in the same general direction' by love, which he tells us can be substituted by either God or goodness.³⁴⁵

Finding this path is by no means an easy feat, which is readily acknowledged by Hammerstein in *The Sound of Music's* anthem "Climb Ev'ry Mountain". "Climb Ev'ry Mountain" began as a song entitled "Face Life", and the lyric sketches dated 9 March, 1959, reveal significant spiritual sentiment. The notes that remain from Hammerstein's

³⁴³ Sister Gregory to Mr and Mrs Richard Halliday, 23 February, 1958, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, Box 1: Sound of Music.

³⁴⁴ Oscar Hammerstein II, notes to *The Sound of Music*, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box D.

³⁴⁵ Hammerstein II to Bill Hammerstein, 18 January, 1953. See Chapter Two, pg. 74.

musings of “Face Life” are scrawled in purple ink, but underneath these we find a particularly revealing note that is underlined: ‘Don’t let it be too obviously a philosophical number’.³⁴⁶ From this it is possible to discern that “Face Life”, and consequentially “Climb Ev’ry Mountain”, were consciously philosophical, even if this was subtle. These notes reinforce the toughness that is required in life, as once you climb to the top of one hill there will always be another waiting for you, but the imagery is that of an ever ascending journey towards a summit. Hammerstein is not encouraging dreaming, but inspiring determination in each individual to find the life that they are born to live. Lyric sketches of “Face Life” reveal this further:

On and on I’ll go
 Until I learn to live
 The life I was born to live
 On and on I’ll go
 Until I learn to give
 The love I was born to give
 I will walk every road
 I will ford every stream
 I will climb every hill on my way
 I will search every forest
 I will search every town
 I will search every [illegible] every day
 I will look for life
 I will find my life
 I will learn to play my part
 On and on I’ll go³⁴⁷

“Face Life”

by Richard Rodgers & Oscar Hammerstein II

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The individual is to search for the meaning of their own life, their purpose, but this is not as individualistic as it might initially seem. The goal of this quest is to be able to,

³⁴⁶ Hammerstein II, notes to *The Sound of Music*.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

‘give the love I was born to give’; it is the selfless answer to the question at the heart of *The Sound of Music*: How does God want me to spend my love? As is evident in the lyric sketches prior to the final draft of “Climb Ev’ry Mountain”, and indeed the final musical number itself, Hammerstein is, suggesting that ‘the dream is already there in God’s providential purposes – the human task is to identify and find it, not to construct it.’³⁴⁸ This theme continues in further notes, written once “Face Life” had developed into “Climb Ev’ry Mountain”, as Hammerstein explores how an individual is to find their purpose or role in life.

One lyric sketch rather enticingly depicts a list of different words, occasionally with a rhyme beside them, as Hammerstein brainstorms words that may convey this journey. Listed are nouns that we would expect such as path and byway, but trail is followed by the enticing term ‘pilgrimage’, and an encircled noun ‘pilgrim’.³⁴⁹ Pilgrimage is described in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* as: ‘The practice of going to a sacred place to make offerings, ask favours, or share in the powers of a holy person, spirit, or deity’, but also in Post-Reformation Europe as a metaphor for life’s journey.³⁵⁰ If Hammerstein regarded “Climb Ev’ry Mountain” as a philosophical number, the appearance of ‘pilgrim’ in this list, loaded as it is with religious connotations, also suggests that he saw this as a spiritual song in which the Mother Abbess offers spiritual advice to the young novice, and consequentially that same advice to the audience.

³⁴⁸ Bradley, *Have a Dream*, 84.

³⁴⁹ Oscar Hammerstein II, notes to *The Sound of Music*.

³⁵⁰ Fiona Bowie, “Pilgrimage” in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, A. Hastings, A. Mason and H. Pyper (Eds) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 541.

On receiving a manuscript of “Climb Ev’ry Mountain”, Sister Gregory was overwhelmed by its simplicity and spiritual nature. She wrote to Mary Martin and Dick Halliday:

It’s a beautiful song and drove me to the Chapel, (relax chums, I’m sure it will not effect [sic] your audiences in the same way). It made me acutely aware of how tremendously fortunate are those who find the dream that will absorb all their love, and finding it, embrace it to the end. [. . .] So I just had to dash to the Chapel, give Him a quick but heart-felt “thank-you” and ask that all the youngsters I love so devotedly not only find their dreams but also have the courage to follow them – wherever they lead.³⁵¹

Sister Gregory was aware of the spiritual power that this song has both in the show and out with it. Every individual is encouraged to find their own dream and follow it accordingly over mountains and through streams until they reach it. This musical number could be viewed in an individualistic way; a humanist mantra for chasing your desires. However, given the context of the show, there is a religious undercurrent that cannot be avoided. Hammerstein is calling on the individual to find their dream; to find what they are destined to do in the world and go for it wholeheartedly despite the various trials they will face. While this taps into themes of the American Dream and humanism there is also a sense that the individual is being supported in their quest by the divine. When combined with the inspirational words of “You’ll Never Walk Alone”, the spiritual nature of both these musical numbers is revealed. There is a divine presence standing behind and beside the human individual ensuring that they never walk alone on their journey.

³⁵¹Sister Gregory to Mary Martin, 17 September, 1959, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box D.

Returning to *Carousel*, the powerful words of the musical number “You’ll Never Walk Alone” have, as described in Chapter One,³⁵² a profound effect on many people across the world, and are sung or performed at a variety of occasions. There is a similarity between “You’ll Never Walk Alone” and “Climb Ev’ry Mountain”, although each is specific to, and appropriate for, its corresponding musical. Nevertheless, Hammerstein alludes to a journey in each that every human being is destined to make through their life as they develop and progress onward and upward. “You’ll Never Walk Alone” is aspirational in a different sense to “Climb Ev’ry Mountain” as it answers questions posed when disaster strikes:

Walk on through the wind
 Walk on through the rain
 Though your dreams be tossed and blown
 Walk on walk on with hope in your heart
 And you’ll never walk alone
 You’ll never walk alone³⁵³

“You’ll Never Walk Alone”

by Richard Rodgers & Oscar Hammerstein II

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The images in *Carousel* are altogether bleaker than in *The Sound of Music*, but what lies beneath each is a consistent philosophy applied to a remarkably different situation. “Climb Ev’ry Mountain” encourages human beings to take responsibility for their own lives and find how they need to live their own life while sharing their love with fellow human beings, and “You’ll Never Walk Alone” reminds them that even in the difficult times, when the journey may become rough, dark and lonely that they are not alone, but accompanied by the divine. It instills hope in times of trouble and

³⁵² See Chapter One, pg. 41.

³⁵³ Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 56-57.

promises that ‘at the end of a storm is a golden sky, and the sweet silver song of the lark’;³⁵⁴ a beautiful and peaceful image that encourages the pilgrim to keep their head held high.

In *Cinderella* and *The Sound of Music*, Hammerstein can be seen to continue his liberal Protestant themes of the goodness of humankind, human moral responsibility, and the guidance of the divine parenthood of God. Each of these musicals asserts that the human individual must search for their own path in life, but they are not left to seek it out alone. In each a divine or spiritual presence is detectable; a God-like figure who supports and guides the individual through the good times and the bad. There are considerable religious undertones in *Carousel*, *Cinderella*, and *The Sound of Music*, which suggest enduring themes that can be traced throughout Hammerstein’s musical plays. Human beings are encouraged to seek and fulfil their God-given potential, follow their moral conscience, and to progress as individuals.

***Carousel*: Pelagian or a Universalist Depiction of the Final Restoration of Souls?**

An exposition of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Carousel* reveals an emphasis on the moral goodness of humankind, the parenthood of God, and the progress of humanity. Supported by complementary evidence found in the lyrics and libretti of *Cinderella* and *The Sound of Music*, Hammerstein can be said to be presenting a liberal Protestant understanding of humankind, and the relationship between human and divine to his audience. Throughout this chapter, I have alluded to a criticism made by

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

Bradley that there is a detectable Pelagian streak visible in all musical theatre, which is found in Hammerstein's musical plays; characters, he suggests, can 'earn' their redemption. However, in light of Hammerstein's liberal Protestant influences, his difficulty in conceiving of an irredeemable soul and his attendance as a youth at The Church of the Divine Paternity, *Carousel* seems to explore a Universalist understanding of the restoration period of the soul to God after death. If this is true then all of the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein can be read in light of Hammerstein's concept of the divine; however, seeing as each musical operates in isolation, we must address this issue of Pelagianism. The question whether or not this search for the individual's dream is indeed a performance of good works, a form of Pelagianism as humankind seeks to achieve its own salvation, must be asked. While similarities can be seen between the Unitarian and Pelagian concepts of the relationship between God and humankind, is it fair to label these musical plays simply as Pelagian or is something deeper at work?

The greatest proponent of Pelagianism in the musical theatre, Ian Bradley, adopts a modern understanding of what is meant by the term Pelagian; namely if an individual performs 'good works' then they can earn their way to heaven. In his book *You've Got to Have a Dream: The Message of the Musical*, Bradley argues that the religious nature of *Carousel*, stemming from Bigelow's interaction with the Starkeeper, falls into the Pelagian strain that is so common within musical theatre.

Here is the familiar Pelagian strain that runs through so many musicals coupled with a portrayal of God which is much more centred on the attributes of forgiveness and grace than on judgement.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁵ Bradley, *Have a Dream*, 78.

For Bradley, Bigelow is offered a gospel of forgiveness and salvation through works when he is given the opportunity to return to earth in Act 2, scene 3. While elements of this reading of Pelagianism can be seen in Hammerstein's portrayal of the divine, they are far more prevalent in the original *Liliom*. Bigelow is never offered redemption as a result of his good action on earth when he is allowed to return for the day, but it is an opportunity to further his character and to develop his 'self' under the guidance of the divine. Liliom on the other hand is offered the opportunity to achieve salvation through his works; he is to spend sixteen years in the crimson fire until his pride and stubbornness have been burnt away before going 'back to earth one day to show how far the purification of [his] soul has progressed'.³⁵⁶ His actions on this day will determine the next stage of his stay in heaven:

Take heed and think well of some good deed to do for your child. On that will depend which door shall be opened to you up here.³⁵⁷

In *Carousel* such a blatant appeal to what we might call Pelagianism is never made. The shift from Liliom to Bigelow brings with it an appeal to the capability of human beings for moral goodness, and an emphasis on fulfilling divinely given potential. If there is a Pelagian strain in the original Molnár play, it gives way for a newly, Universalist inspired perspective on the nature of humanity and of God to emerge in *Carousel*.

Pelagianism, in Bradley's usage, does not invoke those qualities by which the term is defined, but rather focuses on an interpretation suggesting that through good works human beings can achieve their own salvation. However, further consideration

³⁵⁶ Ferenc Molnár, *Liliom*, trans, B. J. Glazer (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010), 166.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

of the emphasis on grace in both Pelagianism and Unitarianism is somewhat revealing, and perhaps strengthens Bradley's argument, as both reject the doctrine of original sin and place an emphasis on God's justice. In Pelagian thought, it is possible for a human being to live a sinless life through the application of moral choice bestowed upon them by God.³⁵⁸ This possibility of goodness and moral perfection echoes Unitarian thought found in the writing of Channing among others. However, Bradley's suggestion that salvation is achieved through good works in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical undermines the divine and moral elements in these musical plays. While it may be the case that characters are expected to act morally, and be 'good' to achieve happiness, this is almost always encouraged by another character that represents the divine will or support. In *Carousel*, Bigelow is encouraged to do good works, but this is by the heavenly Starkeeper who is to be read in divine terms; Maria, in *The Sound of Music*, is morally encouraged by the Mother Superior and so it continues throughout these musical plays. The human ability for change and progression is something that is prevalent in these musical plays, but that does not necessarily brand them Pelagian. As Universalist theology became increasingly Arminian, following the Restorationist Controversy in the latter half of the nineteenth century, they built upon a tradition of universal salvation that included a period after death that would involve the restoration of the human soul to God. Knowledge of the Universalist influence on Hammerstein begins to broaden our awareness of what might be happening in his depiction of the afterlife in *Carousel*, but also illuminates the source of his moral philosophy that influenced all of his work.

³⁵⁸ Gerald Bonner, "Pelagianism" in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, A. Hastings, A. Mason and H. Pyper (Eds) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 527.

Universal salvation was the key theological concept that defined the Universalist movement from the outset; however, there were various interpretations how human beings would experience this salvation. Many would talk of a 'Restoration' period after death, but this would often mean different things to different thinkers; Elhanan Winchester and Caleb Rich provide two early examples of approaches to universal salvation. Richard Eddy assessed Winchester's theology as differing little from what would be called Universalist 'orthodoxy' at the turn of the twentieth-century, 'except in regard to the duration and design of punishment, and the ultimate salvation of all moral creatures whether men or angels.'³⁵⁹ For Winchester, everyone would be punished for their sins in the afterlife, but no human being could ever sin so much that they deserved eternal punishment.³⁶⁰ Winchester's adherents were accused of 'proposing salvation by works, purgatorial purification, instead of by a gospel of free and 'finished' justification.'³⁶¹ A second interpretation of God's salvific plan for humankind was exemplified by Rich (1750-1821), who was the first to proclaim that there was no punishment whatsoever in the afterlife.³⁶² He reached this theory of salvation by discerning that human beings were 'first created in Christ Jesus, and then formed of dust; and that as [they] stood related to the earth of Adam only [they] sinned.' Sin, therefore, belonged to the flesh, and once the spirit had been freed from the fleshly body in death it could return to heaven in its pure state.³⁶³ Rich's

³⁵⁹ Joseph Henry Allen and Richard Eddy, *American Church History Volume X: A History of the Unitarians and the Universalists in the United States* (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1894), 420.

³⁶⁰ Peter Hughes, "Elhanan Winchester," accessed 28 October, 2012, <http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/elhananwinchester.html>.

³⁶¹ Allen and Eddy, *History of the Unitarians*, 423.

³⁶² Peter Hughes, "Caleb Rich," accessed 28 October, 2012, <http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/calebrich.html>.

³⁶³ Allen and Eddy, *History of Unitarians*, 426.

theological understandings inspired Hosea Ballou and traces of his thought can be seen in Ballou's own theology.

The notion of a restoration period after death when souls would be restored to God was influential in American Universalism and can even be found in the work of Hosea Ballou who would go on to spearhead Ultra-Universalism. Eddy argues that in his *Treatise on Atonement*, Ballou discerns that our moral nature determines reconciliation after death; even in death the soul maintains a moral existence that is subject to God's moral law.³⁶⁴ Furthermore, Ballou used Scripture to show that atonement was a moral action, with the purpose of reconciling man to God, and not a legal work to appease a vengeful God. He argued that Christ suffered for man, not instead of him, and that every sinner was responsible for his own sin.³⁶⁵ The reconciliatory action of Christ on the cross 'is the bringing of man into harmony with God, a moral and spiritual result produced in the sinner, who needs changing, not a scheme or effort for changing the unchangeable God, or for turning aside any penalty of his perfect law.'³⁶⁶

When Ballou's public debates with Turner led him to assert that there was no future punishment and human beings suffered for their sins whilst alive on earth, Ultra-Universalism came into being,³⁶⁷ which caused a schism in the church leading to the Restorationist Controversy.³⁶⁸ With a concern for free will and justice, the Restorationists were accused by the Ultra Universalists of adopting a Unitarian

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 434-435.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 435.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 436.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 444.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 455.

theology, despite their argument that due to their belief in a restoration period after death made them Winchester's true heir.³⁶⁹ Reacting against the Ultra-Universalism of Ballou and Turner, the Restorationists sought to take individual accountability into account. They argued that the promise of no punishment in the afterlife and the assertion that all suffering for sin was experience during earth life led to moral apathy and did not satisfy the human need for justice.³⁷⁰ Despite the schism being a failure, Arminianism would win over the majority of Universalists who placed ever increasing emphasis on moral distinctions as Universalism became ever more like Unitarianism.³⁷¹ By the 1830s Ultra-universalism was on the decline and by the latter half of the nineteenth century virtually all Universalists believed in future punishment of some variety or another.³⁷²

Hammerstein's picture of redemption reflects an Arminian Universalist understanding that would have been popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; the period when he attended The Church of the Divine Paternity. With an emphasis on morality, his protagonist in *Carousel* is asked to act morally; to take responsibility for his immoral action, before he will be restored to God. Bigelow is not offered an explicit reward, but we do see that his soul must be cleansed before he can be at peace and able to rest. Gone is the punishment that would have been expected by the early Universalists and the Arminian influence that infiltrated Universalism in the aftermath of the Restorationist Controversy can easily be seen.

³⁶⁹ Hughes, "Elhanan Winchester."

³⁷⁰ Cassara, *Universalism in America*, 43-44.

³⁷¹ Bressler, *Universalist Movement*, 48.

³⁷² Hughes, "The Restorationist Controversy."

Hammerstein has not only shown that his characters are capable of human goodness, but that before they are able to be redeemed their souls must be morally restored.

Conclusion

Carousel is the most illuminating of all of Hammerstein's musical plays as it reveals his understanding of humanity, the divine, and the relationship between the two. With the benefit of the pre-Broadway script and Hammerstein's interview with Michaelis, it is possible to discern the liberal Protestant influences in his work. There is a considerable emphasis on moralism found throughout his work as is evident in *Cinderella* and *The Sound of Music*. Humankind is proclaimed to be good, free to make conscious moral decisions, and be held accountable for them; it is the responsibility of each human individual to find their own path in life, to seek out their purpose, but they are not alone. The divine, or God, represented through figures such as the Starkeeper, the Godmother, and the Mother Abbess, guiding each individual and offering spiritual advice. Hammerstein's image of God is one with a liberal Protestant nature; a fulfilment of all that we deem good in humankind; a moral exemplar and a divine parent. *Carousel* also offers us a depiction of heaven that is reminiscent of the Universalist concept of the restoration period of the soul after death, where the soul is still morally accountable for its decisions and actions. However, each and every soul is redeemable, and the divine actively wants the soul to be restored. At this stage, it might seem that Hammerstein is presenting a highly individualistic Arminian or Unitarian depiction of the relationship between God and humanity, but as we will see in the following chapter, the Universalist emphasis on unity and the brotherhood of

man had a considerable influence on Hammerstein as he explored through how we, as human beings, should treat one another and live in community through the medium of musical theatre.

OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II AND THE SOCIAL QUESTION

Having concluded that Unitarian moralism influenced Hammerstein in Chapter Three, I argued that a liberal Protestant understanding of the nature of humanity, and the relationship between human beings and the divine, can be discerned in Hammerstein's lyrics and libretti. Unitarian and Universalist ideas continue to be significant in relation to the portrayal of ethical relationships between human beings in these musical plays. The Unitarian emphasis on moralism had a significant impact on the understanding of human beings in community, and the ethical and social commitment they have to one another. Prominent during the onset of the social gospel movement, the work of Francis Greenwood Peabody describes the ethical questions faced at the turn of the twentieth century with regard to the nature of the relationships between human beings. As a precursor to two detailed chapters engaging specifically with individual musical plays by Rodgers and Hammerstein, this chapter will investigate how aspects of Peabody's Social Question are evident in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals more generally, and how it is revealed to be a fundamental part of Hammerstein's personal philosophy as expressed through his social and political activism.

Francis Greenwood Peabody and the Social Question

The social gospel became an influential aspect of American liberal Protestantism in the early twentieth century, as ministers and theologians challenged the social and economic injustices that were rife in the world around them. 'It is the age of the social question,' asserts Francis Greenwood Peabody in *Jesus and the Social*

Question: ‘Never were so many people, learned and ignorant, rich and poor, philosophers and agitators, men and women, so stirred by this recognition of inequality in social opportunity, by the call to social service, by dreams of a better world.’³⁷³ This inequality inspired a series of cross-denominational theological questions, which resulted in a resurgence of the study of Christian ethics. Peabody, social ethicist and theologian, proposed that the ‘Social Question’ must be addressed by modern theology as theologians directly related to the experience of humanity at the turn of the twentieth century to the will of God. This resulted in an ethical concern for humankind, and an advocacy for human equality, that existed long after the social gospel faded away in the aftermath of World War I. From this it is possible to discern an increase in the social awareness of American society, as well as among American theologians, which is also evident in Hammerstein’s musical plays. Peabody did not think that the task of moral progress was limited to the theologian or the church, but puts forward an account of the role of the artist in the communication of truth and beauty in the world that relates to the mission of the social question.

Francis Greenwood Peabody (1880-1912), Professor of Theology and lecturer in Ethics at Harvard, was a Unitarian by birth. His book, *Jesus Christ and the Social Question* (1900) became a milestone for the social gospel movement and twentieth century liberal religion.³⁷⁴ Arguing that the modern social consciousness was an ethical expression, he urged the church to realise that it was alienated from this consciousness, and reform was necessary if it hoped to play a significant role in wider

³⁷³ Francis Greenwood Peabody, *Jesus and the Social Question* (N.p.: READ Books 2007), 3.

³⁷⁴ Robinson, *Unitarians and Universalists*, 134.

society. Robinson asserts that while his positions were ‘firmly moderate’, Peabody was highly influential in recognising the vast array of social problems and addressing them to the wider theological community.³⁷⁵ Adding that Peabody did not abandon the individualism that marked Unitarian thinking, Robinson aptly argues that he did turn this individualism against the nineteenth century tendency to identify personal development with the expansion of American business and the economy. It is in Peabody that ‘we see the ethical individualism of Unitarianism, and of American culture in general, made into an instrument of self-criticism and social change’;³⁷⁶ calling Unitarians to social involvement as a means of self-development became a central part of the Unitarian ethos, something that will become apparent in Hammerstein’s philosophy when his attitudes towards social service are examined.

Published in 1909, Francis Peabody’s *Approach to the Social Question* explored early twentieth century society at large, as well as what he would come to define as the ‘Social Question’. This volume advocates an entire movement of social change resulting from an ethical and moral emphasis. Defining the Social Question, Peabody writes:

The Social Question is not a fragment of modern morality, but the summary of it; not an eddy in the stream of modern goodness, but the main current in which that goodness flows. It is not, therefore, until the good life is followed all the way from its source to its end that the ultimate direction of the Social Question is revealed.³⁷⁷

The ethical approach was viewed as a path to the ideal condition and circumstance of humanity in the world; if successfully realised, this new ethical focus will enable

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 136.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Francis Greenwood Peabody. *Approach to the Social Question: An Introduction to Social Ethics* (N.p.: READ Books, 2010),145-146.

humanity to view the world realistically with perspective and precision.³⁷⁸ Peabody argues that various social questions concerning the social, political, and economic conditions experienced by the modern American, reinstates the 'story of ethics' in the 'language of the present age'.³⁷⁹ Recognising the development of a faith in idealism alongside the industrial expansion of America, the growth of materialism, and the constant surge of commercialism, Peabody saw a desire for the spiritual and practical improvement of the lives of Americans suffering at the hands of industrialisation and consumerism. Thus he aimed to offer a solution to the ethical concern, and spiritual yearning, of human beings living in a commercial and industrial world.

Peabody did not view this ethical progress as a quick-fix solution nor as an immediate cure for society's ills, but rather, the social movement was a movement towards something new, an improved way of life for all. Soon to be expressed as the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth amongst the social gospellers, this development towards perfection of society was not expected to happen immediately, but was something of a utopian ideal to be strived towards by humanity.

[The Social Question] finds itself concerned, not with a fixed condition permitting an immediate and final remedy, but with a movement, a growth, a way of life. Each increase in social responsibility, each fragment of effective social service contributes to this social idealism; and to trace this process, and weigh and estimate its various steps, to recognize and promote this emergence of idealism, is the approach of philosophy to the problems of modern life.³⁸⁰

The ethical approach to life enables these hopes and expectations for a new world to be conceived, and more importantly achieved. It not only reintroduces the individual

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 147.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

to the reality of the world around them, but instils a sense of altruism, a motivation, inspired by love, to alter the grim realities of life. Egotist and prudentialist approaches to the world fade away as the optimism and determination of the idealist begins to see the world not only as it is, but also the potential it holds for change and improvement. Unlike the egotist who argues he has no duty to the poor, or the prudentialist who makes half-hearted attempts at charity, the idealist will fight for the ethical upheaval of society, and argue that the weak should not go to the wall, but be supported by the strong.³⁸¹

The Role of the Artist and the Social Question

With an assertion of the importance of the ethical approach, and the ‘socialising’ of the individualism that permeated Unitarianism, Peabody had considerable influence on liberal theology at the turn of the century. In *Approach to the Social Question: An Introduction to the Study of Social Ethics* (1909), Peabody recognised that the moral process was not something unique to religion and asserted that it must not be rejected when it is seen in a different ‘garb’. He argued that any search for Truth, Beauty or Goodness is similar in its mission to find the ‘ideal’. ‘The moral process is not exceptional or unique’, he discerned, but:

Wherever the ascent of life is made, whether toward Truth, or Beauty, or Goodness, the same succession of steps is taken, and the same elusiveness and inaccessibility are disclosed. Science, arts, and morals are alike in this, that each is solicited by an unscaled height. Absolute Truth, perfected Beauty, unmixed Goodness, - all these alike are not attainments, but ideals. Whether it be the intellect, or the imagination, or the will, which is summoned to its best, the call to the heights is the call of the Ideal.³⁸²

³⁸¹ Ibid., 150-51.

³⁸² Ibid., 137-38.

Due to his faith in Truth, the scholar studies many 'truths' in the hope of finding that one, ultimate Truth which will liberate him.³⁸³ Equally the artist is an idealist:

He lives in the presence and under the perpetual persuasion of an unrealized, yet imperative Beauty. What he creates is but the symbol of his ideal; yet it is his ideal which makes him able to create. The light of the ideal shines upon his material and makes it beautiful.³⁸⁴

It becomes possible to view humanity's drive towards Truth, Beauty and Goodness as an expression of the moral; this approach recognises the artist's valuable contribution in the development of the social consciousness and the search to find answers to the social question.

The moral ideal is an essential element for the scholar or the artist who seeks truth because without ethical idealism Peabody believes that he will miss the subtle aspects of the truth he seeks.³⁸⁵ Asserting the necessity of the divine in the life of a scholar, Peabody argues that:

A scholar must be not only creative, but sincere. The pure in heart, it is written, shall see God. Their undefiled character gives them not only a finer morality, but a finer insight. Their eyes are clear because their hearts are clean.³⁸⁶

It is the scholar who has a pure heart who will have a finer insight into the truth through his upstanding moral attitudes. This is also true of the artist as there is a synonymous relationship between the moral and the aesthetic ideal.

Art makes its appeal not to action, but to appreciation. Yet, these very qualities of art have their moral conditions. Veracity, insight, nobility, spirituality, are all parts of the beauty to which the nature of man responds. Art for art's sake, the sensual without the spiritual, the flesh without the soul, has been, in many

³⁸³ Ibid., 138.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 140-41.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 141-42.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 142.

periods of history, not the sign of aesthetic promise, but the mark of a decadent age.³⁸⁷

While art can appeal to action as well as to appreciation, Peabody suggests that when it is reinforced with the moral ideal, it will have a greater impact upon its audience. Furthermore, when an artist has a connection to this moral ideal, he will be more sensitive to the finer qualities of the truth he seeks. This moral ideal, which coordinates with the ideals of science and art also ‘participates in their creative work and affirms the unity of the life of the spirit’.³⁸⁸

For Hammerstein, the arts played a significant role in exploring truth, and advocating a better world in which human beings could live together in unity. In a set of index cards for a speech delivered at the *South Pacific* cast party on 7 April, 1952, entitled ‘What Theatre has done for us’, Hammerstein explores the power of the theatre. He articulates that at its very worst a trip to the theatre can be a wasted evening, but this is not always the case. He advocates a sense of morality inspired by the theatrical performance, which generates human sympathy, an awareness of ‘brotherhood –love for all men’, described as: ‘that devotion to goodness that concern for others exists in all of us and can be awakened in a THEATRE – AS IT CAN sometimes be awakened in a church. DOES NOT ALWAYS HAPPEN.’³⁸⁹ Hammerstein identifies the theatre’s potential to explore truth, and act as a ‘proof of universal love’, as the very reason why he loves the theatre and his job.³⁹⁰ Hammerstein displays a spiritual and an

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 142-43.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 143-44.

³⁸⁹ Oscar Hammerstein II, “What Theatre has Done For Us,” Index Cards from SP cast party 7 April, 1952, Hammerstein’s emphases, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box C.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

ethical approach to the theatre, arguing for its ability to inspire morality and goodness in a manner analogous to that expounded by Peabody.

Sincerity and truth were essential to Hammerstein's rendering of a musical number, and he did not shy away from expressing his belief in the goodness and potential of humankind, and his optimism, in interviews, articles, or speeches. Chapter Two alluded to the close relationship between Hammerstein's personal philosophy and his art through Sondheim's recollection of being advised by Hammerstein not to imitate other people's emotions, but to write what he genuinely believed in.³⁹¹ Hammerstein's *Preface to Lyrics* shows a similar commitment to communicating truth through his lyrics and musical plays. He writes:

The longer I write, the more interested I become in expressing my own true convictions and feelings in the songs I write. [. . .] I became convinced that whatever I wanted to say could be said in songs, that I was not confined necessarily to trite or light subjects, and that since my talent and training in the writing of lyrics is far beyond my attainments in other fields of writing, I had better use this medium.³⁹²

The most important thing for Hammerstein in a good song was sincerity and genuine belief, which suggests there is something of his own personal philosophy in each of his musical numbers as he followed his own conviction that: 'However important, however trivial, believe it. Mean it from the bottom of your heart, and say what is on your mind as carefully, as clearly, as beautifully as you can.'³⁹³ His comments validate an investigation into the liberal Protestant influences that can be read in his musical plays, but also open up a new place of engagement; his political and social activity.

³⁹¹ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 241. See pg.85.

³⁹² Oscar Hammerstein II, "Where the Song Begins" *The Saturday Review*, 3 December, 1949 p.p. 11-14c cont. 51-52, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 3 of 3.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

Following Peabody's argument, the artist is of equal importance to the theological scholar in the assertion of ideals and the search for ultimate truth. The ideologies of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musicals will be viewed in the light of the Social Question, as Hammerstein's active role of ethicising and moralising will be investigated through an account of the political and social roles he performed. Identifying Hammerstein's engagement with the Social Question through his activism and his musicals plays, the close relationship between his personal philosophy and his art will be seen.

Hammerstein and the Social Question

In Hammerstein's musical plays and his social activism a 'dream of a better world' is imagined. Constantly reflecting Peabody's assertion that social involvement leads to self-development, he asserts the need for social and ethical action in order for humanity's development and world peace. Hammerstein's ethical focus leads to the fulfilment of moral goodness, and his insistence that it will be the idealists and the dreamers who will change the world shows a practical faith in moral idealism evident in his personal philosophy and musical plays. Expounding his thoughts on writing songs and shows for an interview on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, Hammerstein reveals the essence of his engagement with the Social Question. Refuting claims that the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play is merely good escapist entertainment, Hammerstein points to the knifing in *Oklahoma!*, suicide in *Carousel*, the tragedy of *South Pacific*, and the conflict faced by the King in *The King and I* resulting in his death. Positing that their plays make attempts to 'wrestle with human problems', Hammerstein argues that the

result of facing these human problems will be the progress of humanity. He explains that in contrast to the passive hopeless man:

The man with hope tries his best to fix what is wrong, and believes in the ability of mankind to become stronger and better. I admit that it's false to say that life is all beautiful, but it is equally false to say that it all mean and low and tragic. Every good play, whether is been musical or not, should recognize life in its proper balance.³⁹⁴

Hammerstein addresses the Social Question, and through his hopeful outlook and his faith in the progression of humanity, positively expresses the human ability to overcome problems in his musical plays. When Hammerstein's own engagement with social issues in his personal life is examined, it is possible to see how this commitment to progress was a part of his wider personal philosophy, and how this belief in the possibility of a better world inspired his musical plays.

Oscar Hammerstein's political and social activity largely overshadows that of Richard Rodgers.³⁹⁵ From his involvement in the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League to his role in the NAACP, Hammerstein actively engaged with the Social Question throughout his life. Questions of race and the dignity of human beings feature heavily as Hammerstein

³⁹⁴Oscar Hammerstein II, Typed Carbons of OH2 thoughts on writing songs and shows for *Ed Sullivan Show* "Toast of the Town," 9 September, 1951, in Oscar Hammerstein New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 1 of 9.

³⁹⁵ Richard Rodgers is often thought of as being less socially and politically active than Hammerstein, but there is evidence that suggests he too was keen to see liberal social, political and economic values at the forefront of American policy. Lovensheimer and Most's individual research concerning some of his earlier musical films with Larry Hart suggest that social issues were deeply ingrained in his consciousness. Andrea Most, in *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical*, argues that *Babes in Arms* illustrates qualities of American Jewish liberalism and suggests that Rodgers may not have been as free from his religious roots as he may have assumed. Illustrating the basic features of American Jewish liberalism, this musical play depicts an underprivileged group who believe in human equality and aim to establish an inclusive and diverse community. (Most, *Making Americans*, 67) Furthermore, despite it being Hammerstein that is often remember for being investigated by the FBI under suspicion of communism, Rodgers was also investigated as a result of participation in a formal protest of artists against the intensification of the HUAC's investigation of alleged Communist presences in Hollywood, which he had participated in. (Lovensheimer, *Paradise Rewritten*, 15)

questions the reality of the brotherhood of man beyond the limits of racial distinction and social boundaries. This commitment to promote world unity beyond cultural particularity was commendable, and a life-long effort. In a report made to the American Senate, following the death of Hammerstein, Mr Jarvits said:

As is so true of men who have a tremendously creative quality, Oscar Hammerstein was also interested in a better organization of the world. Whatever might be one's views as to the particular ideas he espoused, he was sincerely devoted to some effort to develop international government in the world, and gave it an enormous amount of time and talent.³⁹⁶

Hammerstein was recognised for his commitment to creating a better world for all people by the United States Senate as well as by his friends and family. This desire to unite the world through one world government stems from his deep understanding of the brotherhood of humanity, and the commonality that all human beings share, which transcends heredity or racial connections.

In his interview with Arnold Michaelis, Hammerstein reveals his understanding of the relations between human beings. Advocating the shared forum of the arts, Hammerstein suggests that by interacting with different cultures in this way it is possible to discover shared interests and experiences that go beyond the necessity of a common language. Having established that there is an implicit understanding between all human beings, greater than language, Michaelis probes Hammerstein, asking if he is speaking of something that might be described as 'the language of the impulse or the language of the spirit'. Hammerstein answers yes, and continues:

³⁹⁶ Mr Jarvits, Report to the Senate, Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 86th Congress, Second Session, Washington, 24 August, 1960, Vol. 106, No 14, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box D.

Also, it is a language of common sense or recognition that we are not really different, that our differences are superficial, that language differences are superficial, and customs are superficial.³⁹⁷

For Hammerstein, the ordinary ways in which human beings lead their lives; concerns with food and shelter and debt, procreation and employment, are common human practices that transcend land borders, oceans, and customs. Through his Asian musicals, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *Flower Drum Song*, Hammerstein shows his audience that the non-American characters can communicate freely, have the same interests as Americans, particularly in the case of love, and can be readily identified with. One prominent example is the relationship between Anna Leonowens and the Siamese characters in *The King and I*. When what Hammerstein sees as the superficial differences between peoples are overemphasised, human beings find themselves in trouble; a theme explored through the relationship between Anna and the King, who is himself suffering internal conflict as his traditional understanding of monarchy clashes with his yearning for liberal progress. Hammerstein uses this relationship to suggest that human beings should focus on that which is common to us all as this will make it possible for us all to genuinely 'feel for one another'. For Hammerstein, understanding is more crucial than love in terms of human relationships because understanding is a block to hatred, and human beings must not hate one another. Reviewing the opening night of *The King and I*, Dedmon noted that it is infused with Hammerstein's personal philosophy: 'his hero in any garb or in any land will be the man or woman who stands up for individual dignity and freedom.'³⁹⁸ This passion for expressing the commonality

³⁹⁷ Oscar Hammerstein, interview with Arnold Michaelis.

³⁹⁸ Emmett Dedmon, "Rodgers and Hammerstein at Peak in 'King and I,' newspaper clipping, Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 2 of 3 (Aka Ted's Box 2).

of human experience, in order to uphold human equality and dignity, is evident in all of Hammerstein's musical plays as well as his social and political activism, and reflects a liberal Protestant understanding of the brotherhood of man.

Hammerstein was among the many playwrights and composers who left Broadway and headed to Hollywood, following the devastating effect that the Depression had on Broadway. Despite a luxurious private and buzzing social life, these Hollywood intellectuals found financial success but, as Fordin argues, no inner satisfaction.³⁹⁹ Due to an increasing disillusionment among these intellectuals, a new group was formed in June 1936 known as the Hollywood League Against Nazism (later known as the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League for the Defense of American Democracy). Hammerstein was a founding member and an executive council member of the League until he left Hollywood to return to Broadway. One aim of the group was to raise consciousness about the growing threat Nazism posed to the free world, and the United States.⁴⁰⁰ Hammerstein's biographer, Fordin, argues that it is no surprise Hammerstein joined the League:

It was not surprising that Oscar joined the fight. Although he had been unaware of Nazism five years before, when he wrote *Music in the Air*, talks with Germans, as well as a trip to Berlin while he was living in England, had convinced him of its evil. The majority of Americans still felt that Hitler's hooligans were too outrageous to be taken seriously; the Hollywood League Against Nazism was established to change this attitude.⁴⁰¹

Revealing the mission of the League, a letter from Elaine Hellinger, the executive Secretary for the Hollywood League Against Nazism, dated 27 August, 1936, proposes that there is work to be done by the cultural commission to defend the democratic

³⁹⁹ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 142.

⁴⁰⁰ Jim Lovensheimer, *South Pacific: Paradise Rewritten* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2010), 17.

⁴⁰¹ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 142.

liberties of all engaging in cultural work in the United States and also in Germany.⁴⁰² With the additional aim to defend Nazi prisoners, such as Ludwig Renn and von Ossietzky, they planned to use speeches, films, articles, and graphic arts, to publicise the causes and results of Nazi attacks on culture. Hammerstein's paper, 'Aims of the Cultural Commission', articulates their concerns, arguing that Germans are being deprived of their intellectual liberties and that the League does not want to see this in America. He asserts that the League must aid victims in Germany and educate Americans about the Nazi threat to culture, liberty, and its influence in America.⁴⁰³

The League was also a reaction against the Nazi sympathizers and Aryan supremacists who became active across the United States once Hitler came to power in 1933. Spreading vast quantities of anti-Semitic propaganda, they accused Jews of being Communists or Communist sympathisers, and claimed that Jewish communities were a threat to the physical and moral well-being of white Americans. Eventually they targeted Hollywood, seeing it as a Jewish-controlled industry that was attempting to subvert white America. This written and broadcast propaganda linked Jews to the threat of world Communism, and represented them as depraved and immoral in a sensational and tasteless manner. Lovensheimer discovered evidence of Hammerstein's sensitivity to this issue in the Hammerstein archives and reveals:

Hammerstein's sensitivity to this issue is evidenced by an unidentified carbon copy of a memo with the heading, "Nazi – in Los Angeles," which is among the few documents in his papers pertaining to Nazi sympathizers. This memo is concerned with the influx of Nazi thought, propaganda, and activity in the United States; it notes especially the involvement of the Friends of the New

⁴⁰² Elaine Hellinger to Anti-Nazi League, August 27, 1936, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box D.

⁴⁰³ Oscar Hammerstein II, "Aims of Cultural Commission," in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box D.

Germany and the American Labor Party: "The American Labor Party, with a strong anti-Semitic, anti-Negro, anti-communist program, and with a direct tie-up with the Friends of the New Germany, is preparing to drill as many men as possible for future enlistment into the National guard. The purpose being the establishment of a group of trained "storm troopers" who can fight should the occasion arise."⁴⁰⁴

In response to these groups, the Jewish community in Los Angeles formed the Jewish Community Committee in 1934 to raise awareness of these pro-Nazi groups within America.⁴⁰⁵

The first meeting of the Hollywood League Against Nazism took place at Dorothy Parker and Alan Campbell's house in June 1936. Donald Ogden Steward was named president, and Hammerstein, Parker, Florence Eldridge, Frederic March and nine others formed its executive council.⁴⁰⁶ Hammerstein became the head of the cultural commission for the league, organising radio broadcasts, newspaper articles and short informational films⁴⁰⁷ about the threat to 'cultural liberty' posed by the Nazi regime.⁴⁰⁸ Within six months, the cultural commission was broadened and an 'interracial commission' was created, which Hammerstein also chaired. The mission statement of the interracial commission was to 'combat racial intolerance and thus combat Nazism, which uses intolerance to attain power.' Lovensheimer rightly discerns that Hammerstein's work with the interracial commission shows how he combined his passion against racial intolerance with his anti-Nazi beliefs. Lovensheimer effectively illustrates his point by highlighting one event hosted by the interracial committee in January, 1937, an Inter-racial Mass Meeting Against Nazism, which was held at the Los

⁴⁰⁴ Lovensheimer, *Paradise Rewritten*, 17-18.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁰⁶ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 142.

⁴⁰⁷ Lovensheimer, *Paradise Rewritten*, 19.

⁴⁰⁸ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 143.

Angeles Philharmonic Auditorium.⁴⁰⁹ Fordin is also in agreement commenting that: 'The committee was Oscar's first affiliation with a cause that would remain one of his primary interests: understanding among people of all races.'⁴¹⁰ From these interests of Hammerstein, it is also possible to see significant liberal views of freedom, liberty, and the universality of man at work. It was around the same time that the Soviet Union and Germany signed the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939 that Hammerstein withdrew from the league, which by then was known as the Hollywood Peace Forum. The close monitoring of the league by the FBI at this stage shows that Hammerstein's distancing, and finally removing himself from the league and Hollywood was a politically astute move.⁴¹¹ However, even this would not free him from being investigated by the FBI and being accused of having communist sympathies throughout his life.⁴¹²

Despite having left Hollywood and the Anti-Nazi League, Hammerstein remained politically active while working with Richard Rodgers. Lovensheimer claims that he became active in the wartime Writer's War Board within days of the attack on Pearl Harbour.⁴¹³ On 9 December, 1941, just two days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. approved an initiative to find civilian writers who would promote the war effort. Within a month the Writers' War Board was organised and utilised thousands of writers across the nation. The board itself was a self-recruited group of about twenty authors from the New York City area, chaired by Rex Stout (who wrote detective fiction about Nero Wolfe), and

⁴⁰⁹ Lovensheimer, *Paradise Rewritten*, 19.

⁴¹⁰ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 143.

⁴¹¹ Lovensheimer, *Paradise Rewritten*, 20.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 20, 23.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 31.

accompanied by other well-known members such as Hammerstein, Clifton Fadiman (host of the highly rated radio show "Information Place"), Russel Crouse (Broadway dramatist), and Pearl Buck, among others.⁴¹⁴ Lovensheimer writes:

The WWB was founded to promote the sales of war bonds, rationing, and other war-related activities. The WWB was also especially aggressive in its attack on domestic social conditions that its members viewed as antithetical to the ideals that Americans were fighting, and dying, to preserve. In short, their propaganda was intended not just to boost wartime morale but also to change the social conditions of the United States in general.⁴¹⁵

The government had been seen as deceptive and heavy-handed during World War I, so a fresh approach was required during World War II that would underplay propaganda and assert a 'strategy of truth.'⁴¹⁶ Public support was so vital to the war effort that the government had to find new ways to circumvent its official position. The Writer's War Board was one way of promoting official government policy and gaining popular support, while ensuring that the government technically refrained from propaganda.⁴¹⁷

Hammerstein's commitment to boosting American morale was not limited to his work with the Writer's War Board, but also seen in his first collaboration with Rodgers, *Oklahoma!*. Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* came at a very important moment during America's involvement in World War Two. Between 1939 and 1945, the American media was dominated with wartime related material with magazines consistently covering war-related home front activities, and Hollywood producing

⁴¹⁴ Thomas Howell. "The Writers' War Board: U.S. Domestic Propaganda in World War II" *Historian*, Volume 59, Issue 4 (June 1997): 795, accessed 30 November, 2010, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1540-6563.1997.tb01376.x/abstract>.

⁴¹⁵ Lovensheimer, *Paradise Rewritten*, 29.

⁴¹⁶ Howell, "The Writers' War Board," 795.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid

newsreels, cartoons and 160 'Victory Films' between 1941 and 1945.⁴¹⁸ Reinforcing this wartime propaganda were government issued pamphlets and leaflets informing Americans about the war and to encouraging them to support the war effort.⁴¹⁹ Bush Jones argues that, 'perhaps the greatest effect of such government and media efforts was to create among virtually all Americans a sense of national unity stronger than ever before in the country's history.'⁴²⁰ *Oklahoma!* fitted neatly into this feeling of nationwide community as it provided a 'celebration of democracy and community at a time when the US was engaged in a war against fascism.'⁴²¹ It spoke directly to the American people as it explored the issues of brotherhood, conflict, and what it means to be American. Watching the plot unfold in front of them:

Those boys watching *Oklahoma!* in the back of the theatre knew that their fate was just as uncertain. They knew, like the farmers and the cowmen did, that whatever their differences, their commonality of purpose – that which made them truly, deeply American – was all that really mattered if they were to hope to prevail in the Armageddon overseas. These soldiers saw *Oklahoma!* as a metaphor for their own probably ultimate sacrifice. They stamped and clapped and laughed and cried. The country, the show, and the soldiers were as one.⁴²²

The community that Hammerstein portrayed in *Oklahoma!* was one that fed directly into the American consciousness. The brotherhood created between the characters in the musical and the American audience sitting in the theatre resulted in a wider sense of community central to the liberal Protestant faith. The American community was seen to be united, not only through the representation of American citizens in the show, but also through the expression of solidarity felt by the audience and beyond.

⁴¹⁸ Bush Jones, *Our Musicals*, 125.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴²¹ Bradley, *Have a Dream*, 73.

⁴²² Hammerstein, *The Hammersteins*, 175.

In 1943, Hammerstein set up a committee of people from the music industry to look for songs that would help boost the morale of the country and the war effort. Together with Richard Rodgers, he wrote three songs; “The P. T. Boat Song (Steady As You Go),” “We’re On Our Way (Infantry Song),” and “Dear Friend”. “On Our Way” was a widely played song that honoured infantrymen, and was part of a WWB’s response to encouragement from the government to publicise the Army Ground forces; the ‘essential but underappreciated infantry’.⁴²³ The WWB arranged for the 15 June 1944 to be celebrated as Infantry Day, which was an extraordinary success with more than 700,000 spectators turning out in New York alone. The impact of songs such as Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “On Our Way”, as well as the use of radio, poetry and comic strips, was a boost in public opinion and infantry morale.⁴²⁴ The Music War Committee, as it was known, was greeted with scepticism, and Oscar Levant once remarked: ‘You can’t win the war with a song.’ Aware of the power of the arts, Hammerstein retorted: ‘You think this is futile, and yet it is a mighty funny thing that shortly after I started to handle the war, Africa fell to the Allies.’ A few months later, however, he realised that the cynics had a point and began to devote all of his war effort to the Writers’ War Board, which was tackling major questions of attitudes in America such as racism and anti-Semitism. The board not only tried to change these attitudes, but also pressured the government and other organisations to stop racist practices. The efforts of the board were instrumental in the employment of African American medical personnel in the Army and the end of racial blood typing by the Red

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

Cross.⁴²⁵ The third annual report of the Writers' War Board discovered by Lovensheimer in the Hammerstein archives asserts that:

The Board has also continued to concern itself with the nature of the Japanese and German enemy, and with the rising tide of prejudice against racial, religious, and other groups here at home. We believe our military success must not be jeopardized by sentimental illusions about our enemies or bigoted notions about our Allies and fellow-citizens.⁴²⁶

Even with the war coming to an end, the work of the Writers' War Board continued to face racial and social problems within America head on; they recognised the irony of fighting for freedom abroad when their own country was rife with intolerance and bigotry.

Once more Hammerstein's principles of racial tolerance, particularly African American involvement in the military, can be seen in his musical plays. Hammerstein's adaptation of Bizet's *Carmen*, *Carmen Jones*, featured an all African American cast, and told the story of a World War Two Air Force man Joe and Carmen Jones, a parachute maker. Not only did he write one of the first musical plays for an African American cast in dialect, but he portrayed his characters as an essential component of the war effort free from caricature.⁴²⁷ His message was that African Americans were as involved in the war effort as any other American. Speaking about the impact of *Carmen Jones* on the African American acting community, and the portrayal of African Americans in theatre, Muriel Rahn told the *Negro Digest* that: 'Hammerstein has taken the colored player out of the bandana and put him in costume. It's a step towards a better future.

⁴²⁵ Lovensheimer, *Paradise Rewritten*, 211.

⁴²⁶ "Third Annual Report of the Writers' War Board," January 1945, in the Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, Box 21.

⁴²⁷ Alton Cook, "Arresting Fantasy Fills Carmen Jones," in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, Carmen Jones Scrapbook.

From it and other plays colored performers will learn that they can do better roles and demand them.’⁴²⁸ This theatrical integration continued in *South Pacific*, when African American Seebees were integrated into the male chorus, which has been used to great effect in subsequent productions. The Lincoln Center Revival, that toured the United Kingdom in 2011, emphasised the division between the white American and African American chorus, reinforcing the racial tensions present throughout the musical play. Once again, Hammerstein places African American characters in a prominent role, showing that they too are a significant part of American society, and should be treated with respect and dignity. This can be seen in his attitude towards the ‘other’ in all of his musical plays. Hamburger (*New York Times*) takes care to express how Hammerstein had a genuine affection for other human beings and took extreme care not to offend. Commenting on *The King and I*, Hammerstein tells Hamburger: ‘I did not want to tread on any Oriental toes [. . .]. What was required was the Eastern sense of dignity and pageantry – and none of this business of girls dressed in Oriental costumes dancing out onto the stage and singing ‘cling-a-ling-a-ling-ling’ with their fingers in the air.’⁴²⁹ *The King and I* was not a satire, a fairy tale or a revue; breaking with theatrical traditions seen in *The Mikado*, it respectfully engaged with the Orient treating these characters with dignity.⁴³⁰

It was not only Hammerstein’s musical plays that advocated equality in the face of racism and prejudice. He was in charge of writing a short play ‘The Myth that

⁴²⁸ Interview with Muriel Rahn, *Negro Digest*, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, Carmen Jones Scrapbook.

⁴²⁹ Philip Hamburger “The Perfect Glow – II”, *The New Yorker*, May 19, 1951, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, Box 22.

⁴³⁰ “About ‘The King and I’ by Rodgers and Hammerstein,” *New York Times*, March 25, 1951, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, *The King and I* Scrapbook.

Threatens America', and presenting it to influential leaders of the communications industry. Presenting to a group of over 600 professionals responsible for movies, books, and other mass media, the evening included a wide variety of performances including songs from Hammerstein, a scholarly speech by anthropologist Margaret Mead, and an appearance by striptease artist Gypsy Rose Lee.⁴³¹ The message that Hammerstein and the board were trying to communicate was one of caution; even a writer with no racist bias can inadvertently give support to prejudice when they use devices of stereotype as a lazy way of getting laughs and making quick characterisation.⁴³² Ironically, Hammerstein would fall into this trap of stereotyping in *South Pacific*. Despite his active role in promoting the equality of all races, Paul Robeson's wife wrote to him having seen the show for the first time and said while they had enjoyed the show very much, one part bothered them: the African American dancer, Archie Savage, played a Seabee (which in itself was radical, as black Seabees were segregated) who's jitterbug enthralled the audience, but that was all he seemed to do. Mrs Robeson asked Hammerstein if there could be a moment in the show where the only black cast member on the stage could do something other than jitterbug. Hammerstein, to his credit, fixed the problem very next day.⁴³³

Hammerstein was a member of NAACP and was active on its board of directors from the late 1940s until the end of his life.⁴³⁴ There is further evidence of his promotion of racial tolerance to be found in the Hammerstein Archives in the Library of Congress. Examples of this can be found among condolence letters, which include one

⁴³¹ Howell, "The Writers' War Board," 395.

⁴³² Lovensheimer, *Paradise Rewritten*, 235.

⁴³³ Laurence Maslon, *The South Pacific Companion* (London: Pavilion Books 2008), 163.

⁴³⁴ Lovensheimer, *Paradise Rewritten*, 31.

from Samuel A Williams, the President of the NAACP, and another from the Interracial Music Council Inc. expressing how proud and grateful they were that Oscar Hammerstein showed an interest in their work.⁴³⁵ He was certainly aware of the work of the NAACP as early as 1948 as within the archives there is a letter from Carl von Doren on the 28 July, 1948, requesting assistance for a Mrs Rode Ingram and her two sons facing life imprisonment in Georgia. Additionally, there is a receipt from the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Inc. acknowledging a donation from the Hammersteins on the 2 July.⁴³⁶ The American people were certainly aware of Hammerstein's racial activism, and throughout the archives we find further examples of letters such as this from a variety of sources including a dinner invitation on behalf of Sydenham Hospital, America's first interracial hospital.⁴³⁷ A series of letters from 1954, from people such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry Emerson Fosdick, are in response to a letter Hammerstein sent out on 20 December, 1954, which we can discern asked influential individuals whether they would be concerned if an African American moved into their neighbourhood, and if they thought this would result in the devaluation of property.⁴³⁸ While there is no information as to what sparked Hammerstein's letter, he can be seen to be playing an active role in the promotion of equality for African Americans in America.

⁴³⁵ Samuel A Williams, Condolence letter, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, X Box 7 of 9

⁴³⁶ Carl von Doren, letter from the 'Committee of 100' dedicated to the creation of an America of Justice and Equality for our Negro Fellow Citizens, 28 July, 1948, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, X Box 7 of 9

⁴³⁷ Correspondence letters 1960, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, X Box 7 of 9.

⁴³⁸ Letters, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 4 of 9.

Hammerstein did not shy away from his commitment to advocating racial equality in his social action, his musical plays, or indeed interviews. When questioned by Mike Wallace on 15 March, 1958, he replied with a simple 'yes' in response to the following question: 'Does that express your view as far as you're concerned with miscegenation, inter-marriage between races is perfectly sensible?'⁴³⁹ Having approached the issue in both *Show Boat* and *South Pacific*, where he subtly suggested that he was in favour of interracial marriage, such a direct answer to this question reinforces what an audience can already assume from his musical plays. *South Pacific*, in particular caused quite a controversy at its time of production, largely due to the musical number "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught", but Hammerstein resisted any temptation to cut the song from the musical play. Causing a stir among the critics, it was occasionally met with praise, but largely with hostility. John Beaufort (*Boston Mass Christian Science Monitor*) wrote that this musical number introduced a 'protest against racial discrimination which gives the story an underlying human theme',⁴⁴⁰ but this praise was counterbalanced by suspicious reviews and political difficulties. Responding to a letter from Lieutenant Commander Thomas McWhorter, who felt that the musical number was too blunt, too much like harsh propaganda when the theatre should be for pure entertainment,⁴⁴¹ Hammerstein informs him: 'I am most anxious to make the point not only that prejudice exists and is a problem, but that its birth lies in teaching and not in the fallacious belief that there are basic biological, physiological

⁴³⁹ Oscar Hammerstein II, Interview by Mike Wallace, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, X Box 3.

⁴⁴⁰ John Beaufort, "Mary Martin, Ezio Pinza Seen in New Musical Play," *Boston Mass Christian Science Monitor*, 16 April, 1949, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, *South Pacific* Scrapbook – 1949, Volume 1.

⁴⁴¹ Lieutenant Commander McWhorter to Oscar Hammerstein II, 2 April, 1949, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, Box: *South Pacific*.

and mental differences between races.’⁴⁴² Hammerstein not only shows his commitment by resisting pressure put on him to remove the song, but more importantly by responding and defending his lyrics in light of his own personal philosophy. He stood by this commitment when *South Pacific* received increasingly serious criticism from politicians who accused it of being ‘Red’ during the national tour following a performance at the Tower Theatre, Atlanta in 1953. Two Georgian State legislators, State Representative David C Jones and State Senator John D Shepherd, protested against *South Pacific* and planned to impose a ban on arts that had an ‘underlying philosophy inspired by Moscow’⁴⁴³ as they denounced the show on the floor of the Georgia state legislature arguing that intermarriage breed half-breeds, and in the South there were pure blood lines that they intended to keep that way. There were further problems when the show was to play in a segregated theatre in Wilmington, Delaware, when Rodgers and Hammerstein threatened to pull the show unless the segregated seating was lifted.⁴⁴⁴

Until his death in 1960, Hammerstein remained active in several organisations in addition to the NAACP that reflected his vision of internationalism.⁴⁴⁵ One of these organisations was the Writers’ Board for World Government. Writing a guest editorial for the *Saturday Review of Literature*, Hammerstein proclaimed that: ‘The world government I am talking about here is limited world government, limited to the objective of peace. [. . .] The nations are not to give up their form of government, their

⁴⁴²Oscar Hammerstein II to Lieutenant Commander McWhorter, April 11, 1949, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, BOX: *South Pacific*.

⁴⁴³“‘South Pacific’ Racial Propaganda: Two Georgia Legislators put a ban on Moscow plays,” newspaper clipping, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, *South Pacific* Scrapbook.

⁴⁴⁴Maslon, *South Pacific Companion*, 163.

⁴⁴⁵Ibid., 31.

customs, their songs, their games – only the right to make war.’⁴⁴⁶ Hammerstein was an active and enthusiastic World Federalist, delivering many speeches as well as writing series of articles and pamphlets all promoting World Government. In a speech on Nuclear Energy delivered in 1957, Hammerstein argues that the World Federalists are not dreamers, but hard-headed realists, accusing those who think things can simply drift along of not facing up to the devastating reality of an atomic war.⁴⁴⁷ Supporting proposals for strengthening the UN, denouncing the Stockholm ‘peace’ position, and vehemently opposing Navy Secretary Matthew’s suggestion for a preventative war, the United World Federalists, of which Hammerstein was a member of the Advisory Boards, insisted that the United States ought to announce a goal to avoid World War Three: it should ‘free people from fear of war; maintain and promote human freedom; make the world safe for its differences, securing to the United States and to all nations the right to develop according to their own customs and traditions; unite all peoples who genuinely desire peace.’⁴⁴⁸ Peace, however, was not simply the absence of war, but the presence of law and order achieved by a united world federal government.⁴⁴⁹ In a speech delivered on 25 August, 1950, in Westport, Connecticut, Hammerstein shows his support of this cause, calling for people to come forward to help build a structure for peace saying: ‘We believe that real and permanent security can be achieved only by a universal World Government, a federation of all the natures

⁴⁴⁶ Oscar Hammerstein II, guest editorial, *Saturday Review of Literature* 33, no 52 (December 23, 1950) 22-23, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 3 of 3.

⁴⁴⁷ Oscar Hammerstein II, Nuclear Energy Speech, 1957, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, BOX 2 of 9.

⁴⁴⁸ World Federalist Government, Preliminary Policy Draft – Minority Report, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, BOX 1 of 9.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

of the world.⁴⁵⁰ In an article entitled, “Getting off the Pyramid”, he describes this federation as being limited to objective peace; the ‘only surrender of national sovereignty would be a nation’s right to make war.’⁴⁵¹ Imagining a world where human dignity and the brotherhood of humanity were at the core, Hammerstein sees world government as the only alternative to total destruction and the elimination of humankind. All of humanity is responsible for the survival of the human race and the maintenance of human dignity. We all believe in peace, Hammerstein asserts, but he asks: ‘What good does it do to believe in it? It won’t just fly into your lap like the white dove it is supposed to be. You have to work for it, just as you have to work for freedom, and for anything else that’s good.’⁴⁵²

Closer to home, in 1949, the Hammersteins became interested in Welcome House,⁴⁵³ an adoption agency run by Pearl S. Buck, that found homes for Asian and part-Asian children, who despite being born in the United States were shunned by most adoption agencies. The Hammersteins were no strangers to the reality for Asian Americans in the 1950s: the internment of their brother-in-law, Jerry Watanabe, for being of Japanese origin had a direct impact on the family who took in his daughter for the duration of her father’s imprisonment.⁴⁵⁴ It is no wonder why they became so involved with their neighbour, Pearl S. Buck’s adoption agency with this personal connection as well as Hammerstein’s commitment to racial equality and human

⁴⁵⁰ Oscar Hammerstein II, United World Federalist Speech, August, 25, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 5 of 9.

⁴⁵¹ Oscar Hammerstein II, “Getting off the Pyramid,” *The Saturday Review*, 23 December, 1950 pp 22-23, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 3 of 3 (Aka Ted’s Box 3).

⁴⁵² Oscar Hammerstein II, “High Time,” December, 1952, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, Box 34.

⁴⁵³ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 284-85.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

dignity. Buck was aware of the sadness of these orphans who had been fathered by American fathers, and argued that: ‘unwanted in the lands of their birth [. . .] they have no status, no dignity as a human group.’⁴⁵⁵ Hammerstein served on the board of the Welcome House for seven years⁴⁵⁶ as the organisation worked to combat racial prejudice and common misconceptions of ‘hybrids’.⁴⁵⁷ Writing for *Life International*, Buck explains that for Welcome House the happiness of the child is the utmost concern, ‘not the propagation of racial or religious origins.’ Helping to broaden the outlook of other adoption agencies, Welcome House differed from agencies that refused to take interracial children because they could not find interracial parents, and aimed to place children with loving families regardless of race and religion.⁴⁵⁸ The Welcome House pamphlet informs us that Oscar Hammerstein was the President of Welcome House, and sets out the ethos of the agency: when couples cannot have children, they should be helped if possible by adoption; the principle of adoption should be the right child with the right family and not restricted by race or religion.⁴⁵⁹ Pearl S. Buck would become influential in Hammerstein’s campaign against racism and social injustice. Issues of assimilation did not escape his musical plays either. *Flower Drum Song* concentrates solely on the tensions between the Chinese American community in San Francisco. This community is diverse, as described by the musical number ‘Chop Suey’, and wholly American in terms of the brotherhood of man. He is

⁴⁵⁵ Pearl S Buck ‘The Single Candle,’ clipping, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 4 of 9.

⁴⁵⁶ Lovensheimer, *Paradise Rewritten*, 32.

⁴⁵⁷ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 285.

⁴⁵⁸ Pearl Buck, ‘It Began with an Unwanted Boy,’ *Life International*, 21 July 1958, pp64-69, pg 68, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 4 of 9.

⁴⁵⁹ “Welcome House Pamphlet,” in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 4 of 9.

often seen using the innocence of children to reinforce his belief in the essential likeness and equality of all human beings.

By 1958 Hammerstein had written two chapters for a proposed book on racial prejudice that was also to contain work by Buck and James Michener (author of *Tales of the South Pacific*).⁴⁶⁰ Although never published, the chapters remain in the Hammerstein Archives in the Library of Congress. In what appears to be an introduction, the three assert that human barriers have been put in place that keep people apart, but all human beings are capable of goodness and evil, wisdom and stupidity. In a polemical statement they assert that:

We are absolutely convinced that the historical tendency of the world leads toward greater communion between races, not less, toward great equality, not less, and toward greater acceptance of the essential brotherhood of the world, not a retreat from that principle. [. . .] We would like to see that brotherhood and equality of opportunity achieved now . . . this year . . . this month . . . today.⁴⁶¹

Their aim is to redeem the American reputation and to remind Americans that they are better than this discrimination, and that improvement is not a utopian dream, but a practical necessity.⁴⁶² Hammerstein's first chapter, 'Progress', observes how traditional comedy is guilty of creating and perpetuating slander about various kinds of Americans.⁴⁶³ He argues that there has been an improvement in American society as while prejudice and discrimination still exist, 'the bad taste and cruelty'⁴⁶⁴ found in the jokes about African American and foreign-born Americans are on the decline and met

⁴⁶⁰ Lovensheimer, *Paradise Rewritten*, 32.

⁴⁶¹ Oscar Hammerstein II, Pearl Buck, and James Michener, introduction to a book collaboration, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 4 of 9.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Oscar Hammerstein II, "Progress," in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, Box 33.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

with greater objection than they would have been in previous years. He attributes this change to the war waged against discrimination as Americans were becoming more tolerant and intelligent, but also in the role played by the assimilated children of the immigrants, who have ‘developed a pride and dignity that refute the old slanders.’⁴⁶⁵ The American people are, in Hammerstein’s opinion, improving, but there is still a way to go, something he addresses in his following chapter. In this chapter, entitled ‘Dear Believer in White Supremacy’, Hammerstein writes: ‘The race problem is serious. You and we must build some kind of bridge of understanding so that we may join together in a sincere effort to avert the ultimate world tragedy that must ensue if we do not join together.’⁴⁶⁶ Refuting arguments for the inferiority of African Americans, he observes that ‘the popular concepts of religion seem to point strongly toward the equality of all men in the sight of God.’⁴⁶⁷ Despite Lovensheimer’s description of this observation as ‘sly’,⁴⁶⁸ it is more reflective of Hammerstein’s liberal Protestant views and belief in the universality of man.

The draft of Hammerstein’s chapter, ‘Dear Believer of White Supremacy’, found in the Library of Congress archive is an implicitly polemical engagement with many of the myths and legends surrounding the advocacy of segregation and racial discrimination.⁴⁶⁹ Arguing for the serious nature of the race problem in America, Hammerstein invites his opposition to engage in an arena of debate, discussion, and scientific research, to discover if the legends that maintain segregation are in fact true.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Lovensheimer, *Paradise Rewritten*, 32.

⁴⁶⁹ Oscar Hammerstein II, “Dear Believer in White Supremacy,” in Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Library of Congress, Box 33 (OH Articles).

He insists, 'we must build some kind of bridge of understanding so that we may join together in a sincere effort to avert the ultimate world tragedy that must ensue if we do not join together.' The mutual assumptions he asserts that must be addressed in order to reveal the truth that lies behind the 'race problem' include political, social and religious issues: the risk of political control in States where African Americans are the majority; interracial marriage resulting in an inferior type of progeny; God did not intend for the races to intermingle; African Americans do not want better standards of living; and even, African Americans have a particular smell.⁴⁷⁰ Having addressed each of these issues, Hammerstein refutes each, noting a lack of scientific evidence, and points to countries where there has been experience of integration such as New Zealand. As for the Biblical argument, he argues:

The popular concepts of religion seem to point strongly towards the equality of all men in the sight of God. But if this is a mistaken idea, and if a closer examination of the Bible reveals a contrary philosophy, we should find out about it.⁴⁷¹

Given his understanding of the brotherhood of man, it is obvious which side of theological exegesis Hammerstein falls down on. He is aware of the 'disunity' that the race issue has had in the United States, and the 'grief and terror and violence, that it has caused.'⁴⁷² Arguing that theories held by a majority of people must not be ignored, but explored, and if they are found to be false, they must be exposed in order to re-educate the American people.

Conclusion

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid

⁴⁷¹ Ibid

⁴⁷² Ibid

Hammerstein identifies the Social Question of his age as one that concerns the equality of all human beings at home in America, and across the world. His musical plays reflect his social and political activism, which shows a commitment to the creation of one world united under democracy, in order to achieve peace. He advocates the worth of each individual that transcends the particularity of their culture, and even more significantly their skin colour or appearance. Asserting unity, while aiming to protect ethnic, gender, and cultural diversity, Hammerstein's commitment to the brotherhood of man and the progress of humanity is reflective of a Unitarian and Universalist understanding of the relationship between human beings, and humankind's ultimate goal as explored in Chapter Three. The social and political activism of Hammerstein that informed his musical plays is reminiscent of the Social Question set out by Peabody. The active social and political role adopted by Hammerstein provides evidence of the long-lasting impact of the social gospel movement on Unitarian and American liberal Protestant thinking. Not only aware of the social inequalities and injustices in the world around him, Hammerstein made a concerted effort to generate change through his influential position in society. The essential likeness and brotherhood of man was extended beyond the original economic and class issues, which were the driving force behind the social gospel movement, as Hammerstein turned to the universality of humankind regardless of race. Hammerstein set himself apart as an idealist, searching for truth and challenging society through his musicals; fuelled by the moral ideal, his search for truth equals that of the theologian. Now that Hammerstein's social and political background has been explored in the light of American liberal Protestantism, it is possible to turn to the

musicals themselves to see how these ethical and moral ideals translated themselves through his art. The following chapter will focus on Hammerstein's emphasis on the Universalist concept of the brotherhood of man, as seen in his 'Western' musicals, *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel* and *The Sound of Music*, before turning to his main ethical concern, race relations, in Chapter Six.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN IN THE 'AMERICAN' MUSICALS OF RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN

Chapter Four revealed that Hammerstein's personal philosophy informed his musical plays, and that a correlation can be seen between his social and political activism, and his art. As he addressed the Social Question of his day, resulting from his experience of racial inequality and war, Hammerstein sought to provide ethical answers to humanity's situation through an assertion of the unity, equality, and essential brotherhood of humankind. This chapter investigates the role of the Universalist concept of the brotherhood of man in Hammerstein's American musical plays: *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *The Sound of Music*, and *Allegro*. This investigation into Hammerstein's concept of human unity and brotherhood raises concerns about his treatment of diversity, represented by the figure of the 'other'. In the light of James Luther Adams' theological account of diversity, Hammerstein's tendency to eliminate characters who pose a threat to the overriding sense of community, such as Jud Fry in *Oklahoma!*, begs the question: does Hammerstein's vision of community allow significant space for difference and diversity?

Liberal Protestant Emphasis on the Brotherhood of Man

While Unitarianism began with an emphasis on the moral progress and divine likeness of the individual, the brotherhood of man became a key aspect of Unitarian thought. In the search to understand the relationship between God and human beings, it was crucial to understand how human beings related to each other. James Freeman Clarke (1810-1888) included the brotherhood of man in his five points of Unitarianism:

1. The Fatherhood of God
2. The Brotherhood of Man
3. The Leadership of Jesus
4. Salvation by Character
5. The Continuity of Human Development in all worlds, or the Progress of Mankind onward and upward forever.⁴⁷³

Robinson suggests that these five points were the ‘most nearly expressive creed that the denomination formulated in the nineteenth century’, highlighting their importance.⁴⁷⁴ The very positioning of the brotherhood of man within this list is particularly significant and this theme permeates the Unitarian thought of the nineteenth-century. Stemming from the fatherhood of God and the divine potential of the human being, as explored in Chapter Three of this thesis, the moral relationships and unity between individuals was hugely important socially and theologically. It was discerned that if a human being is of infinite worth, and God works towards the perfection of man’s moral personality, it is done through the establishment of the rule of love among men.⁴⁷⁵ Through this love and the victory of the spirit over nature, humanity has the potential to achieve moral good. Cauthen discerns that the highest human good is found within community:

The highest human good is realized as individuals join together in the creation of a community based on mutual love, sacrificial service, and universal brotherhood. The achievement of this perfect society is the highest moral demand which is laid upon men.⁴⁷⁶

Liberal thought, therefore, comes with an ethical demand to develop a society of the highest moral standard resulting from the genuine love of God and fellow human

⁴⁷³ Robinson, *Unitarians and Universalists*, 105.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴⁷⁵ Kenneth Cauthen, *The Impact of American Religious Liberalism*, 2nd ed. (Washington: University Press of America, 1983), 209-210.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 211.

beings. While the brotherhood of man was found in the theology of the early Unitarians it had a predominantly spiritual nature; brotherhood was fostered by the transforming Spirit of God, which altered the relationships between human beings. Receiving further attention during the early 1900s as the social gospel developed, the brotherhood of man became less of a spiritual community resulting from the moral development of individual human beings, described by Christie as the ‘one universal spiritual life where the sense of one divine, one divine allegiance, [that] shelters and enfolds all men’, and more of a concrete, ethical reality.⁴⁷⁷

Francis Greenwood Peabody’s contemporary, Henry Churchill King (1858-1934) provides an example of how the social gospellers took the spiritual concept of the brotherhood of man and developed a new ethical and practical approach, which was rooted in the same liberal ideas. For King, the social consciousness of humanity was crucial for theologians as they began to engage with the reality of the world at the turn of the century. He argued that: ‘the social consciousness is so deep and significant a phenomenon in the ethical life of our time, that it cannot be ignored by the theologian who means to bring his message to men really home.’⁴⁷⁸ Providing a definition of the social consciousness in the first section of *Theology and the Social Consciousness* (1907), King posits that: ‘The simplest and probably the most accurate single expression we can give to the social consciousness, is to say that it is a growing sense of the real brotherhood of men.’⁴⁷⁹ King identifies five elements that are involved in this growing sense of brotherhood: the likeness of the like-mindedness of men; their

⁴⁷⁷ Francis A. Christie, “Unitarianism,” *The American Journal of Theology* 21 Vol. 4 (Oct. 1917): 563, accessed June 20, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3155349>.

⁴⁷⁸ Henry Churchill King, *Theology and the Social Consciousness* (London: MacMillan & Co Ltd., 1907), 1.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

mutual influence; the value of the person; the sacredness of the person; and finally, love.⁴⁸⁰ Arguing for the likeness of man, King asserts that any thorough investigation of a social question results in the affirmation of the resemblance between human beings.⁴⁸¹ He affirms the position of continuity between God, man, and the world, using both philosophy and science to show that humanity and the world are deeply interconnected.

Its root idea of universality of law forces upon the thought of a world which is a *coherent* whole, a unity with universal forces in it, in which every part is inextricably connected with every other. So too, the acceptance of the theory of evolution has led science to regard the whole history of the physical universe as an organic growth.⁴⁸²

The foundation of King's theology is based in his assertion of an 'ultimate unity' in the world, which he recognises as the immanent will and presence of God.

Within this unity, there is considerable diversity that does not threaten coherence, but should be viewed positively. Each component of God's creation effects, and relates to, another; this translates as a mutual influence when viewed with regard to humanity. The mutual influence of persons is described as 'inevitable', 'indispensable', and 'desirable', in contrast to individualism and isolation.⁴⁸³ As a result of the social consciousness, human beings become aware of:

[A] growing sense of the inevitableness of the mutual influence of all men, and of all classes of men; that we are all parts of one whole, each part unavoidably affected by every other; that we are bound up in one bundle of life with all men, and cannot live an isolated life if we would; that we do influence one another whether we will or not, and tend unconsciously to draw others to our

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁸² Ibid., 10-11.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 13.

level and are ourselves drawn toward theirs; that we joy and suffer together whether we will or not, and grow or deteriorate together.⁴⁸⁴

In King's theology, it is impossible for an individual to remain purely individualistic as human beings continually influence one another through the development of human relationships, in which we are subconsciously affected by other personalities. An awareness of this mutual influence makes it possible to discern that we cannot achieve full humanity through independence, but we must enter into personal relations with others.⁴⁸⁵ Life is viewed as a fulfilment of relations, and as King turns to sociology, he argues that it is through relations and the mutual influence of man that society can reach its perfection.⁴⁸⁶

Within these human relationships, it is essential that the value and sacredness of the person is recognised and upheld in order for the social consciousness to be developed. Every relationship between individual human beings must be accompanied with respect and love for humanity as a whole.

Reverence for personality – the steadily deepening sense that every person has a value not to be measured in anything else, and is in himself sacred to God and man – this it is which marks unmistakably every step in the progress of the individual and of the race.⁴⁸⁷

For King, '[only] the person is truly sacramental',⁴⁸⁸ and as a result of this, it is essential that each individual personality is treated with reverence, so that the individual, and humanity as a whole, can develop morally and ethically. King asserts that the increasing demand for equal rights, which results from a realisation of the sacredness

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 88.

of the person, reveals an awareness of our responsibility to one another, and instils a sense of duty as human beings desire to serve each other.⁴⁸⁹ This obligation and servant-like attitude comes from an overarching sense of love without which the social goal of 'equality, brotherhood and liberty' would be unthinkable.⁴⁹⁰

King roots the social consciousness in the moral development of humanity, grounded in the ultimate moral source; God.⁴⁹¹ The social consciousness and the nature of human relationships transcend physical similarities that we can recognise based on race. Human beings do not metaphysically influence each other based upon physical connection, and King argues that dependence on this argument should be disregarded: 'it is well to know that our entire moral interest is in the essential likeness and mutual influence of men, however brought about, and not in the physical unity of men.'⁴⁹² Essential human likeness is rooted in our being created in the image of God, by which King alludes to the human conscience and moral faculties.⁴⁹³ Once human beings recognise the sacredness of the person and respond to each other morally in love, they respond to the character of God, which reveals his ethical will. As advocates of the social consciousness, individuals 'share in God's loving purpose in the creation and redemption of men.'⁴⁹⁴

For the social consciousness to be effectively grounded in the ethical, it must be supported by the will of God: it must work for God, and with God, to be of any

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 18-19.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁹² Ibid., 36-37.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 49.

significance in the world and to be seen as part of God's overarching providential plan for creation. The social consciousness:

[M]ust be able to believe that it is in league with the eternal and universal forces; that the fundamental trend of the universe is its own trend; in other words, that the deepest thing in the universe is an ethical purpose conceivable only in a Person; that the ideals and purposes of finite beings expressed in the social consciousness are in line with God's own; that the loving holy purposes of the Infinite Will quickens and sustains and surrounds our purposes.⁴⁹⁵

Supported by God's ethical will, the individual is able to make significant impact in the world, as their social consciousness is quickened through the providence of God. At this stage, King discerns that 'nothing short of full Christian conviction is needed to support the social consciousness'.⁴⁹⁶ He argues that the social consciousness is initially recognised through the interconnectedness of human beings; however, whenever it is reinforced with the Christian conviction, it is soon discovered to be an ethical mandate from God.⁴⁹⁷

The social consciousness is expressed in terms of universality; every human being is filled with the gift of the social consciousness from God whether they are aware of it or not. Our personal relations, as well as our moral and ethical sense of obligation fostered in love, are reflections of our relationship with God, and are infiltrated by divine immanence. This allows for the possibility of dialogue between the social consciousness and non-Christians, both from other religions and other cultural sectors. King explains:

But I do not, on the other hand, as a Christian theologian, wish to shut my eyes to a great essential likenesses in fundamental faiths and ideals and aspirations,

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 44-45.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 86.

because they are clothed in different garb. The life and teaching of Jesus have worked and are working in the consciousness of men far beyond the limits our feeble faith is inclined to prescribe. There is doubtless much “unconscious Christianity,” much “unconscious following of Christ.”⁴⁹⁸

Interestingly, and not surprisingly, King ascribes the fundamental faiths, ideals, and aspirations found across humanity to an ‘unconscious Christianity’. Asserting the authority of Christianity, King nevertheless remains open to influences from outside of the contemporary Christian faith. There is a sense of the universality of humanity and a relationship with God that transcends the particularities of an individual faith basis.

King continues by positing that:

[A]ll men are moral and spiritual beings, made for relation to one another and to God; that they have ideals that have a wide outlook implicit in them, and have some loyalty to these ideals; that they do have a sense of obligation; that the moral and spiritual life is a reality, a great universal human fact.⁴⁹⁹

Claiming that the moral and spiritual life is a great universal human fact, King also reinforces an early point of the universality of the social consciousness. This essential likeness, and the universality of the social consciousness connects humanity as a whole in a brotherhood of humankind

The brotherhood of man expounded by King, and many others like him of the liberal Protestant faith, including Clarence Russell Skinner, is firmly rooted in the moral law of God and humanity’s resemblance of the divine. Without this common morality, gifted by God, then shared and adhered to by human beings, it would be impossible to understand human character and just relationships between people. While this creates a spiritual community as advocated by early Unitarian theologians, it also leads to the

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 130-31.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 132.

development of a tangible community in which human beings treat each other ethically and justly, while being supported by the ethical will of God. Social gossellers, and theologians inspired by the social gospel movement, explicitly argued for ethical action and a definitive avocation of the equality and shared dignity of all human beings. Unity remains an essential concept as human beings were recognised as inherently social; united through the likeness of the like-mindedness, mutual influence, the value and sacredness of the person, and most importantly, love. Human beings were created to be social and to be united as a race, and in Universalist thought to be restored to God through universal salvation. This desire for unity and 'oneness' is fundamental to the philosophy of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play; human relationships and community are essential themes in Hammerstein's ethos and can be seen particularly clearly in *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*. While *Oklahoma!* provides a picture of American unity at its best, *Carousel* embraces the spiritual element of this 'brotherhood' as it explicitly incorporates the divine element within the community. Furthermore, it appeals to the Universalist understanding of redemption, which is not as explicit in any other Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play.

The Brotherhood of Man in *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*

Hammerstein employed a variety of techniques that encouraged *Oklahoma!*'s audience to experience a sense of 'oneness' as Americans. The need to eradicate racial, ethnic, and cultural prejudices and the promotion of tolerance and reconciliation are themes that originate in *Oklahoma!* and continue to form the major

structure of all of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musicals.⁵⁰⁰ These social and ethical viewpoints can also be traced in Hammerstein's earlier musicals with Kern, and reveal something of his moral standpoint. Stephen Sondheim said that *Oklahoma!* is about a picnic unlike *Carousel*, which is about life and death,⁵⁰¹ and others have argued that it hangs on who takes the girl to the dance; but behind this love story is a far more significant dispute that stems from the history of the range wars in the Oklahoman territory. In *Oklahoma!* the audience watch a community developing in order to reach its full potential, 'brotherhood' if you will. Differences between the farmers and the cowmen are set aside for the fulfilment of the human desire for unification symbolised by the impending statehood. Oscar Andrew Hammerstein argues that the characters are searching for new identity in this time of change; something that was analogous to America as it entered World War II:

They are, sometimes volubly, trying to come to grips with, and answer, the question: Who are we as Oklahomans? In 1943, as American soldiers marched into two theatres of war, all Americans asked a similar question, writ large: Who are we? What matters to us? What are we made of? Americans had begun to grapple with this question of identity during the Great War, but had been a late-arrival "spoiler" at Europe's four-year bloodbath. World War II was far different. It wasn't about blood and treasure. This war was a life-and-death, ideological struggle whose outcome was far from certain. This war required faith and sacrifice from all Americans.⁵⁰²

The great potential promised in *Oklahoma!* is signified in the title song and symbolised in the story of a young couple starting out in life. Oklahoma will provide for its citizens; it will 'treat you great'⁵⁰³ with an abundance food, pastures, flowers and air. In order

⁵⁰⁰ Bush Jones, *Our Musicals*, 143.

⁵⁰¹ Scott Miller, *From Assassins to West Side Story: The Director's Guide to Musical Theatre* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996), 55.

⁵⁰² Hammerstein, *The Hammersteins*, 175.

⁵⁰³ Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. *Oklahoma!* (London: Williamson Music Ltd., 1954), 47.

for the community to receive these gifts it must mature and develop cohesion and unity. The marriage of the farmer Laurey to cowboy Curley symbolises the end of old rivalries and marks the birth of a new, harmonious society, which is cemented in the union of the state with the United States of America in the rousing and patriotic title song.⁵⁰⁴

Oklahoma! represents the key values of American society, and reflects the importance of community found in Unitarian and later Universalist thought. As members of the community unite they become aware of their brotherhood and reveal Hammerstein's worldview to the audience; in order to become a member of the Union individuals must allow their own selfish desires to be subsumed for communal interest or good.⁵⁰⁵ Pantinken takes this further, arguing that:

Along with the concept of progress as defined by the need for communal cooperation, *Oklahoma!* is about progress in general and about adjusting to it so it too can be lived through in peace and harmony – a recurring theme in Hammerstein's work.⁵⁰⁶

The development of the human personality and the creation of an ethical society are themes that run deep within Unitarian theology. Hammerstein's portrayal of progress reflects the desire for societal progress towards an increasingly ethical global community that advocates equality and democracy. The community in Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical plays is shown to have considerable power that can be used for ethical and societal progress. These communities are shown to have the ability to change the world as it is known and work towards one that is based upon love and

⁵⁰⁴ Bush Jones, *Our Musicals*, 145.

⁵⁰⁵ Most, *Making Americans*, 106.

⁵⁰⁶ Pantinken, *History of the American Musical Theatre*, 16.

moral goodness. This is certainly analogous to the Unitarian views expressed above and these sentiments are symptomatic of each Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play.

The community of New Englanders in *Carousel* is remarkably similar to the farmers and cowboys in *Oklahoma!*, but this musical play is more explicit in its portrayal of the divine overseer of humanity that is so essential to Unitarian thought. The spiritual dimension of the community in *Carousel* is largely expressed through the two chorus numbers, “June is Bustin’ Out All Over” and “You’ll Never Walk Alone”. The patriotism expressed in *Oklahoma!* with direct reference to the United States of America is found in *Carousel*, but in a more generalised way. “June is Bustin’ Out All Over” is a communal celebration of the coming of summer, which also expresses a joy and thankfulness as the community respond to their environment. Preparing for the community’s ritualistic clambake, this musical number communicates the interconnectedness of nature and humanity while pointing towards the divine. The community can sense what is coming:

Y’ken feel it in yer heart,
 Y’ken see it in the ground!
 Y’ken hear it in the trees
 Y’ken smell it in the breeze⁵⁰⁷

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The seasonal change is not only visible to the eye, but it is deep within the heart of every member of the community, engulfing each of their senses. Continuing to

⁵⁰⁷ Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 20.

describe the naturalistic changes that June brings to the plants, the animals, and even the atmosphere, it is not long before Hammerstein draws analogies between the activities of the animals and the love blossoming between human beings. This musical number is a celebration of the gift of life, cleverly juxtaposing what is already around the community and looking to the promise of new life through pollination and procreation. The love of life and connection of humanity to the wider universe through God is reflective of Unitarian thought previously discussed and examples such as these in Hammerstein's lyrics and libretto suggest connections between the two.

The actual clambake is another example of the importance of community in *Carousel*, which takes on a new religious significance when viewed in the light of divine representation in the musical play. The clambake is of huge importance to the community; the men have been digging clams from five o'clock in the morning and the anticipation is building up among the women who are anxious to cross the bay to get started.⁵⁰⁸ The audience are also given enough information by Hammerstein to know that this is an annual occurrence marking the beginning of the summer. Julie's disappointment and humiliation that Billy will not be going to the clambake as her husband⁵⁰⁹ further suggests that in order to be a part of the community it is essential to partake in these events, as refusal will result in alienation and rejection as Billy will come to experience. Opening Act Two, the clambake portrays a content community, described in the stage directions as 'languorous', relaxing after a shared meal and enjoying each other's company. The simple lyrics of "A Real Nice Clambake" and the

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 19-20.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 27.

stage directions instructing the actors to sway their feet to the time of the music unite the characters physically, linguistically, and musically. Together the community expresses one emotion that summarises the experience of the clambake:

This was a real nice clambake,
 We're mighty glad we came.
 The vittles we et
 Were good, you bet!
 The company was the same.
 Our hearts are warm,
 Our bellies are full,
 And we are feelin' prime.
 This was a real nice clambake
 And we all had a real good time!⁵¹⁰

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The community are sharing the same emotion and the same experiences; soloists reminisce about what has happened during the clambake, while the chorus respond expressing how thankful they are for each other and their communal meal. This is a unified group of individuals who are setting aside their individual desires in order to pursue the moral good of the community.

The most profound example of communal singing in *Carousel* is found at the very end of the musical. By this stage the audience is well aware of the role of the divine in the musical play, and the spiritual element of "You'll Never Walk Alone" becomes even more apparent. The first time the audience encounters this musical number, the community is surrounding Julie as she encounters her dead husband and Nettie sings to them. In this context, "You'll Never Walk Alone" takes on a comforting

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 41.

and consoling function as the community's matriarch lulls the distressed group back to peace. It is almost as though Nettie is mediating the words of the divine in order to reassure Julie and the wider community that they are in fact not alone, which is reinforced by the presence of the Heavenly Friend immediately after Nettie and Julie kneel in prayer. Any doubts that this song does not have a spiritual nature is eliminated by the movement into the divine realm in the next scene, reaffirming Nettie's words, 'you'll never walk alone!'⁵¹¹ The celestial scenes that follow suggest that even in death you will not walk alone, but are accompanied by God who remains as part of the wider community. The spiritual element of this community resurfaces in the final scene of *Carousel* when there is a reprise of "You'll Never Walk Alone", and is reinforced by the presence of the Doctor, significantly and unambiguously played by the same actor who plays the Starkeeper (or God), who opens the musical number by reciting the opening lyrics before the entire community begin to sing in solidarity. Importantly, the Doctor sings along with the community symbolising the divine presence among them, but it is also reminiscent of the Unitarian and Universalist concept of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Here, at the end of *Carousel*, we see an expression of the brotherhood of man that has been steadily built up through the role of the chorus, but also an indication of the fatherhood of God within that community. The individuals of the community support one another at the Graduation ceremony, a time that symbolises great excitement and joy, but also change and anxiety. Despite being seen as an outsider during her ballet, Louise is now very much a part of this community as she begins to sing with her classmates and their

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 57.

families. Encouraged by the mystical words of her father, she succumbs to the wider community of *Carousel* and learns that she will never walk alone.

The Rodgers and Hammerstein musical plays *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel* provide examples of how Hammerstein's lyrics and libretti reflect a Unitarian and Universalist understanding of the brotherhood of man. In each, and indeed throughout the canon, issues resulting from conflict, morality, patriotism and oneness are explored. Each community, Hammerstein suggests, must set aside conflict and work together as individuals towards the common good or they will be unable to progress. Furthermore, these musical plays allude to the divine presence within the community as it is connected to nature and even to spiritual elements that are beyond their comprehension as seen in *Carousel*. However, the question remains as to how appropriate this portrayal of 'oneness' is theologically and ethically. How does the advocacy of solidarity and uniformity affect diversity and individuality? While Hammerstein tries to advocate equality and peace, the sense that human beings must conform to a particular worldview that undermines their diversity still remains.

The Growing Importance of Diversity in Twentieth-Century Thought

For the twentieth-century theologians James Luther Adams and Henry Nelson Wieman diversity within a community is of particular significance. There is a risk in late nineteenth-century liberalism for the brotherhood of mankind to result in a desire to create global unity that is dominated by Western democracy; diversity is only a positive aspect of the community insofar as it is found within these boundaries. Adams and Wieman, however, counter that diversity should be embraced within its cultural

particularities and has considerable advantages for the development of the liberal community and humanity's understanding of God. After examining Adams' advocacy of diversity as a reminder to humanity of their scattered nature, and Wieman's account of creative communication, this section will investigate how Hammerstein engages with diversity in his 'Western' musical plays before turning to his 'Asian' musical plays in Chapter Six.

While Adams proposes that diversity alone cannot create a community of integrity, it remains central to his theological understanding of community.⁵¹² Appealing to the biblical account of the Tower of Babel in his convocation address given at the Memorial Church in Harvard Yard in September 1957, Adams argues for the theological importance of diversity within the university and the world at large. In this address, he argues that the story of the Tower of Babel 'suggests that absolute unity and conformity in the cultural enterprise will present a threat to viable and meaningful human existence.' Furthermore, he sees an 'absence of diversity [as] a denial of human creatureliness and also of human individuality and freedom.'⁵¹³ Diversity is to be viewed as a God-given gift that not only asserts human creatureliness, but serves as a reminder of humankind's complete dependence upon something other than itself. In Adams' account, Babel teaches us that diversity frees humankind from tyranny and is appropriate because human beings are scattered, individuated and incomplete.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹² James Luther Adams, *An Examined Faith: Social Context and Religious Commitment* G.K. Beach (Ed), (Boston, MA: Beacon Press 1991), 291.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

The scatteredness of humanity is not to be viewed as something that must be overcome, but as a state of being that has considerable potential for creativity and liberation, for where diversity is not respected or embraced, blasphemy and distortion occur.⁵¹⁵ Human beings are constantly tempted to remedy this 'scatteredness', to achieve ultimate unity, be this in churches or throughout the world, but this would in fact result in destruction rather than peace. Adams argues that, 'what binds us together is at the same time the ground of our individuality and the ground of our common identity.'⁵¹⁶ This individuality has been given to humanity from God and therefore comes with a certain dignity that must be respected. Making a New Testament reference to support his previous allusion to Genesis, Adams marks Pentecost as a pinnacle moment for unity within diversity.

The Holy Spirit then raised persons above themselves not into a Procrustean conformity but rather into a community where many languages were heard and yet where everyone heard the others speak in one's own language, where persons retained their own individuality and yet through the Spirit were open to others, where the common relation to the universal engendered unity in diversity. Here we find the paradigm of diversity as a gift from the divine fecundity.⁵¹⁷

For Adams, diversity is not only a gift, but a way in which humanity is constantly reminded of its total reliance on God. Through his use of the biblical account of Pentecost, Adams informs the liberal church that diversity is not a result of the sinfulness of humankind, but rather is gifted to them alongside the ability to communicate regardless of cultural or linguist differences. At Pentecost each individual was given the ability to listen to the other and was open to others through the work of

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 293.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 298.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 300.

the Spirit. Once again, as with the scatteredness of humanity, Adams posits that diversity alludes to the common relation of all humans; that they are dependent on, and united by the divine.

Adams' claim that diversity is a state, which has the potential for creativity and liberation, is a theme that is also taken up by Unitarian preacher and philosopher Henry Nelson Wieman. For Wieman, diversity within a community is essential for the development of the individual and wider society. He argued that the natural ability for each individual to view the world differently gives a great scope for progression and development.

Now, if two or more persons can integrate their visions so that each perceives not only what falls within the scope of his own native discernment, but also learns through intimate communication to apprehend what the other has gathered, so that they can pool their findings, then it is plain that each can live in a far richer and more significant world. Then the height and depth and fullness of the world opens up, not only the world that now exists, but the world of ideals and imagination and possibilities.⁵¹⁸

The presence of more than one human being counteracts the individual prejudices and passions that can be seen to manipulate or distort that person's sense of the world. A diversity of opinion leads to a three-dimensional image of the world, where humankind gains a sense of perspective.⁵¹⁹ Wieman discerns that this:

[A]bility to learn what others have learned, to appreciate what others appreciate, to feel what others feel, and to add all this to what the individual has acquired from other sources, and finally to form out of it all a coherent unity which is one's own individually is what distinguished the human mind from everything else.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁸ Henry Nelson Wieman, *The Issues of Life* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1930), 49-50.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ Henry Nelson Wieman, *Man's Ultimate Commitment* (Carbondale: University of Illinois Press, 1958), 53.

The human ability to communicate, and to learn from these interactions, develops the mind as experiences and perspectives are shared. However, not all human interactions work in this way, and Wieman accounts for manipulative and dehumanising forms of communication. Nevertheless, he argues that if creative communication, or interchange, is made the dominant form of interaction, the people of the world will want to live together without mutual destruction. The only other alternative, he warns, would be a 'regime of a superimposed and coerced uniformity.'⁵²¹

Wieman asserts that creative interchange occurs in any place where human beings are interacting with each other as human interchange is dependent upon creative communication, which allows individuals to act humanly toward each other and recognise the other's subjectivity.⁵²² However, despite this desire for creative communication, it is never fully attained because it is oppressed by the other forms of interchange that occur between human beings.⁵²³ Creative interchange demands a commitment from human beings and differs from other forms of interaction in that it affects all the individuals involved positively. Providing a description of creative interchange, Wieman states:

Creative interchange has two aspects which are the two sides of the same thing. One aspect is the understanding in some measure of the original experience of the other person. The other aspect is the integration of what one gets from others in such a way as to create progressively the original experience which is oneself. This creative interchange creates the unique individuality of each person while at the same time enabling each to understand the individuality of others.⁵²⁴

⁵²¹ Ibid., 54.

⁵²² Ibid., 52.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 23.

Creative interchange demands respect, and that each individual is treated with the upmost dignity. While the outcome of creative interaction is perceived as a self-critical and self-esteeming understanding,⁵²⁵ which may seem individualistic, the sense of equality and dual-importance enables the growth of both community and individual. This understanding of individuality extends beyond the self, and thanks to the growing sense of perspective gained creates a healthy and thriving community.

Communication plays a vital role in preventing the creation of a disjointed and disparate society despite the diverse nature of human beings. Wieman posits that, when properly carried out, communication connects human beings together as they work toward the common good. When each individual is 'cherished by every other and protected and enabled to promote and contribute to the common good' they will recognise that this is not only their own personal good, but also the good for all.⁵²⁶ Diversity is essential to Wieman's theory of the common good that connects humankind.

The experience of the good is an experience which includes both the total individual having the experience and the total effective environment, including other persons. Thus the good is not inside the individual. Neither is it outside. It includes both the organic individual and everything outside the individual experience which must be in existence for him to have the satisfying experience.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁵²⁶ Wieman, *Issues of Life*, 65-66.

⁵²⁷ Wieman, *Ultimate Commitment*, 102.

Common good is for all and is not dependent upon the individual, but it must provide for diversity as 'diversity is required to satisfy the unique individual in the wholeness of his being.'⁵²⁸ Uniformity cannot satisfy the unique nature of each individual.

Communication is essential within the community of faith as this is the way in which human beings find self-awareness, and develop both individually and collectively. Adams asserts that:

Our community of faith is a community of communication. It is a community of dialogue, or perhaps we should say multilogue. In this community of dialogue the minister is a speaker, not only on Sunday morning. But apart from this, we must say that in our community of faith we affirm the priesthood and prophethood of all believers. In our kind of church, speaking is a two-way venture. Every member is a speaker.⁵²⁹

Referring to 'multilogue' rather than mere dialogue, Adams expresses the importance and value of each individual voice within a community. This is reaffirmed by his assertion that the priesthood and prophethood of all believers within a community is recognised and respected, giving every individual an authoritative voice within the group. This respect for individuality and communication extends beyond a particular community of believers to encompass the entire world. Not seeking to create 'one world', in a uniform sense under Western democracy, Adams notes that 'any attempt of the United Nations to impose their ideas upon each other or upon other cultures will not be successful.'⁵³⁰ Rather, the successful communication and 'multilogue' between the West and the East results in mutual influence that ensures the maintenance of diversity.⁵³¹ He warns that any imposition of Western democracy, as

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 99-100.

⁵²⁹ Adams, *Examined Faith*, 366.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 287.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

an ethical or political system, will inevitably fail and advocates that the West takes the biblical statement, ‘in my Father’s house are many mansions’, seriously.⁵³²

The widening of perspective is of particular importance to Adams for the development of the liberal church.

Accordingly, the first use, the religious vocation, of diversity is to keep human systems and institutions and languages open; it is to protect people against the weakness of their own strength; it is, in short, to maintain responsiveness to the freedom of God as Creator, as Judge, and as Redeemer.[. . .] The demand placed upon us is not only the maintenance and protection of diversity but also the use of diversity for a positive purpose.⁵³³

The role of diversity within a community has a dual purpose; not only is diversity a response to God, but it also prevents social stagnation that has the potential to lead to oppression and idolatry. Adams refers extensively to the ‘pecking-order’ system of the world, and defines liberal religion as that which confronts and challenges these social structures.⁵³⁴ Reminding his reader that this behaviour can also be found within the liberal religion, Adams asserts that diversity protects communities from this stagnation and allows religion to keep changing and evolving alongside society as it responds to cultural and temporal particularities.

Hammerstein’s Treatment of Diversity

With this positive assertion of diversity in twentieth-century liberal Protestant thought in mind, questions concerning Hammerstein’s treatment of diversity begin to surface. The first section of this chapter concluded that Hammerstein advocated a liberal Protestant understanding of the brotherhood of man and the importance of

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Ibid., 293.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 308.

unity within a community. To what extent is his debt to pre-twentieth-century liberal Protestant detrimental to his portrayal of diversity? While Hammerstein is frequently appraised for his portrayal of a wide variety of faiths and cultures in his libretti, to what extent is he truly celebrating the diverse nature of humanity, and are those who are 'other' given the opportunity to communicate freely in his musical plays? The recently revived, but otherwise rarely performed musical play, *Pipe Dream* paints an optimistic picture of Hammerstein's assertion of diversity within the world. "All Kinds of People" creates an image of the world that encompasses a wide range of people and animals:

It takes all kinds of people to make up a world,
All kinds of people and things.
They crawl on the earth,
They swim in the sea,
And they fly through the sky on wings.
All kinds of people and things.
And brother, I'll tell you my hunch:
Whether you like them
Or whether you don't,
You're stuck with the whole damn bunch!⁵³⁵

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The song continues exploring various different types of human beings and when added to the collection of Hammerstein's lyrics that portray a wide range of personalities suggest that he was a champion of diversity. However, while diversity is acknowledged, there is a tendency for the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play to assert conformity to Western ideals of political and ethical democracy. *Oklahoma!* is

⁵³⁵ Oscar Hammerstein II, *The Complete Lyrics of Oscar Hammerstein II* Amy Asch (Ed), (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Random House Inc., 2008), 369.

renowned for its proclamation of American community, but does it truly celebrate diversity?

As previously discussed, “The Farmer and the Cowman” is a rousing chorus number that unites the community portrayed in *Oklahoma!*. Through the mediation of Aunt Eller, and somewhat controversially her gun, the conflict within the community is discussed through the medium of song and dance. The farmers and the cowmen express their individual concerns; the cowmen are concerned that the farmers have built fences across their ranges and the farmers are suspicious of the relaxed attitude of the cowmen and the threat to their daughters. Sadly, the cowman is not allowed to express himself as Aunt Eller says ‘a word for the cowboy’,⁵³⁶ assuring the farmer that he too has his own difficulties to face. A superficial reading of this musical number would suggest that Hammerstein is telling his audience that differences should not stand in the way of friendship, and human beings should accept each other as individuals. However, even from the first line of this musical number doubts are formed about the authenticity of this unity, which is forced upon the men by Aunt Eller: ‘The farmer and the cowman should be friends.’ The emphasis of the line falls heavily on the word ‘should’, which is repeated throughout the piece as is the rationale that despite their differences there is ‘no reason why they cain’t be friends.’ What is even more concerning than the use of the word ‘should’ is Aunt Eller’s dramatic action when a fight breaks loose between the farmers and the cowmen during the choreography. Firing her gun into the air and pointing it at Carnes to

⁵³⁶ Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Oklahoma!*, 32-33. Excerpts from OKLAHOMA! reprinted by permission of Rodgers and Hammerstein: an Iagem Company.
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encourage him to sing once more adds an element of coercion and violence to the scene. This undermines the voluntary action of friendship and community that liberal Protestantism encourages. These men are unaware of the common good for all, but surely they will not understand these concepts of community while looking down the barrel of a gun wielded by the community's matriarch.

The impending statehood of the Oklahoman territory seems to be having a profound effect on the community throughout this musical number. After being chastised by Aunt Eller, the men sing once more, and Ike Skidmore proclaims that:

And when this territory is a state,
 An' jines the Union jist like all the others,
 The farmer and cowman and the merchant
 Must all behave theirsels and act like brothers⁵³⁷

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This suggests that in order for the territory to become a state it must conform to certain aspects of order and peace, therefore, any member of the community who does not conform to the standards of the society is ostracised and treated with unashamed inequality.

To be allowed to be a part of this community each individual must behave, but it is important that they act like brothers in order for the territory to be united to the other states forming the Union. Even Curley must conform to this new perception of statehood through his marriage to Laurey. He must 'settle' and renounce his cowboy ways to become a respectable farmer. Not only was the cowboy not allowed his own

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

voice in “The Farmer and the Cowman”, but the archetypal cowboy of the show, the protagonist Curley, leaves his carefree ways behind him in order to become a respectable farmer and to work the land:

I’ll be the happiest man alive soon as we’ve married. Oh, I got to learn to be a farmer, I see that! Quit a-thinkin’ about th’owin the rope and start to git my hands blistered a new way! Oh, things is changin’ right and left! Buy up mowin’ machines, cut down the prairies! Shoe yer horses, drag them plows under the sod! They gonna make a state outa this territory, they gonna call it Oklahoma! Country’s a-changin’, got to change with it!⁵³⁸

The individuals living in the territory must develop with their country and modernise, following in the footsteps of Kansas City. Andrea Most comments that this demand for conformity first appears during Will Parker’s musical rendition of “Kansas City”. The musical number culminates with the full chorus of cowboys tap-dancing together symbolising a ‘happy, unified acceptance of modernity.’⁵³⁹ Most notes that in *Oklahoma!* individual choices are to be disregarded in favour of the mood created by the musical numbers, that of a wartime utopia: ‘Differences meld into a unified loving American community. Access to this community is determined not by *character*, but by *function*: anyone willing and able to perform the songs and dances can join.’⁵⁴⁰ Any man who will not change alongside the community is extradited and left behind like the villain of the piece, Jud.

On the surface *Oklahoma!* appears to be an idealised representation of a long lost piece of American life; however, the hope of the union of the state and the

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 43-44. Excerpts from OKLAHOMA! reprinted by permission of Rodgers and Hammerstein: an Imagem Company.

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⁵³⁹ Most, *Making Americans*, 105.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 104.

romance of Curly and Laurey is seriously threatened by the pivotal character Jud. His intimidation of Laurie, heightened by the threat of rape in his haunting solo number “Lonely Room”, underscores this seemingly innocent musical play with the darker side of reality. Steyn writes:

This isn't folksy gingham-check sentimentality, but a flesh-creeping glimpse of the darker realities of rural existence, culminating in a tense, taut, nasty subversion of that most innocent of rustic traditions – the auction of the girls' picnic hamper to the boys. This is boy-meets-girl for real.⁵⁴¹

Jud was not the first character that Hammerstein had killed off on the stage, but it was the one to have the most successful impact. Jud's threatening behaviour towards Curly and Laurey is eradicated through his accidental death. Crucial to be aware of, however, is that the isolation of Jud not only poses a risk to the relationship between the two lovers, but it also threatens interconnectedness of the community and the land. The spiritual connection between humanity and the earth that is prevalent in *Oklahoma!* is unsettled by the figure of Jud through his disruptive behaviour among the community as well as his acts of arson during his previous employment. Once Jud has been removed from the narrative, the community is purified and is united once more, but even this displays an element of realism. The hope of the lovers cannot triumph as democracy calls for a trial of Curly's involvement in Jud's death. It is not until the last few moments of the musical play that he is acquitted, and the chorus can burst into a rousing chorus of “Oklahoma” symbolising the hope and justice of this state-to-be and its community. Despite being praised for the psychological depth Hammerstein explored in Jud's “Lonely Room”, it is a far cry from the three dimensional psychological reality given to Bigelow in *Carousel's* “Soliloquy”. Jud is a mere

⁵⁴¹ Steyn, *Broadway Babies*, 73.

representation of the evil present in society that must be eradicated in order for there to be unification, a dangerous 'other' that must be removed.

Hammerstein's treatment of the 'other' in his musical plays raises certain issues with regard to his treatment of diversity and community. As Most discerns, the characters Ali Hakim and Jud Fry are presented as the outsiders in *Oklahoma!*, but to different effect. While Ali is able to join with the community of men in "It's a Scandal, it's an Outrage" and with the entire community in the closing celebration of community that is "Oklahoma", Jud is unable to participate in the communal realm of singing and dancing.⁵⁴² From the outset, Jud is presented to the audience as the 'other'; Laurey's fear of Jud creates a barrier between this character and the rest of the community. While he is allowed to communicate through the medium of song, Jud is never allowed to sing with the rest of the community. Similar problems occur in *South Pacific* with the role of the 'outsiders' Bloody Mary and Liat. While Bloody Mary is able to communicate with the Western community, Liat is rendered speechless and only allowed to use simple hand gestures to reinforce the words her mother sings for her.⁵⁴³ To be unable to sing in a musical play is tantamount to suicide, and relegates this 'other' to the lowest rank and ensures her oppression. The death of Jud Fry takes this isolation a step further, which results in his inability to be reconciled to the community. Jud's condemnation hardly reflects Hammerstein's later comment regarding *Carousel* that he could not conceive an irredeemable soul. As Bush Jones asserts: 'even in Hammerstein's sometimes idealistic world or eradicating prejudice,

⁵⁴² Ibid., 108.

⁵⁴³ Andrea Most comments that without the tools of a voice or a song, Rodgers and Hammerstein prevent Liat from functioning as a proper character in *South Pacific*. Most, *Making Americans*, 160.

some irreclaimable group or individuals cannot be brought within the finale's circle of reconciliation and must either be done away with (as is Jud) or banished.'⁵⁴⁴ Whether deaths such as Jud's can be seen as dramaturgical or not, the question remains as to why Hammerstein kills off difficult characters that do not fit into his idealised worldview. Perhaps we can attribute this to the context of *Oklahoma!* as it reflected the threat of Nazism in World War II. However, the inability of the 'other' to communicate effectively within the communities, and the lack of outreach from the other characters, acts against Adams and Wieman's accounts of community. In Jud's case he only expresses himself musically with another character once in Curley's taunting "Pore Jud is Daid", in which he is completely overshadowed by the musical personality of the male lead. He is not listened to, but consistently overpowered and ignored, cast aside for being insignificant. Diversity certainly is present in these musicals; however, the community does not always listen to their concerns; a key aspect of communication.

There certainly are occasions within the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals where the community does not necessarily respect the diversity of each individual; however, it is essential to note that these relationships are between human beings. Miller argues that the views and opinions of the community in *Carousel* are extremely important in creating juxtaposition between Billy and the other characters at important events. Billy's resistance to sing with the community, signified by his use of different words shows his separation from them, and for Miller there can only be two results from this: 'either he learns to join the community, or he is removed from the

⁵⁴⁴ Bush Jones, *Our Musicals*, 145.

community.⁵⁴⁵ Fortunately for Billy his fate differs from Jud Fry's, and regardless of his suicide he is not fully removed from the community, but connected to it through the unifying presence of the divine. Where the audience encounters aspects of the divine, diversity is seen as a divine gift that must be treated with dignity and respect. *Carousel* offers a prime example of the rejection of the 'other' by the community, but the acceptance of all by the divine. Bigelow's rejection from the community by all but Julie, and his own rejection of society, acts as a device that heightens the audience's shock when he is accepted by the Starkeeper. Loving, yet firm, the Starkeeper provides Billy with opportunities that would have been kept from him by the larger community represented in the musical play. He does not participate in any of the chorus numbers, which results in a sense of isolation. This isolation, however, is not maintained, but Billy is reconciled to the larger community of faith in the closing scene and the powerful reprise of "You'll Never Walk Alone". Not only does this highlight the divine love of diversity, but it appeals to the liberal sense that all individuals are ultimately connected to one another through their dependence on God.

Another musical play where the audience encounters divine acceptance despite the human suspicion of individuality is *The Sound of Music*. Maria differs remarkably from the other nuns in the Abbey, something that causes the community some confusion and sparks debate concerning her position within the group. It would be possible to argue that Sister Berthe and Sister Sophia desire to extradite Maria from the Abbey on account of her differences that are set out humorously for the audience in "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?" She is seen as a 'clown' who is not an

⁵⁴⁵ Miller, *Director's Guide*, 44-45.

'asset for the Abbey' due to her whistling, waltzing, and singing. The defence made on behalf of Maria by Sister Margaretta provides an example of conflict and debate. More importantly, however, is what the nuns decide to do with Maria. Unlike postulant Irmagard who is rejected from entering the religious order altogether, Maria is sent out into the world for a while to discover if she is indeed ready for religious life. The Mother Abbess explains: 'Perhaps if you got out into the world again for a time you will return to us knowing what we expect of you and that we do expect it.'⁵⁴⁶ Maria is not cast out but receives religious guidance; the Mother Abbess respects her diverse nature understanding that, as argued by Sister Sophia, her penitence is real and she must discover God's plan for her; she must find her own place within the community of humankind. The divine guidance that the Mother Abbess mediates to Maria is not withdrawn at any point throughout the musical play. Rather, Maria turns to this religious figure in times of need or crisis, evident in her return to the Abbey after the Ball alone and on route to Switzerland at the end of the piece.

It is Maria's first return to the Abbey that is of particular significance to this discussion. Act 1, scene 13, suggests divine endorsement of diversity and individuality communicated through the ever constant and matriarchal figure of the Mother Abbess. The following snippet of dialogue illustrates this point:

MOTHER ABBESS (Helping MARIA to rise) Maria, the love of a man and a woman is holy, too. The first time we talked together – you told me that you remembered your father and mother before they died. Do you remember – were they happy?

⁵⁴⁶ Rodgers and Hammerstein, *The Sound of Music*, 17. Excerpts from THE SOUND OF MUSIC reprinted by permission of Rodgers and Hammerstein: an Iagem Company.
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(She seats MARIA on the stool.)

MARIA Oh, yes, Mother, they were very happy.

MOTHER ABBESS Maria, you were born of their happiness, of their love. And, my child, you have a great capacity to love. What you must find out is – how does God want you to spend your love.⁵⁴⁷

Maria's concern that she has betrayed God through her love of Captain von Trapp is refuted by the Mother Abbess, who assures her that human love is yet another way of committing her life to the will of God. Protesting that she has devoted her life to God's service, the Mother Abbess promptly informs her that: 'if you love this man, it doesn't mean you love God less.'⁵⁴⁸ While Maria will not be part of the community within the Abbey walls, she will still remain a member of the larger community of faith. Love and moral goodness are not limited to those in God's service, but are shown to be present in any creative interchange between human beings. Maria is encouraged to find her place in the wider community of the brotherhood of humankind, which goes beyond this religious community. She is invited to find her own path in life, her own vocation if you will, that has been divinely laid out for her. Hammerstein does not neglect diversity in this case, but shows that difference is important when it is rooted in love, and that each individual has a place within the brotherhood of humankind.

Hammerstein's most conceptual and experimental musical play, *Allegro*, often described as the most autobiographical of all his work,⁵⁴⁹ explores the detrimental effect that leaving one's own community can have on individuals. Joe Taylor, the aspiring doctor whose life *Allegro* maps out from birth to adulthood, is initially greeted enthusiastically by his community; his birth is celebrated by the women going to

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 66.

⁵⁴⁹ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 93.

church, men visiting the saloons, townspeople gathering, and an address by the Mayor.⁵⁵⁰ He is born into a community and aspires to serve them as a doctor following in his father's footsteps. However, the aspirations of his childhood sweetheart Jenny, who he marries at the end of Act One, tear him out of his community and drag him away from his family. In an argument with Joe's mother, Jenny reveals her impatience and materialistic drive, as she declares that if Joe must become a doctor she will see that he becomes a 'real doctor' in the big city, the most successful doctor in town.⁵⁵¹ With her ambition taking Joe out of his community, away from practicing at his father's medical practice where he shows concern and commitment to named individuals in the town, he finds himself in a soulless city practice dwelling on those he left behind. Desperate for someone who is worth a doctor's time and knowledge, he despairs at business practice, the unveiling of plaques, and the dubious moral standards of his wife. He despairs, exclaiming: 'There's nothing real about any of it – nothing real about the whole damn place. What the hell am I doing here!'⁵⁵² At this point the chorus appear as a group of friends from home, accompanied by his father and mother, spiritually calling him home to be in community.

Come home, Joe, come home.
 You will find a world of honest friends who miss you,
 You will shake the hands of men whose hands are strong,
 And when all their wives and kids run up and kiss you,
 You will know that you are back where you belong⁵⁵³

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⁵⁵⁰ Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Six Plays*, 188.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 259.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, 260.

He is called back to his spiritual home by his mother, a place where he is loved and can love. Analogous to “You’ll Never Walk Alone”, “Come Home” is a powerful spiritual number that reinforces a sense of providence and guidance. Every human being has a place to belong within community and there is always the opportunity to return, individuals are called back to the brotherhood of man where love and just relationships overshadow moral depravity and commercial gain. Once more, Hammerstein asserts that there is a place for each individual within the brotherhood of humankind and it is their responsibility to find their role in the world.

Conclusion

Hammerstein’s treatment of Jud stands out alone as an example of a purely immoral character in the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon. While there are other morally dubious characters, such as Jigger in *Carousel*, Hammerstein tends to create well-rounded three-dimensional characters in his musical plays. However, his treatment of diversity is somewhat paradoxical; when the outsider is a threat to the overall community they are frequently removed as is common in most comedies, however, if the outsider is integral to the plot he shows the audience how their diversity should be accepted, if not celebrated. The treatment of diversity in *Carousel* and *The Sound of Music* is particularly interesting theologically as it is affirmed through allusions to the divine. Billy and Maria are both accepted by God, albeit in remarkably different ways, despite their differences to the rest of the community. Each character also learns how to find their place within their community: Billy finally becomes a father, and Maria finds her place within the von Trapp family. Thus Hammerstein

makes considerable attempts to show the audience that diversity slots into the wider community and is to be valued and respected. Problems arise, however, when the character who is displaying characteristics of diversity is seen as a threat to the wider community. These characters, such as Jud, are refused the ability to communicate with the other members of their community and as a result remain ostracised and isolated. However, this is only asserted when the character is a disruptive and destructive influence within the community, working against the goal of human unity. To gain a real sense of how Hammerstein treats diversity in his musical plays we must turn to his multicultural musicals. From his political views seen in Chapter Four, and his assertion of human unity evident in his Western musical plays, it is possible to discern that unity is of the utmost importance for Hammerstein. We must ask, however, whether or not this unity comes at the expense of the diversity of different cultures and traditions.

UNITY OR DIVERSITY? THE TREATMENT OF THE RACIALLY OTHER IN THE 'ASIAN' MUSICALS OF RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN

The previous chapter of this thesis argued that while Hammerstein explores conflict and difference in *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*, reconciliation only occurs when all in question submit to an overriding sense of morality. Should a character not neatly fit into Hammerstein's vision of unity, or if they cannot be reconciled to the wider community, resolution is achieved when they are written out of the narrative. Difference within American communities is overcome by unification and a developing sense of 'oneness' within the social group. This 'oneness', however, could threaten the theological significance of diversity within the community. The threat to diversity in Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical plays becomes even more important when we turn to their multicultural ventures. Broadening the scope of their musical plays to encompass stories from across the globe, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*, *The King and I* and *Flower Drum Song* encounter characters that differ considerably from the Americans portrayed in *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*. If Hammerstein was advocating diversity within communities, it would be in these multicultural musicals that we would expect to find evidence of difference being appropriately valued. This chapter aims to further investigate issues raised by that preceding it, and explore whether Hammerstein portrays a world united by conformity or one that displays unity in diversity. Beginning with a discussion of Hammerstein's advocacy of racial equality, this chapter offers an exposition of "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught", suggesting

that *South Pacific* asserts unity and the ‘oneness’ of humankind. Following this an exploration of *Flower Drum Song*, comparing performance and text, will show the complicated relationship between unity and diversity in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play, after which, a theological investigation will be made into the theological implications of silencing diversity seen in relation to *The King and I* and *South Pacific*.

“You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught” and Human Unity in *South Pacific* and *The King and I*

Through a reading of James Freeman Clarke and Henry Churchill King in Chapter Five, I discerned that liberal thought places an ethical demand on human beings that insists society is developed towards the highest moral standard. By developing ethical relationships between human beings under God, it was perceived that this ascent to societal perfection was within reach. Respect and love would transform human relationships and enable humankind to attain this utopian society. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century liberal theologians, largely due to their particular context, were primarily concerned with the relationships between Western individuals. Nevertheless, a contemporary reading of the principles of the brotherhood of man extends beyond the Western norm and encompasses the entire human race. Hammerstein’s vision of the world certainly extends beyond the white Western norm and looks to argue for the universal qualities of humanity that unite us all. In extending the concept of the brotherhood of man beyond the Anglo-Saxon race, he goes beyond these liberal Protestant thinkers, carrying their theology forward into the twentieth-century in the context of the Cold War and U.S. Expansion through Asia. In his Asian

musical plays in particular, Hammerstein argues for the uniting principles of love, respect, and dignity that bond individuals of differing races or ethnicities together. At risk of eradicating the individuality of a person resulting from their ethnicity, he uses these musicals to send a message to his audience; that all human beings are fundamentally the same. *South Pacific* reveals a great deal about the socially aware and politically minded Hammerstein, which builds upon the extent of his philanthropic work that was addressed in Chapter Four. In *South Pacific*, Hammerstein positively asserts his belief that humanity is united and that racism is both unacceptable and counterproductive; quite the claim in 1949. Christina Klein argues that *South Pacific* was not necessarily alone in its condemnation of racial prejudice and its message of tolerance, but that it was unique in suggesting how Americans might actually be able to overcome their racism.⁵⁵⁴ In pre-Civil Rights Movement America, this social and ethical message was met with discontent and outrage, and the climatic lyric of “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught”⁵⁵⁵ in particular was seen as subversive and branded as Communist.

Richard Rodgers was determined to voice his opinion that this musical number was never intended as a protest song or to stir up such controversy:

The fact is the song was never written as a ‘message’ song, though it has, I know, provided ministers of many faiths with a topic for a sermon. It was included in *South Pacific* for the simple reason that Oscar and I felt it was needed in a particular spot for a Princeton-educated young WASP who, despite his background and upbringing, had fallen in love with a Polynesian girl. It was perfectly in keeping with the character and situation that, once having lost his

⁵⁵⁴ Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2003), 161.

⁵⁵⁵ Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Six Plays*, 346-347.

heart, he would express his feelings about the superficiality of racial barriers. End of sermon.⁵⁵⁶

Rodgers raises two issues that are of considerable interest. The first is that ministers of *many faiths* found this song inspirational; not only does this reinforce the universality of Hammerstein's sentiment and the impact of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical in America, but it also appeals to the argument that Hammerstein makes for unity. Secondly, Rodgers appeals to what was long known to be the method of artistry that he and Hammerstein followed when developing an integrated musical play. This explanation of the origin of "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught" is reminiscent of accounts that recall the duo creating psychologically complex characters from the beginning of their career in *Oklahoma!*;⁵⁵⁷ a trait that distinguished them from other musical playwrights of the era. However, Rodgers' argument does not necessarily hold true when Hammerstein's connection to philanthropic causes and his history of exploring race related issues in *Show Boat* and *Carmen Jones* are taken into consideration. Certainly, while we imagine that Rodgers had some degree of impact upon the lyrics of any given musical number, the lyricist is the one who must be held accountable for the message their words send out. Bearing in mind Hammerstein's life-long commitment to equality among races and honesty in lyric writing, it is not outlandish to suggest that "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught" reveals something of his social and ethical philosophy to his audience. Amy Asch discerns that Hammerstein was privately proud of the song's message, which suggests that the determination to assert the song's dramatic qualities was something of a defence against the political

⁵⁵⁶ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 261-262.

⁵⁵⁷ Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 186.

climate of the time. Quoting from a personal message to his publisher in 1955, Asch reveals Hammerstein's enthusiasm for the message of his lyrics: 'We may not make much money on this song, but we certainly have a wide circulation, haven't we? I am very gratified by this and very glad that it is doing as much good as it seems to be doing.'⁵⁵⁸

In "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught" Hammerstein asserts that it is not in humanity's nature to hate. Arguing that human beings are distorted through fear, Hammerstein alludes to the negative impact the mutual influence of humankind can have when it is not rooted in the ethical. The image of the relationship between child and teacher, conjured up by Hammerstein, reinforces the dangers of human relationships when they are not working towards the ethical will of God. The very nature of the verb 'to teach' suggests two things; firstly there must be a pupil, and secondly there must be an educator. Cable argues that both he and Nellie have been taught to think in a specific way, and while it is not in their nature they have been conditioned to think in racist terms. This teaching process must be continual, 'from year to year',⁵⁵⁹ and the adjective 'carefully' suggests that a great deal of effort must be put into this education. It also alludes that it is a challenge to teach children to hate and to fear as it must be done 'carefully', and the violent image of 'drumming in your dear little ear'⁵⁶⁰ suggests that this education is abusive and dehumanising. Children

⁵⁵⁸ Hammerstein II, *Complete Lyrics*, 341.

⁵⁵⁹ Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Six Plays*, 346. Excerpts from SOUTH PACIFIC reprinted by permission of Rodgers and Hammerstein: an Imagem Company.

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⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

must be caught when they are young, 'before you are six or seven or eight',⁵⁶¹ another piece of evidence to suggest that hate is not natural to humanity, but rather an inflicted construct from society.

In light of this great message of human equality, underlying both hatred and fear, the tragic message of *South Pacific* affects the audience deeply. Joe Cable, the handsome young male lead is stripped of his heroic status through his inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to unlearn the racism that he has appropriated. Even when he does turn from his racist ways and decides to remain on the island with his Polynesian lover after his mission, his untimely death renders him unable. Despite this inability for Cable to change, Hammerstein's lyric in "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught" alludes to the human ability for improvement and development, well in keeping with the Unitarian and later Universalist emphasis on the development and progress of humankind. While not explicitly mentioned, this song suggests that it is possible to relearn behavioural patterns that lead to racial violence and hatred; a message that struck a nerve across America. It is entirely possible to relearn beliefs that lead to being afraid of people with different shaped eyes or different skin shades. Hammerstein is telling his audience that physical differences are superficial as he asserts the unity of humanity across all boundaries and the resemblance of humankind. Liat, Cable's lover is portrayed as reacting in the same way any young American girl would as she expresses her grief following his death. Unable to unite the couple, Hammerstein poignantly uses Liat to gain sympathy from his audience, showing them through the theatre that those considered 'other' experience love in the same way that Westerners do. Liat's eyes

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

may be 'oddly made' and her skin a 'different shade',⁵⁶² but she is shown to be just like us underneath it all. Henry Churchill King discerns that: 'Every painstaking investigation of a social question comes out at some point or other with a fresh discovery of a previously hidden, underlying resemblance between classes of men.'⁵⁶³ Hammerstein's investigation of the social question of race through this musical, as seen through this song and the emotional response of Liat, reveals an underlying resemblance between the Americans and the racially other.

Once an individual has realised the resemblance and unity of humankind, Hammerstein asserts that they can improve and progress following the example of his heroine. Nellie's conversion is crucial to Hammerstein's message of racial equality and the oneness of humanity. Observing Nellie's story from the context of "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught" it is apparent to the audience that Nellie's racism stems from her social context, and more specifically from her mother. Cable informs us that you have to be taught in early childhood to 'hate all the people your relatives hate', and this certainly seems to be the case with Nellie. Her concerns about cultural difference are perpetuated after she receives a letter from her mother, a dramatic device which reveals the root of Nellie's prejudice to the audience. Ironically Nellie declares, 'My mother's so prejudiced', but quickly looks for reassurance from Cable highlighting her uncertainty and insecurity.⁵⁶⁴ Her discovery of her racism through the development of her relationship with Emile de Becque comes as a shock to Nellie, which suggests that Hammerstein is indicating that racism is so deeply imbedded in American culture that

⁵⁶² *ibid.*, 346.

⁵⁶³ King, *Theology and the Social Consciousness*, 10.

⁵⁶⁴ Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Six Plays*, 308.

it is often learnt subversively. He does not judge, however, but posits through his lyrics and libretto that racism is not a natural or permanent state of human beings. Hammerstein may be accused of being 'preachy', but his insistence that it is a human being's responsibility to turn away from their racist tendencies is a response to an ethical and theological demand. It seems that in *South Pacific*, Hammerstein is asking us to challenge our behavioural norms, and if we happen to discover anything untoward he encourages us to follow the example of Nellie before it is too late.

Nellie's transformation is not necessarily completed during the musical, but she begins a journey towards an understanding of the oneness of humankind through her relationship with Emile de Becque and his children. Her concern about the cultural differences between herself and the Frenchman suggest that her humble upbringings did not enable her to engage with people of diverse cultures or beliefs. This notion is perpetuated through her encounter with Emile's children and the discovery of his deceased Polynesian wife. The rehearsal script reveals a cut line from Act 1, scene 12, that when reinstated into the 2008 revival of *South Pacific* reminded the audience of Nellie's racial prejudice and reinforced all of the clues they had already been given. Following de Becque's response 'Polynesian', Nellie corrects him saying, 'Colored' (a universal description for anyone who is not white), before he replies saying that despite being darker than either of them his wife was nonetheless beautiful.⁵⁶⁵ While 'colored' was an appropriate and arguably polite way of describing an African American in 1949 within this context, it caused a considerable stir in the audience

⁵⁶⁵ Lovensheimer, *Paradise Rewritten*, 95.

when it came from the mouth of Mary Martin.⁵⁶⁶ Frank Rich (*New York Times*) reviewed the 2008 Broadway revival, and claimed that this reinstated line ‘lands like a brick in the theatre.’ In the United Kingdom tour of this revival in 2011, this tension was reinforced by the dramatic action occurring in the background among the African American Seabees who freeze on this word. Rich argues on behalf of the audience saying: ‘It’s not only upsetting in itself. It’s upsetting because Nellie isn’t some cracker stereotype – she’s lovable. [. . .] But how can we love a racist?’⁵⁶⁷ The challenge posed by this word spoken by our heroine is critical, but so too is the affection that the audience still feels for Nellie. While Hammerstein actively criticises racist belief systems he does not alienate people with racist tendencies, but rather provides the opportunity for repentance and an awakening of their social consciousness.

Emile is essential in the awakening of the characters’, and potentially the audience’s, awareness of the shameful of their racial prejudices. Baffled and upset by Nellie’s response to his previous marriage to a Polynesian woman, Emile’s refusal to accept her racism is essential to her development throughout the course of the musical play. “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught” is directed toward him by Cable at Nellie’s request in order to explain how she feels and why she is the way she is. His absolute refusal to accept that this hatred is born in Nellie echoes Hammerstein’s personal philosophy. Emile refuses to accept that hatred of the ‘other’ is a universal condition of humankind, which prompts Cable to sing “You’ve Got to Be Carefully

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 96.

⁵⁶⁷ Frank Rich “Memorial Day at *South Pacific*,” *New York Times*, 25 May, 2008, accessed 12 December, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/25/opinion/25rich.html?_r=0.

Taught” as if he is realising the cause of this hatred for the very first time.⁵⁶⁸

Throughout his musical plays, Hammerstein uses the motif of love to show the oneness of humanity; even as early as *Show Boat* he uses this theme to great effect in the moving scene when Steve ingests Julie’s blood making a mockery of the miscegenation laws. Something similar happens in *South Pacific*, and in an earlier lyric found in the rehearsal script for Emile following “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught”, Hammerstein reveals that he believed love to be antithesis to hatred:

Love is quite different
It grows by itself.
It will grow like a weed
On a mountain of stones;
You don’t have to feed
Or put fat on its bones;
It can live on a smile
Or a note of a song:
It may starve for a while,
But it stumbles along,
Stumbles along with its banner unfurled,
The joy and the beauty, the hope of the world.⁵⁶⁹

The message of this passage is vital when read in conjunction with “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught”, and the negativity of the rewritten lyrics used from 1950 onwards crushes the beauty of this sentiment. The rewritten lyrics read thus:

I was cheated before
And I’m cheated again
By a mean little world
Of mean little men.
And the one chance for me
Is the life I know best.
To be on an island
And to hell with the rest.
I will cling to this island
Like a tree or a stone,

⁵⁶⁸ Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Six Plays*, 346.

⁵⁶⁹ Hammerstein, *Complete Lyrics*, 341.

I will cling to this island
And be free – and alone.⁵⁷⁰

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In the original lyrics for Emile, Hammerstein is telling his audience that while hate and fear can be taught they do not eradicate feelings of love and empathy. Love does not need to be taught, but is the core essence of humanity seen in the Unitarian and Universalist understanding of brotherhood. Certainly, it can be suppressed, but this lyric suggests that it continues to flourish and grow with the resilience of a weed growing through the stones.

Wolf notes a connection between heterosexual romance and social concerns in Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical plays, arguing that romantic relationships are always used as a vehicle to argue for social tolerance; illustrated in *South Pacific* between Nellie and Emile, and Cable and Liat.⁵⁷¹ Similarly, McConachie argues that throughout Rodgers and Hammerstein's Asian musicals, it is the trope of romantic love that makes it possible for the characters to transcend the racial boundaries placed upon them and therefore is the key to understanding the universality of humanity. The 'sympathetic Asian characters [. . .] fall in love just like Americans when their predestined heartthrob touches them on the inside.'⁵⁷² While McConachie contends that certain musical numbers leave the audience in 'no doubt about the universality of romantic love', he comments on the superficiality of the love experienced by Asian

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Wolf, *Gender and Sexuality*, 31.

⁵⁷² Bruce McConachie, "The 'Oriental' Musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein and the U.S. War in Southeast Asia," *Theatre Journal*, 43, No. 3, Colonial/Postcolonial Theatre (Oct., 1994): 385-386, accessed 9 March, 2011, 392.

characters in these musicals: the Polynesian girls in *South Pacific* are ‘Younger than Springtime’ and despite all language barriers, or silence in the case of Liat, can ‘Happy Talk’ with their American lovers.⁵⁷³ Despite accusing Hammerstein of creating flat and unrealistic relationships between the Asian characters and their Western lovers, he discerns that:

[It is] the ideology of romantic love, understood as the natural expression of an inner self beneath and outer facade of cultural and racial difference, that really anchors Rodgers and Hammersteins’[sic] attack on prejudice. Their plea for tolerance in [*South Pacific, The King and I, and Flower Drum Song*] rests on the conviction that all people are fundamentally the same underneath the container of race. Culture is only skin deep, especially in matters of the heart.⁵⁷⁴

Love is an essential part of the Rodgers and Hammerstein ethos as they argue it is through the love of another individual something of the true nature of humanity can be experienced. While romantic love plays a considerable role in expressing the unification of the human race in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical plays, it is also essential to appreciate the other forms of love that are illustrated in these shows. The mutual influence of these characters and the ever increasing sense of love and the social consciousness goes far beyond the romantic trope common in Broadway shows of the period. Hammerstein’s characters learn, and the audience alongside them, that humankind is one and what individuals owe each other is love and respect.⁵⁷⁵

Through the experience of love in its many guises, Hammerstein argues that the true nature of humanity is revealed to individuals. Love reveals humankind’s potential for goodness and in turn reveals the value of the person, which is to be

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ King, *Theology and the Social Consciousness*, 21.

upheld at all costs. McConachie and Wolf run the risk of undervaluing the importance played by the role of love in these musicals (and the others across the canon).

Speaking about his personal relationships in 1953 Hammerstein remarked:

My strange, disorderly, unsystematic family may have developed in me a tolerance for disorder, which makes it possible for me to live in a disorderly world, even though I crave another kind. But there is no other kind. The world is very much like my family, filled with people of unharnessed passions, illogical impulses, the inconsistent religions and clashing philosophies. All these whirling atoms are held together loosely and kept going slowly in the same general direction by one element – love.⁵⁷⁶

This reflects an earlier quote from Hammerstein in Chapter Two where he correlates love to what people might call God: love represents the divine, which both is present in each human being, but that transcends their humanity, keeping humankind moving in the same general direction.⁵⁷⁷ This singular element, love, is the most important of all of the human capacities and this is explored in its fullness in the musical plays of Rodgers and Hammerstein. This is not romantic love in superficial, operetta or vaudevillian terms, but rather an expression of the divine love shared between humankind, which inspires the social consciousness through an awakening of a resurgence of faith in humanity. The sheer variety of characters created by Rodgers and Hammerstein fully embodies this re-evaluated sense of love on the musical stage.

South Pacific is a musical play of contrasts and differences, which are ultimately devalued in order to reveal the likeness of humankind. Emile constantly criticises Nellie's tendency to focus on the differences that divide people and seeks to instil in her a respect and love of the universal qualities of humanity. Through revealing the

⁵⁷⁶ Hammerstein, *The Hammersteins*, 88.

⁵⁷⁷ Oscar Hammerstein II to Bill Hammerstein, 18 January, 1953, in Oscar Hammerstein II New Collection, Library of Congress, Box 2 of 9. See pg. 74.

ultimate likeness between American and European people through the relationship between Nellie and Emile, Hammerstein uses a more accessible union to challenge the problems raised by the more controversial relationships between Emile and his deceased wife, and Cable and Liat. By posing a social question in his musical play, Hammerstein reveals the unity of humankind to his audience illustrated by love. This theme is continued in *The King and I*, where an ethical question concerning slavery reveals the essential likeness of the radically opposite figures of Anna and the King of Siam. Exploring issues of gender, power and stereotype, Hammerstein uses *The King and I* to express the same message of unity and oneness that comes out of *South Pacific*. *The King and I* raises many social questions such as the role of women in society, polygamy, and slavery, but it is the latter which Hammerstein uses to reveal the likeness of humankind to the audience.

The iconic scene from *The King and I* of Anna and the King dancing through the palace is one of passion and power. Throughout the musical play these characters have been fighting each other for respect and authority, and finally the audience see the relationship developing in an altogether positive direction. However, it is short lived, and Hammerstein's clever use of dramatic action interrupts their union in a seemingly unsalvageable way as the guards bring Tuptim into the room to be punished. The anti-slavery theme that runs throughout the musical play, with Anna teaching the Siamese of the horrors of slavery and the King's outright rejection of this happening in Siam, finally reaches its dramatic climax. Stood before the young girl, whip in hand, the King understands the message that Anna has been trying to teach him. He has been 'carefully taught' to keep slaves and to punish them accordingly, but through his

relationship with Anna he has come to an ethical realisation that this behaviour is not appropriate or just. Despite the flaws in character and the differences between Anna and the King, it is apparent that they share a common humanity represented through the various liberal reforms that exalt human rights. This ethical issue of how to treat a 'present' or a 'slave' reveals that the essence of Anna and the King is fundamentally the same. Despite his dilemma the King finally 'knows' something, that this action is in fact barbaric, and he cannot bring himself to torture this young girl. This is not an act of Western domination of an Eastern culture, but rather a slow recognition through the mutual influence of person that awakens a deep sense of social consciousness and a realisation of unethical conduct. Engaging with the issues of modernisation *The King and I*: 'downplay[s] the notion of unbreachable cultural differences and heighten[s] the message of tolerance and mutual understanding.'⁵⁷⁸ Once more, Hammerstein shows that hatred is not natural to humanity and appeals to the human ability to change and progress.

The likeness and resemblance of humankind is essential to Hammerstein's understanding of the brotherhood of man and human community. Unity is rooted in love and the universal qualities of human beings that he sees to transcend all differences. *South Pacific* and *The King and I* reveal Hammerstein's fundamental belief in the universality of humanity that can be seen across all racial boundaries. Through his musicals, he profoundly teaches that racial hatred and fear of the other is deeply rooted in society, but that it can be overcome in time through the awakening of the social consciousness. While this will not be an easy path to take it is an essential one

⁵⁷⁸ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 195.

because of the role it plays in the progression of humankind onward and upward, a key concept of Unitarian and later Universalist theology that he recalled in his letters to son Bill Hammerstein. Hammerstein's hope for humanity and the world was rooted in the development and progress of humankind as a result of a global community that transcends all racial or cultural boundaries. However, as he argues for a united world where perfection is achieved and races can live in harmony, he unfortunately begins to neglect the importance of difference and diversity. While there is much to be said for focusing on the universal principles of humankind that unite rather than divide the global community, the risk of losing a wide range of cultures, languages and perspectives is detrimental to the purpose of God's creation.

Theological Implications of Asserting Unity over Diversity

Hammerstein's insistence on promoting the likeness and universality of humankind locates him firmly within early twentieth-century liberal Protestant thought. With a focus on that which unites rather than divides human beings, the particularities of human context were set aside, judged to be a hindrance when seeking to discover the true nature of humanity in the image of God. King argues that:

Men might have sprung out of the ground in absolute individual independence of one another, and yet if there were such actual like-mindedness as now exists, the race would be as truly one as it now is, and as capable of reciprocal action, and its members under the same obligation to one another. No ideal interest is at stake, then, in the question of the actual physical unity of the race as descended from one pair.⁵⁷⁹

King asserts that questions concerning physical unity are both unhelpful and unnecessary as they have no impact on the essential truth of the shared likeness of

⁵⁷⁹ King, *Theology and Social Consciousness*, 36.

humankind. Whether humankind developed in absolute independence of each other, or if principles of heredity are to be asserted, this does not detract from the essential likeness and mutual influence of human beings. He argues that theology has no occasion to continue its emphasis on physical unity,⁵⁸⁰ and from this it is possible to discern that racial distinctions should be acknowledged, but looked past in order to discover the essential like-mindedness of humanity. While there is considerable worth in asserting global unity, the risk is that one culture's particularity, here Western America, will have dominance over the other. Jonathan Sacks posits that:

A global culture is a universal culture, and universal cultures, though they have brought about great good, have also done immense harm. They see as the basis of our humanity the fact that we are ultimately the same. We are vulnerable. We are embodied creatures. We feel hunger, thirst, fear, pain. We reason, hope, dream, aspire. These things are all true and important. But we are also different. Each landscape, language, culture, community is unique. Our very dignity as persons is rooted in the fact that none of us [. . .] is exactly like any other.⁵⁸¹

In looking for likeness, the tendency is for those searching to look for themselves in the other, which often leads to cultural oppression. Although this merely touches on the severity of the issue, Hammerstein's resolution of subsuming all cultures into one American vision of unity is both disrespectful and dangerous. If these musicals were in fact feeding into American culture during the Cold War and U.S. expansion in the East then this could compromise Hammerstein's ethical and philosophical position.

Jonathan Sacks' influential work, *The Dignity of Difference*, while primarily addressing the impact of globalisation in the twenty-first-century, contributes significantly to a theological discussion of the importance and value of diversity in the

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., 36-37.

⁵⁸¹ Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference* (London & New York: Continuum, 2002), 47-47.

world. While he also asserts that there is value to be found in universalism, he fervently argues that it must be balanced by a theology of difference and an understanding of why diversity is part of God's ultimate plan.⁵⁸² Discerning that the universal moral codes of the world create a space for cultural and religious difference, he asserts that this refers to 'the sanctity of human life, the dignity of the human person, and the freedom we need to be true to ourselves while being a blessing to others.'⁵⁸³ Respectful of the scatteredness and variety of human life, Sacks asserts that:

The glory of the created world is its astonishing multiplicity: the thousands of different languages spoken by mankind, the hundreds of faiths, the proliferation of cultures, the sheer variety of the imaginative expressions of the human spirit, in most of which, if we listen carefully, we will hear the voice of God telling us something we need to know. That is what I mean by *the dignity of difference*.⁵⁸⁴

Diverse cultures and traditions are not only important because they have been divinely appointed by God, but also because through an engagement with other perspectives humankind will be able to learn something of and from God directly.

Furthering Adams' argument addressed in Chapter Five, Sacks refers to the story of the Tower of Babel, discerning that it is a parable for our time.⁵⁸⁵ He argues that it illustrates '*the attempt to impose a man-made unity on divinely created diversity*', and that it is this search for uniformity that is the problem with universalism.⁵⁸⁶ Babel represents the period in history when God ceased to support a universal order, something that Sacks believes we will not attempt again until the end

⁵⁸² Ibid., 21.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 20-21.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 52.

of days. 'Babel ends with the division of mankind into a multiplicity of languages, cultures, nations and civilizations. God's covenant with humanity as a whole has not ceased.'⁵⁸⁷ No matter what attempts human beings make to create a global unity it will never succeed as it goes against the divine will of God. Therefore, to silence diverse cultures not only disobeys the will of God, but is a futile human attempt to create simplicity, which ultimately undermines the variety and beauty of the world. When Hammerstein silences the racially diverse characters of his musical plays, not only is he undermining his philosophical message of respect and equality, he is seeking to create a false man-made unity that is contrary to the will of God. We must ask if by mistaking equality for autonomy, Hammerstein devalues and disrespects the cultures that he is so desperately trying to fight for in the social and political realms. Is he forgetting that the world is not black and white, and risking the loss of the colour and variety of humankind, rather than realising that human beings are 'particular *and* universal, the same *and* different, human beings as such, *but also* members of this family, that community, this history, that heritage'?⁵⁸⁸ Adhering to the Unitarian understanding of being made in the image of God, he easily makes the mistake that this does not make human beings autonomous, but suggests that God represents us all equally. In Chapter Five, I argued that *Pipe Dream's* "All Kinds of People" shows Hammerstein's acceptance of diversity, and it is important to remember the twenty-first century context of Sacks; in a world where cultures are increasingly interacting with each other diversity becomes essential to theological thought. For Hammerstein in the 1940s and 1950s, when cultural isolation and domination was rife, it was crucial to express unity

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 56.

in order to break barriers between different cultures and races. One issue that is raised from the inclusion of Sacks in this chapter, as well as an engagement with contemporary criticisms of Hammerstein, is how we approach texts from a different era that may not live up to our twenty-first century standards of political correctness? Certainly, continuing popularity of these musicals in theatrical and film form suggests that we must find a way to appreciate them, but constructively criticise what is not deemed appropriate in our century.

The Challenge of Diversity in South Pacific, The King and I and Flower Drum Song

Undoubtedly *South Pacific* and *The King and I* argue for the shared love of humanity uniting humankind and transcending racial boundaries. However, in fervently asserting the unity of humankind there is a risk that diversity has been subsumed through a desire of oneness. While in his 'American' musicals *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel* it was appropriate for the values of Western democracy to have dominance, when non-Americans are introduced into Rodgers and Hammerstein's musicals the diversity resulting from their particularity is often subsumed by the American way of life. Considerable theological problems arise when diversity is threatened as seen in Chapter Five, and ironically, despite Hammerstein's constant attack on racism, he has often been criticised for perpetuating ideas of Western superiority at the expense of diversity. Rather than celebrating the scatteredness of humankind and the God-given potential arising from communication with the 'other', Hammerstein seems to be asserting white, middle-class values and silencing

difference. While I would argue that this is not necessarily a conscious decision on Hammerstein's part, and would appear to contradict his pluralistic ideals, his determination to show the oneness of humanity frequently came at the cost of stripping foreign characters of their true diverse nature. This is particularly problematic if diversity and difference is viewed theologically as part of God's divine plan for creation. An investigation into *Flower Drum Song*, however, shows how the practice of these musical plays advocated a strong sense of diversity, although the impact of this was not necessarily as positive as might have been expected.

Sacks identifies a global community that despite doing much good has also done great harm with regards to diversity in the world. This global community did not always exist but was a twentieth century product that was promoted and created by a change in American foreign policy. In her seminal work *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*, Christina Klein locates Rodgers and Hammerstein's three Asian musicals within a 'distinct cultural moment in which Americans turned their attentions eastward' as they began to develop a global community.⁵⁸⁹ As a result of the Cold War and American expansion in Asia in the period between 1945 and 1961, hundreds of American people spread throughout Asian countries including Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and the Pacific.⁵⁹⁰ Klein argues that the artistic output from those she defines as middlebrow intellectuals, including Rodgers and Hammerstein, educated Americans about their relationships with Asia and 'created opportunities – real and symbolic – for their

⁵⁸⁹ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 2.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

audiences to participate in the forging of those relationships.’⁵⁹¹ Helping to create a national identity for America as it engaged with non-communist parts of Asia, these musical plays, and other middlebrow culture, ‘brought these alliances to life by translating them into personal terms and imbuing them with sentiment, so that they became emotionally rich relationships that Americans could inhabit imaginatively in their everyday lives.’⁵⁹² Klein identifies four key aims of the middlebrow intellectuals that can be read from their cultural outputs: 1) to raise awareness of a larger world system through the replacement of the old Nationalist map carried in the American imagination; 2) to replace the national image based on separation with a global image based on connection; 3) to situate the audience in relation to a world, which was to be understood as interconnected; 4) to repudiate imperialism as an acceptable model of East-West relations.⁵⁹³ In contributing to these cultural products, as well as his involvement in the World Federalist Movement, Hammerstein participated in the creation of a global community, which asserted unity and brotherhood over diversity.

Taking the lesser known Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play, *Flower Drum Song*, as an example of this participation, we can see how the relationship between unity and diversity is particularly complicated. Based on Chin Y. Lee’s novel, *Flower Drum Song* opened in 1958, but before long it found itself subject to revisionist criticism as people asked: ‘Did it transcend, or traffic in, ethnic stereotype?’⁵⁹⁴ Despite considerable efforts to update the show and to instil political correctness, *Flower Drum Song* remains largely unperformed and even with a film adaptation largely unknown.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 7-8.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁹⁴ Hammerstein, *The Hammersteins*, 217.

Despite this, Klein argues that *Flower Drum Song* was incredibly important and should be read as a 'cultural narrative and a social practice':⁵⁹⁵

Flower Drum Song created a focal point around which the integration of Asian Americans was enacted, performed, promoted, and publicized. It became a forum for the articulation of liberal views on race and for the repudiations of the older racial formation of racialization, and created a cultural space in which Asian American's could be publically embraces as "real" Americans.⁵⁹⁶

Focusing on the move from racialisation to ethnicisation during the 1930s and 1940s in America, Hammerstein steps away from previous assumptions that the term Asian meant 'foreign,' 'inassimilable,' or 'alien'.⁵⁹⁷ As America was being celebrated as a 'racially, religiously, and culturally diverse nation', the ethnic immigrant was transformed 'from a marginal figure into the prototypical American'.⁵⁹⁸ *Flower Drum Song* played a vital role in this practically as well as artistically by opening Broadway to a diverse acting community.

Considerable problems were faced in the casting of *Flower Drum Song*, which demands a cast suitable for a show that consists entirely of Chinese characters. Lewis argues that a lack of Asian roles in stage and film resulted in an uninspired Asian community who did not pursue careers in entertainment.⁵⁹⁹ Combined with a stigma found within the Chinese community that acting was unseemly, and young people should not be 'making clowns and sex objects of themselves performing to vulgar western music', it became increasingly difficult to cast this musical play.⁶⁰⁰ In order to

⁵⁹⁵ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 230.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 224.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ David H. Lewis, *Flower Drum Songs: The Story of Two Musicals* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc., 2006), 37.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

try and find suitable actors for *Flower Drum Song*, Gene Kelly and Carol Haney searched beyond Broadway travelling to Boston, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and San Francisco.⁶⁰¹ While this shows commitment and a considerable effort to cast appropriate actors, there was a sense that it did not entirely matter whether or not the actors were Asian, and soon a 'polygot troupe' was compiled including Chinese, Japanese, African American, Hawaiian, and white actors.⁶⁰² Rodgers comments that the 'ethnically mixed cast certainly didn't lessen the total effect; what was important was that the actors gave the illusion of being Chinese.'⁶⁰³ Despite the concerns that this raises, the very fact that *Flower Drum Song* had real Asian actors was a 'landmark in racial terms for Broadway',⁶⁰⁴ and it remained the only mainstream Broadway musical to have an almost exclusively Asian cast until David Henry Hwang's revised version in 2002. As for Koster's 1961 film, it remained the only major Hollywood film to have an almost exclusively Asian cast until *The Joy Luck Club* in 1993.⁶⁰⁵ Assimilation and diversity did not stop at the casting, but was evident in the show programmes, which introduced 'a large and ethnically diverse group of Americans with roots in countries throughout Asia' through the naming of national origins, and thereby emphasising 'how American nationality supersedes, but does not eliminate ethnic identity.'⁶⁰⁶

Flower Drum Song provides an example of Hammerstein's social vision manifesting itself out with the narrative of his musical plays. Not only was his musical

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 44.

⁶⁰² Hammerstein, *The Hammersteins*, 215.

⁶⁰³ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 295.

⁶⁰⁴ Pantinken, *History of the American Musical Theatre*, 336.

⁶⁰⁵ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 232.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., 235.

play advocating unity, but the very production was crucial as a 'material and social practice that enabled the integration of real people.'⁶⁰⁷ The show itself, however, has come under considerable scrutiny, quickly becoming regarded as a 'quaint, racially offensive relic'.⁶⁰⁸ While for Klein, *Flower Drum Song* emphasises the value of the dual-identity of Asian Americans for America's new pluralistic national identity and does not advocate the 'melting of Asian difference into a homogenous sameness of post-war American whiteness';⁶⁰⁹ Wolf disagrees, arguing that while Hammerstein may have written a musical for Asian actors featuring the Chinese-American community it undermines diversity, '[objectifying] the non-white characters under the guise of liberal universality.'⁶¹⁰ In a common criticism of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical plays, she discerns that by trying to prove that everyone is alike underneath and that people should behave according to American cultural values, Hammerstein erases the particularity of Asian cultures.⁶¹¹ This was also felt by the Chinese American intelligentsia in San Francisco when *Flower Drum Song* was revived in 1983 by David Plotkin and George Costomoris. Under the impression that the show made a mockery of their ancestors on Grant Avenue, the Chinese American community protested against what they saw to be deeply offensive stereotypes of Chinese people played for the entertainment of white audiences.⁶¹² As a result, changes were made to *Flower Drum Song*, such as the removal of offensive material like the chorus number "Chop

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 232.

⁶⁰⁸ Lewis, *Flower Drum Songs*, 1-2.

⁶⁰⁹ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 240.

⁶¹⁰ Wolf, *Gender and Sexuality*, 10.

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

⁶¹² Lewis, *Flower Drum Songs*, 119.

Suey".⁶¹³ If any song in *Flower Drum Song* attempts to create a sense of diversity and the need for tolerance it is this musical number, however, critics such as Mordden have described it as being 'so vague it feels pointless'.⁶¹⁴ While Klein highlights the cultural significance of *Flower Drum Song* when viewed in light of its cultural context, significant difficulties faced when trying to cast the musical play in the late twentieth century as it was viewed as politically incorrect, and the commercial failure of David Henry Hwang's revised *Flower Drum Song* produced in 2002⁶¹⁵ show that this musical is very much a product of its time, and while asserting diversity in the acting community, it continues in the Rodgers and Hammerstein vein of narrowing diversity at the expense of unity.

Klein is not the only scholar to note the relationship between war, American expansion in Asia, and the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play. Showing how the impact of over-asserting unity can be viewed as having an altogether more sinister effect, Bruce McConachie has argued that rather than furthering the cause of racial equality these musicals perpetuated American ideas of racial distinction and political containment as part of wider American culture. McConachie argues that Rodgers and Hammerstein's 'oriental' musicals, *The King and I*, *South Pacific*, and *Flower Drum Song*, helped to establish a legitimate basis for the American war against the people of Southeast Asia in the 1960s.⁶¹⁶ He argues that the white, middle-class American mind set of the 1950s was largely dominated by metaphors of containment, which reflected the doctrine of containment. Musical such as these fed into the assumption that the

⁶¹³ Lewis, *Flower Drum Songs*, 119-120.

⁶¹⁴ Ethan Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1995), 199.

⁶¹⁵ Lewis, *Flower Drum Songs*, 198.

⁶¹⁶ McConachie, 'The 'Oriental' Musicals,' 385-386.

South Vietnamese were just like Americans ‘under the skin’,⁶¹⁷ justifying and validating the war effort. This assertion that people from South Vietnam were ‘just like us’ suggests a creation of false unity, where diversity is stripped in order for the dominance of Western democracy. Alluding to the arguments made for diversity by Adams, and later by Sacks, with regard to the Tower of Babel, suggests that this desire for autonomy under the West is not unlike the desire to build a tower that could be dominated by humankind without dependence upon God.

For McConachie, Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Asian musicals are dominated by metaphors of containment and enablement, which threaten the portrayal of genuine diversity. The prominent role these musical plays had in the 1950s, which transcended their presence in the Broadway theatre through feature stories, LP recordings, revivals and film versions was remarkable and showed how every aspect of these musical plays would become a part of the dominant culture of the era.⁶¹⁸ Rather than having a positive impact upon culture with regard to racism, it has been argued that the Asian musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein perpetuated the problem. In his review of *Flower Drum Song* in *The New Yorker*, 1958, Kenneth Tynan highlighted the synonymous assumptions made about ‘oriental’ people in the *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *Flower Drum Song*. He discerns:

It seems to have worried neither Mr. Rodgers nor Mr. Hammerstein very much that the behaviour of wartorn [sic] Pacific Islanders and nineteenth-century Siamese might be slightly different from that of Chinese residents of present-day California, where *Flower Drum Song* is fictionally sung. So little, indeed, has it worried them that they have entrusted the principal female roles to Japanese

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 388.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., 389.

actresses. The assumption, which may be justified, is that the audience will not notice the difference.⁶¹⁹

Asian characters, Tynan and McConachie argue, are not addressed within their own particularity and are subject to stereotyping and cultural domination. They are perceived as being the 'same as Americans', just under a different skin. This was reinforced by newspaper and magazine articles teaching women how to mimic the Oriental 'slant' through carefully applied make up. *The Sunday Mirror Magazine* ran a story on 1 July, 1951, with the tagline, 'One American Girl Who Sets a Speed Record in Becoming a Siamese' by Hyman Goldberg, complete with step by step pictures of the transformation of Dorothy Sarnoff, the King's First Wife in *The King and I*.⁶²⁰

Contrary to arguments put forth by Klein that highlight the progressive casting of the Rodgers and Hammerstein 'oriental' musicals, McConachie sees this as yet another way in which the Asian race was undermined. Arguing that the casting of multiple races in *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *Flower Drum Song* for the Asian roles 'encourage[d] audiences to believe that Asian culture was only skin deep and easily shed',⁶²¹ McConachie asserts that Rodgers and Hammerstein undermined their anti-racist crusade in musical theatre. Taking the example of Mongolian Yul Brynner, who became the archetypal King of Siam rendering all other portrayals inferior, McConachie argues that the consideration of Caucasian Rex Harrison for the role shows that Rodgers and Hammerstein gave little consideration to the racial features or

⁶¹⁹ Kenneth Tynan, 'Critics Round Table,' *The New Yorker Digital Edition*, May 31, 1993, 122.

⁶²⁰ Hyman Goldberg, "New York to Bangkok in 2 Hours" *Sunday Mirror Magazine*, 1 July, 1951, in Oscar Hammerstein II Original Collection, Library of Congress, *The King and I* Scrapbook. With tagline "One American Girl Who Sets a Speed Record in Becoming a Siamese – at Least Daily" complete with pictures of the transformation step by step of Dorothy Sarnoff 1st Wife

⁶²¹ McConachie, 'Oriental Musicals,' 392.

characteristics of their Asian characters.⁶²² In a somewhat outlandish claim given the time and consideration given to assembling an ethnic cast for *Flower Drum Song* he writes:

Rodgers and Hammerstein, who produced each musical, apparently exercised no consistent policy articulating relationships among the racial features of a performer, the ancestry of his or her character, and the general importance of the performer and/or character to the production.⁶²³

As we have seen, in reality, Rodgers and Hammerstein were faced with a considerable casting dilemma. While McConachie discerns that the audiences would have responded differently to an Asian or Black actor in a 'white' role,⁶²⁴ it is important to remember the cultural context of these musicals. In this sense it could be argued that Rodgers and Hammerstein did continue the double standard regarding casting and race,⁶²⁵ but it should also be noted that in the present day these traditions have been altered in their musicals.⁶²⁶

McConachie, however, is concerned about the impact that this representation of Asian characters would have had upon Rodgers and Hammerstein's audiences in the 1940s and 1950s. Rather than humanising Asian characters, he argues, the impact of these casting decisions '[disembodied] the Asian cultures ostended in the productions.'⁶²⁷ Due to the fact that an audience member could not recognise the race

⁶²² Ibid., 392-393.

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., 393.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Molly Smith, artistic director of the Arena Stage and director of the company's 2011 revival of *Oklahoma!*, paid particular attention to how the characters would have actually appeared in the period. The result was a racially diverse cast with black actresses portraying Aunt Eller and Laurey, and Nicholas Rodriguez, an actor who could be read as a Native American, playing Curly.⁶²⁶

⁶²⁷ McConachie, 'Oriental Musicals,' 393.

of a character through the natural appearance of the actor stereotyping was necessary.

[S]pectators were induced to understand 'Asianness' as a performance in itself, a matter of external role-playing involving a darker shade of grease paint and other theatrical trappings. With western characters, on the other hand, the audience could presume that the 'inside' matched the 'outside;' the actor underneath the role always looked the part.⁶²⁸

Andrea Most argues that in *The King and I* this performance of 'Asianness' is reinforced by what she defines as 'theatricity' present throughout; various characters 'act' or assume certain roles in the company of others that differ from their own individual personalities. Placing Anna firmly into her theatrical analogy, Most regards the protagonist as the theatrical director⁶²⁹ of the Siamese; stripping the Siamese of their cultural traditions and teaching Prince Chulalongkorn the Western bow, which shows the audience that the Siamese can be 'like us' through the adoption of democracy.⁶³⁰ However, this is not universal to the entire Siamese court and at certain dramatic moments the 'Westernisation' of the Siamese backfires and causes embarrassment. Forcing the King's wives into Western clothing and the accompanying musical number "Western People Funny" has a considerable impact on this argument. It could be said that the Siamese wives are being ridiculed by Hammerstein for having never seen a monocle before and are in need of Western education. However, a more accurate reading of this scene involves questioning the inappropriateness of Anna's 'dressing up' of the women like dolls. In this case, the Asian costumes could be taken off the 'Asian' characters, but their cultural essence remains the same; these women do not

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Most, *Making Americans*, 189.

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 184.

become Westerners simply because of change of 'theatrical trappings'. This theatrical 'Asian-ness' was furthered by Richard Rodgers' approach to writing the musical numbers for *The King and I* as his refusal to imitate Oriental sounds resulted in a Westernised version of how he imagined the Orient to sound.⁶³¹ His argument that a Western audience was not used to the sounds of the Orient and would render him unable to reach them emotionally may have some truth in it, however, the result of this was the composition of music that fed into a stereotype of Orientalism that could be argued diminishes and undermines the diversity of individual Asian races.

Rodgers and Hammerstein's Asian musicals played a crucial cultural role in educating the American people about the 'other' as America expanded through Asia. The result of this was a focus on unity and essential likeness occasionally at the expense of diversity. While casting was problematic and Rodgers and Hammerstein can be commended for opening the theatre up to different races, the effect of multiracial casting and newspaper articles teaching fans how to become 'Siamese' undermined the particularity of the Asian characters they sought to represent. The theatrical trappings seen in *The King and I* reinforce how the unique qualities of the Asian characters were subverted, or 'modernised' so that they could be easily seen as being 'just like Americans', and easily accepted into American culture as the country expanded throughout Asia. The consequence of this was not only the neglect of diversity, but the actual silencing of the Asian characters in these musicals either literally in *South Pacific* or through modernisation seen in *The King and I*.

⁶³¹ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 273.

The Silencing of the 'Other'

While Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical plays argue for the unity of humankind, as we have already seen in Chapter Five, it is often the 'other' who suffers when they cannot or do not fit neatly into Hammerstein's vision of community. Jud may have suffered in *Oklahoma!* as he was isolated then removed from the narrative, but the fate of the King in *The King and I* is equally telling. In *The King and I* Hammerstein explores the differences between individuals, power struggles, and possibilities for reconciliation rooted in modernisation. Engaging with modernisation, which was a key concept of American foreign policy in the 1950s, *The King and I* 'offers an exemplary instance of the culture of integration: it imagines that Others rather than being exterminated could be modernized through an intimate embrace.'⁶³²

Presented as an innovative ruler seeking to develop his country through the introduction of the printing press and education, the King finds himself in constant conflict between the Western ideas brought into the palace by Anna and his Siamese traditions. The West, however, always trumps the Eastern ideals whether it is through discussions of snow or the more serious issue of slavery. The audience is given little information of what it is that makes the Siamese positively unique apart from beautiful costumes that the women are eventually deprived of as they submit to the Western diplomats visiting the palace. In order to prove that they are not barbarians, the Siamese are to act like Westerners, to dress in hoop skirts and to eat European dishes. On the stage (unlike in the film version) Anna does not object to the dressing up of the Siamese palace in Western garb. Instead Anna is 'suddenly inspired' and excitedly

⁶³² Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 193-194.

proclaims, 'We shall dress them up in European fashions', thus stripping them of their diversity.⁶³³ Without the King even realising, Anna slowly peels away the unique and diverse qualities of Siamese culture to create a mini-Europe for the British diplomats. Anything specific to the Siamese culture is undermined, not to mention the inaccurate portrayal of Buddhism in the musical play, which is but a token gesture towards the religious traditions of Siam. This silencing of the Siamese rejects the dignity of diversity and asserts the authority of the Western world over the East. The two perspectives are not allowed to enter into dialogue, but rather one is rebranded to make it appear synonymous with the dominant culture. In this it is possible to discern Sacks' warning that in searching to find unity the dominant culture will look for itself and discard or trivialise that which it cannot relate to undermining diversity. The final silencing of the King reinforces this rather tragic message of *The King and I*.

The generational split between the King and his children suggests that in order for modernisation to be completed and true unity to occur the older generation must pass on. In other words, in order to achieve unity between the East and the West diversity must come second to unity. Most argues that unlike his children:

The King [. . .] is too circumscribed by his racial otherness, which prevents him from successfully learning new behaviours. Because he cannot perform properly, he – like Moses, with whom he is obsessed – must die without ever seeing the Promised Land.⁶³⁴

His death is necessary for the emergence of a new Westernised Siam led by his son Prince Chulalongkorn. While the adults are bound by their racial otherness in the

⁶³³ Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Six Plays*, 409. Excerpts from KING AND I reprinted by permission of Rodgers and Hammerstein: an Iagem Company.

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⁶³⁴ Most, *Making Americans*, 184.

musical play, the young children are able to be moulded into young Democratic citizens no different to American children represented by Anna's son, Louis. The touching intermediate scene between Louis and Prince Chulalongkorn expresses this quite clearly. The reprise of 'A Puzzlement' is particularly poignant as Prince Chulalongkorn prepares himself to lead his country into the new century, something that Most argues the King would be unable to achieve.

The King dies of a broken heart – he has been crushed by the realization that he will never be able to enter the Promised Land of Western civilization. He dies in order to make way for his son, who strides confidently into a new age of enlightenment.⁶³⁵

Despite the King's advancements in Siam, such as the introduction of the printing press and his ability to speak, read and write English, Most renders him unable to truly modernise his land.

Prince Chulalongkorn, like his father, is in need of education from the West, represented by the figure of Anna. McConachie argues that the generational split within the King's character enables the audience to 'justify and reinforce a condescending attitude towards the East'⁶³⁶ as he is represented as a child in desperate need of correction and schooling. With the passing of the King potential for modernisation increases as Chulalongkorn becomes a model for democratic modernisation of the East. Klein identifies the Prince as such:

Chulalongkorn stands as a model of the enlightened, democratically inclined leadership that Washington hoped would be produced by its modernizing mission in Southeast Asia. Biologically the King's child and politically Anna's, the Prince stands as the offspring of their joint effort to modernize Siam.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁵ Ibid., 183.

⁶³⁶ McConachie, 'Oriental Musicals,' 391.

⁶³⁷ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 213.

Initially this seems promising, but we are soon reminded that he is just a boy who must be educated, and educated by Western progressive Anna Leonowens rather than by his own family and confidants. Anna's influence is not altogether negative as during a conversation with his mother, Lady Thiang, he tells her that he has been thinking of a great many things he has been taught including slavery and what Anna said of religion: 'how it is a good and noble concern that each man find for himself that which is right and that which is wrong.'⁶³⁸ Nevertheless, once he has the opportunity to make his own proclamations he speaks of frivolous things, fireworks and boat races, and concerns over how his people will show him respect. While there is certainly potential and promise in Chulalongkorn, it is significant that Anna remains at his side teaching him the Western way of life. The audience can only imagine the other Western lessons that he will adopt under her guidance following the reform of the Siam bow that Anna found so offensive previously. Not to undermine the changing attitude towards slavery that Anna instils in the Siamese palaces, as this is of great importance, but the eradication or trivialisation of Siamese customs threatens the diversity of other cultures.

The Asian characters in *The King and I* have the ability to communicate effectively with their Western counterparts, but in *South Pacific* the 'other' is silenced in a more literal way. Despite the Western dominance in *The King and I*, the King was freely able to enter into debate with Anna and to express his viewpoint. In contrast,

⁶³⁸ Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Six Plays*, 442. Excerpts from KING AND I reprinted by permission of Rodgers and Hammerstein: an ImaGem Company.
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the islanders in *South Pacific* suffer from the inability to communicate with their American visitors. Bloody Mary's broken English, and misinterpretation of words and phrases, acts as a comedic device in the musical play as she interacts with Luther Billis. This comedic effect results in the creation of a stereotype who lacks integrity and dignity as an individual, which is further undermined by her attempt to 'sell' her daughter Liat to the most eligible Western man. Liat's fate, however, is more significant for the discussion of diversity and the treatment of the other in the musical plays of Rodgers and Hammerstein. The very fact that Liat is rendered unable to speak to anyone throughout the musical is of considerable importance. Portrayed as a stereotypical Asian child beaut, obediently choreographing naive hand gestures while her mother sings ironically about "Happy Talk", Liat's fate is tragic from the outset.

Bloody Mary can be viewed as a multi-dimensional character,⁶³⁹ but her daughter Liat 'embodies the classic stereotype of the exotic oriental woman.'⁶⁴⁰ Hammerstein grants Liat the potential to be a real character in *South Pacific* through her relationship with Cable, but the very fact that she cannot speak strips her of the ability to express her diversity. For a character in a musical play to be stripped of the ability to sing renders them useless, and as Most argues, unable to function as a 'real' character.⁶⁴¹ Not only does Liat suffer due to being a stereotype, but she suffers even further through her muteness. Most argues that had Liat been given a voice and united with Joe Cable at the end of the musical Rodgers and Hammerstein would have 'openly

⁶³⁹ Lovensheimer, *Paradise Rewritten*, 170.

⁶⁴⁰ Most, *Making Americans*, 158.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

and powerfully' objected to racism and miscegenation laws.⁶⁴² While we know that Hammerstein was an advocate of interracial marriage, given the context of censorship and the threat of McCarthyism such an outright stand against racism would have been unviable. However, had he given Liat a voice it would have made a remarkable impact on this musical play. Had Liat been able to speak, increased audience sympathy could have reinforced the tragedy at the end of the musical increasing the impact of the subtle message it carries. As it stands the racially other characters of the play have no chance of becoming part of the American community on the island. What is perhaps more important is that they cannot enter into meaningful dialogue with the Americans and remain segregated from the community. In this sense diversity is kept out of the American community in *South Pacific*, which has a potentially detrimental effect. The only positive that can be taken from this is that the message of *South Pacific* is reinforced by this segregation and our knowledge that Hammerstein is suggesting that this is not the way the world should be.

Conclusion

Modern criticism, in light of Sacks' twenty-first century account of diversity, reveals that there are certain problems with Hammerstein's portrayal of difference. Hammerstein's representation of Asian characters in his musical plays can be seen pandering to stereotype or causing undue offence largely as a result of naivety. However, his personal philosophy of the unity of humankind, and the interconnectedness of the human race that transcends all racial and geographical

⁶⁴² Ibid.

barriers, strongly suggest that any offence caused was far from his intention. His musical plays do assert unity at the expense of diversity, but as Klein highlights, this educated the American people at a time when they were questioning a changing world in which different cultures were beginning to interact and work together towards peace. Hammerstein is responding to social questions concerning race and assimilation; recognising the question, 'How do we all live together as Americans?' In answering this question he provided a case for racial equality and assimilation in America at a time when it was much needed. His solution was a global unity and a deep understanding of the brotherhood of humankind, as he offered ethical and moral answers to the political and social concerns of the American people.

CONCLUSION

The Liberal Protestant Influence on Oscar Hammerstein II

*The Universalist faith is stated very simply. I will recite it to you. Our faith is the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the leadership of Jesus, salvation by character, the progress of mankind, onward and upward forever.*⁶⁴³

When Hammerstein wrote to his son Bill in 1953 expounding the key beliefs of the Universalist faith, he provided a guideline for recognising the extent of the influence the liberal Protestant faith had on his personal philosophy and his musical plays. It is interesting that Hammerstein was still able to recite this proclamation when he was 58 as it implies that he carried the principles of the liberal Protestant faith with him throughout his life. While Hammerstein defines this creed as Universalist, it is apparent that it owes something to Unitarianism through the inclusion of James Freeman Clarke's affirmation of 'the progress of mankind, upward and onward'. In this statement, Hammerstein encapsulates the essence of the liberal Protestant faith and reveals the ever narrowing gap between the Unitarian and Universalist denominations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century. Through Hammerstein's personal letters, statements, articles, and significantly his musical plays circa 1943-1959, we can see the manifestation of many of these principles. While Hammerstein never confesses belief in the leadership of Jesus, this thesis has provided considerable evidence that implicit and explicit traces of these other key aspects of Unitarianism and Universalism can be seen in his lyrics and libretti.

⁶⁴³ Oscar Hammerstein II to Bill Hammerstein, 8 February, 1953.

This thesis has identified the liberal Protestant influence on Oscar Hammerstein II, and ascertained that this influence was primarily Unitarian and Universalist in nature. The memories that Hammerstein recalls in his personal letters to his son, Bill Hammerstein, reassert that he had no knowledge of Judaism, and that the liberal Protestant faith of his maternal family built the foundations of his understanding of humanity and God. While religious observances were adhered to they were neither strict nor conservative and the family's relaxed affiliation to any particular denomination, evident in their move from Presbyterianism first to Episcopalianism, and finally to Universalism, reveals an openness and growing religious liberalism within the family. It is significant that Hammerstein could recall specifics of the Universalist faith, and details of sermons he heard at The Church of the Divine Paternity, which he felt influenced him. Attending such an influential Universalist church, under the ministry of Hall and Skinner during the social gospel period, inevitably influenced Hammerstein's understanding of the moral and ethical duty of humankind, and the overriding concept of the brotherhood of man that permeates all of his work.

The continuing influence of Unitarian and Universalist thought reveals itself in later comments that Hammerstein made about the nature of faith and his concept of God. The encounter between Hammerstein and the policeman described in Chapter Two is particularly poignant as it reveals how deeply interconnected his concept of 'otherness' was to his personal philosophy;⁶⁴⁴ this faith was so integral and natural to his personal philosophy that he was surprised to realise he was in some sense religious. He alludes to a faith in humanity and a faith in the progress of humankind

⁶⁴⁴ See Chapter Two, pg. 84.

onward and upward forever, which is central to Unitarianism and later Universalism. For Hammerstein, faith is not about going to church on Sunday morning or devout religious practices, but it concerns ethical and moral relationships between human beings, and a commitment to building a better world. Attributing his positive outlook and attitude towards life to the influence of his Presbyterian paternal grandfather,⁶⁴⁵ Hammerstein maintained an optimistic outlook and an unwavering faith in the goodness of humankind. Frequently associating God and religion with goodness and love, he explicitly states that if a faith in the triumph of good over evil is a religious belief, then he is religious.⁶⁴⁶ From this it is possible to discern that Hammerstein's personal philosophy was grounded in an understanding of the goodness of humanity and a belief that there is something more powerful than humankind beyond it all. This reveals a Unitarian, or later Universalist, understanding of morality that asserts the goodness of humanity and the moral nature of humankind. A reading of Channing in Chapter Three revealed that the nature of humankind was of far greater concern for North American liberal Protestants than the doctrine of the Trinity or the divinity of Christ. These liberals posited that humankind was capable of making moral judgements, and had the capacity to progress and improve, cultivating their divine potential. The liberal Protestant influences on Hammerstein led him to understand the moral responsibility each individual has for helping God to 'perfect' the world.⁶⁴⁷

In American liberal Protestant thought, each individual is responsible for identifying moral principles and acting accordingly, and is not subject to the Calvinistic

⁶⁴⁵ Philip Hamburger "The Perfect Glow – II".

⁶⁴⁶ Hammerstein II, interview by Mike Wallace.

⁶⁴⁷ Hammerstein II, interview by Arnold Michaelis.

doctrine of irresistible grace. This means that each human being must take responsibility for their actions and their own lives. God retains a significant role in this development through awakening the moral faculties, and acts as a divine parent, guide and support. Expressions of this supportive role, which is fulfilled by the divine, are found throughout Rodgers and Hammerstein's musicals, but it is in *Carousel* that we see the most overt expression of this liberal Protestant belief in the fatherhood of God. In the pre-Broadway script, the audience encountered this parenthood directly through the heavenly characters He and She; the divine mother and father. Consistent with the Unitarian understanding of the fatherhood of God expounded by Channing, Hammerstein's divine parents support their children, in this instance the protagonist Billy, educating him morally and imparting knowledge to him in order for him to reach his potential. If we are to recognise the divine through resemblance and loving parenthood, then the example provided by He and She certainly falls within this category. This is not lost when the divine figures He and She are distilled into the Starkeeper and the Heavenly Friend. The audience remains aware of the otherworldliness of these figures, and the supportive and forgiving parental role fulfilled by the divine does not change. The divine parent provides an example for Billy, awakening his consciousness and inspiring him to be a better father. Spiritual characters such as these are found throughout the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon, supporting and guiding the wayward soul. The Mother Abbess in *The Sound of Music* functions precisely in this way, and interestingly, as with most of Hammerstein's spiritual characters, is female; it is almost as if he wants his audience to remember they need a divine mother as well as a divine father.

These divine or spiritual characters inspire a sense of responsibility in those they encounter as they teach the fundamental liberal Protestant concept of the goodness of humanity, and the responsibility of each individual; while they are supported by the divine it is ultimately the individual's responsibility to act morally and work towards reaching perfection. While Bradley has accused *Carousel* of showing traces of Pelagianism by Bradley, I would argue that Hammerstein reveals the liberal Protestant concept of human responsibility; Bigelow must play an active role in the restoration of his soul and the awakening of his moral faculties. He cannot rely on the divine characters to save him, but must show willingness to reform, and the humility to repent and act morally. Maria in *The Sound of Music* has a similar experience: she may be supported by the Mother Abbess, who represents the divine in this musical, but she must find her own path for herself as she searches for the answer to the question: 'What does God want me to do with my life?' Hammerstein uses the philosophical musical number "Climb Ev'ry Mountain" to express how difficult this search or pilgrimage will be, but at the same time stresses how important it is for each individual to discover how God wants *them* to spend *their* love. This not only taps into the individualism of Unitarianism, and the divine bestowed responsibility of each human being, but it focuses on the liberal Protestant emphasis on love and morality. When read alongside "You'll Never Walk Alone" from *Carousel*, these two prominent musical numbers reveal Hammerstein's understanding of the relationship between God and humanity. Human beings have to find their 'dream', but they are never alone, no matter how dark or lonely life becomes, they are accompanied by the ever-supporting divine parent.

Hammerstein's understanding of salvation also reveals a significant liberal Protestant influence. Unable to reconcile the eternal damnation of the protagonist in *Liliom*, his adaptation, *Carousel*, represents a Universalist understanding of salvation. The journey of Billy Bigelow through the afterlife is characteristic of the restoration period of the soul after death, which permeated Universalist thought. With the exception of the Ultra-Universalists in the mid-nineteenth century, the restoration period was a popular concept among Universalists as they sought to reconcile the doctrine of universal salvation while taking sin seriously. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, in the aftermath of the Restoration Controversy, Universalism became increasingly Arminian and an ever-growing emphasis on morality and character can be seen, although a belief in the restoration period remained. When reciting the principles of the Universalist faith Hammerstein recalls, 'salvation of character', which can be seen clearly in *Carousel*. In *Carousel*, Bigelow enters a restoration period where the divine characters make it explicit that his soul must be reconciled before he can be at rest. This reconciliation consists of a renunciation of his immoral acts, and the performance of moral actions; Bigelow must help his daughter and be the father that he never was. The Starkeeper suggests that they will wait for as long as it takes before Bigelow's soul can be restored: 'patience is as endless as time. We ken wait.'⁶⁴⁸ In contrast to the damning, judgemental God that Bigelow expects, he is greeted with patience, forgiveness, and encouragement to undergo a moral awakening.

⁶⁴⁸ Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 60.

As a result of this understanding of the goodness and potential of humankind, Hammerstein's thought follows a similar pattern to the development of liberal Protestant thought at the turn of the twentieth-century. This understanding of the goodness of humanity had a significant impact on how liberal Protestant theologians understood the responsibility human beings have to one another. Peabody's theology of the Social Question shows an increasing awareness of the reality of the human situation at the turn of the twentieth-century and provides an example of on-going attempts to make theology relevant to the lives of ordinary people. Attending The Church of the Divine Paternity in the early twentieth century, which at the time was led by two prominent Universalist social gospellers, Hammerstein's musical plays, and his social and political activism strongly suggest that he was influenced by the social gospel. His insistence that humankind could change the world and would develop onward and upward is revealed through his engagement with social questions via the philanthropic causes with which he was involved. Following in the footsteps of Peabody, Hammerstein was acutely aware of the human situation in the first half of the twentieth century. His work with the Hollywood League Against Nazism, the Writer's War Board, the NACCP, and Pearl S. Buck's Welcome House, reveal a deep concern for themes of freedom of expression, racial equality, and the dignity of human beings, which we see permeating his musical plays. Furthermore, his commitment to the United World Federalists shows an enduring commitment to the development of one world government dedicated to peace and equality. Hammerstein was deeply committed to the reality of the brotherhood of man, a prominent theme in

Universalist and social gospel thought, that transcended racial distinction, cultural differences, and social boundaries.

Peabody argued that the artist was as important as the theologian in the search for truth, and in providing answers to the Social Question faced by humanity. Influenced by liberal Protestant thought and informed by his philanthropic work, Hammerstein's musical plays provided answers to some of the most pressing concerns of humanity in twentieth century America. *Carmen Jones* is one example where we see Hammerstein's social commitment and his art meet: his work with the Writer's War Board was fundamental in the employment of African American medical personnel in the Army,⁶⁴⁹ and *Carmen Jones'* message was that the African American people were as much a part of the war effort as any other American. *South Pacific*, however, was Hammerstein's most controversial musical play, and was the one that caused the greatest stir throughout America as it explored the divisive issue of race relations. Although Hammerstein had already explored the problem of miscegenation in *Show Boat*, *South Pacific* explicitly revealed his belief in racial equality and interracial marriage. Hammerstein showed his commitment to these causes and to the brotherhood of humankind over and above racial distinctions by refusing to remove "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught" from the musical play despite serious criticism from politicians and audience members alike.

Recalling the brotherhood of man as one of the key aspects of Universalist thought, Hammerstein alludes to one of the major liberal Protestant influences that can be seen in his musical plays. The brotherhood of man had been important to

⁶⁴⁹ Lovensheimer, *Paradise Rewritten*, 211.

Unitarian and Universalist thought from the beginning, but it was not until the social gospel period that the meaning shifted from a conceptual, spiritual understanding of brotherhood to a concrete, ethical mandate from God. In order for humanity to achieve the highest human good, it was essential that individuals join together in community and develop a perfect society in which all were equal. Liberal Protestants, such as Henry Churchill King, asserted the unity of humankind over and against all differences; human beings were united as one race, unable to remain as isolated individuals, and must be treated ethically and justly within community. This concept of unity and brotherhood is fundamental to the Rodgers and Hammerstein play. In *Oklahoma!* especially, Hammerstein asserts that unity among human beings is essential for a community to develop and achieve its full potential: once differences are set aside and the state enters the Union in *Oklahoma!* the community will be rewarded.

Problems arise, however, when an individual does not fit into Hammerstein's concept of human unity. The threat of Jud Fry is important in *Oklahoma!* as he represents disorder and disunity; while his disruption continues, ultimate unity, or genuine brotherhood, cannot be achieved and society cannot progress onward and upward together. While this might appear to be a threat to diversity, which was of considerable importance to liberal Protestant theologians James Luther Adams and Henry Nelson Wieman, Hammerstein's treatment of Billy in *Carousel*, and Maria in *The Sound of Music* shows that he did respect diversity. Initially neither of these characters fit into their local community, although neither is as disruptive or threatening as Jud Fry, and both come to find their place within the brotherhood of humankind by the

end of their musical. Bigelow is an outsider, but is brought back into the community by the restoration of his soul to the divine; his repentance and redemption leads to his reconciliation not only to the divine, but also to the community. In *The Sound of Music*, Maria is not rejected from the community outright, but she most certainly does not fit into the community of nuns of which she desires to be a part. Hammerstein advocates diversity in *The Sound of Music* by teaching Maria that she must search for her own vocation; her own place in the community. Diversity is respected where it is not disruptive or dangerous; Hammerstein asserts that there is a place for every individual within the brotherhood of humankind so long as they uphold the dignity of the other and act respectfully and peacefully. If a character cannot be reconciled with the community then Hammerstein suggests society cannot progress, and removes them from the narrative.

Hammerstein's 'American' musical plays express the brotherhood of man and the unity of humankind while maintaining a certain degree of the importance of diversity within community. *Pipe Dream's* "All Kinds of People" shows Hammerstein's awareness and respect of diversity, but modern criticisms of his Asian musical plays raise concerns about how much value he truly places on diversity. These Asian plays, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *Flower Drum Song*, all assert the unity and brotherhood of humankind, which transcend racial and geographical barriers. *South Pacific* fervently asserts the essential likeness of humankind as it offers a critique of American racial prejudice and offers an answer to the social question of racial inequality and interracial relationships. Discerning that hatred and racial discrimination are learned behaviour, and not natural to humanity, Hammerstein advocates that it

can and must be unlearned in order for humanity to progress. *South Pacific* is an artistic manifestation of the beliefs he expressed in his chapter 'Dear Believer in White Supremacy'; Hammerstein is arguing for the essential likeness of human beings and the overriding brotherhood of humankind. Hammerstein not only identifies the predominant social problem in 1940s America, but he also provides a solution to the problem; the re-education of white Americans. The innocence of his protagonist Nellie and her complete lack of awareness concerning her racist beliefs come as a shock to the character and the audience. This allows Hammerstein to argue that in most cases racism is subversive and often taken for granted; the use of Nellie in revealing this avoids a confrontation between the musical play and the audience, allowing audience members to place themselves into the narrative without feeling accused. Using the accessible trope of love between human beings, Hammerstein creates two sympathetic relationships that are threatened by racial prejudice and instils sympathy among the audience for the tragic relationship between Cable and Liat, while providing hope in the relationship between Nellie and Emile de Becque.

While *South Pacific* is a play of difference and contrasts, its message is that these can all be overlooked because human beings have an essential likeness and are united as one. *The King and I* suggests that when these differences are not ethical, in this instance with regards to slavery, humankind can influence one another positively, and rather than dominating other cultures the West can awaken the East's social consciousness. This of course was of vital importance in the context of the original performance as is revealed by Klein's research in *Cold War Orientalism*. As America's role in the world changed during the Cold War these Asian musicals were important in

helping Americans gain a sense of identity in an ever changing world, and to explore how to engage with new cultures. Unity and oneness became important because it helped to alleviate fears of that which was other and asserted that the 'others' were 'just like Americans'. While McConachie, Wolf, and Most have argued that this was to the detriment of genuine diversity, Hammerstein played an important role in the first steps of racial acceptance and assimilation. By modern standards there are problems in each of these musicals that cannot be ignored: the silencing of Liat, the Westernisation of the Siamese court, the stereotyping of Asian characters in *Flower Drum Song*; however, when read in their context, each of these musicals was important in identifying, addressing, and offering solutions to social questions which we still see traces of in the world today. They continue to provide an important affirmation of human unity in a divisive and polarised world, and also act as a springboard for asking serious questions about how we can maintain genuine diversity without losing sight of our human unity.

All of Hammerstein's musical plays in this period reveal his faith in the liberal Protestant principle of the progress of humankind onward and upward forever, which is rooted in the essential goodness of humankind, and the human capacity to achieve perfection. After the social gospel this took an increasingly ethical and communal slant as the route to human perfection was seen to be through the perfection of human society. Hammerstein's musical plays reveal both of these aspects of the progress of humankind. The universal message of all of his musical plays is that the individual, usually represented by the protagonist, must pursue their own path and take responsibility for their own life whilst being provided support by a spiritual figure; in

this we see the development of the individual as their moral conscience is awakened and developed throughout the course of their musical play. This development does not occur in isolation and the protagonist must find their place within wider society. Community is of the utmost importance in all of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals as Hammerstein asserts the brotherhood of humankind and our moral responsibility to one another.

The liberal Protestant influences on Hammerstein from his maternal family and the time spent at The Church of the Divine Paternity had a significant impact on his musical plays. With the exception of the leadership of Jesus, each aspect he attributes to the Universalist faith can be seen informing his personal philosophy and his musical plays circa 1943-1959. We see an unwavering faith in the goodness and potential of humanity, a belief in something that lies beyond humankind, and confidence in the progression of humanity onward and upward forever. Often branded an idealist, Hammerstein showed a commitment to improving the world, but he was aware of the responsibility human beings have to conceive a better world and then work to create it. There is evidence in his understanding of the fatherhood of God revealed in his musical plays that Hammerstein believed there was something beyond; something or someone divine, who supported and helped human beings achieve this goal of perfection. It would seem that it was his honest conviction that humankind 'will never walk alone', but that they are united in brotherhood and supported by the divine.

Theology and Popular Culture

The musical plays of Rodgers and Hammerstein are important contributors to the engagement of theology with popular culture as they ask serious questions about what it means to be human. Any doubts that musical theatre does not have a place within the popular culture bracket are refuted by the powerful influence of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical in America and in Britain. Christina Klein and John Bush Jones' research shows how the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein fed into the American psyche at the time of conception as they answered political and social questions: both scholars reveal how these musicals helped shape American identity in a rapidly changing global context. Bush Jones illuminates how *Oklahoma!* played an important role in asserting American identity, and promoting values of freedom, liberty and democracy in a war-time environment. It reassured the American people, those leaving for war and those staying behind, that they were all united as Americans, and part of a country that was worth defending and fighting for. Klein shows how Rodgers and Hammerstein's 'Asian' musicals played a vital role in helping Americans understand U. S. expansion in Asia and how to accept and interact with different cultures that they had never come into contact with before at home or abroad. *Flower Drum Song* played a significant role artistically and practically as it not only tackled issues of Chinese-American assimilation, but the diversity of the cast symbolised a diverse and assimilated America. While Rodgers and Hammerstein have received criticism for undermining diversity with a cast of actors 'pretending' to be Asian, or for asserting that Asian people are 'just like Americans' under the skin, the unified humanity that they portrayed was an important influence in uniting an increasingly diverse America.

These musical plays helped to shape American identity and provided a safe place where American audiences could explore their relationships with the East, and also with each other. Indicative of Schofield Clark and Romanowski's theologies of popular culture, which place tremendous value on the role narrative plays in popular culture as it challenges, confronts and binds human beings together, these musical plays used narrative to answer serious political and social questions that were being asked by American people in the first half of the twentieth century. The most important social question that Hammerstein engaged with concerned racial equality and his commitment to improving race relations can be seen throughout his work. While *South Pacific* is the musical play that most will turn to when looking for an example of his message of racial equality, there is evidence of this commitment in many of his other musicals from as early as *Show Boat*: even *Flower Drum Song's* chorus number "Chop Suey" contains a reference to the school-integration issue that was consuming America in the 1950s.⁶⁵⁰

Continuing on the theme of narrative, De Gruchy's declaration that: 'Stories told with honesty, like all genuine works of art, break open reality, helping us to see things differently, to see ourselves differently and hopefully to live differently',⁶⁵¹ touches upon something that is characteristic of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play. The honesty with which *South Pacific* was told was particularly powerful as it revealed the inherent racism prevalent in America, and asked the audience to question their concept of humanity and race. This broke open reality; it revealed the

⁶⁵⁰ Bush Jones, *Our Musicals*, 158.

⁶⁵¹ De Gruchy, *Confessions*, 7.

underlying problems of racism, and asserted that all human beings must be treated with dignity and equality in the hope that humanity would improve and progress. It encouraged a cultural conversation that is evident in the letters written to Hammerstein by Lieutenant McWhorter, the newspapers and magazine articles, accusations of being preachy from critics, and most significantly, the political debate it stirred in Georgia. In all of these musicals Hammerstein is asking serious questions about what it means to be human: how do we relate to one another ethically displaying aspects of love and understanding? The fact that he provides explicit answers to these questions is why he was often regarded as ‘preachy’, irritating audiences and critics alike; musical plays were for entertainment not moral lessons.⁶⁵²

Hammerstein’s lyrics and libretti not only challenged political and social norms, but they asked serious human questions about existence. The value of this thesis is that it exposes the root of the deep questions Hammerstein asks throughout his musical plays concerning the nature of humanity, existence, and our relationship with God. While my research reveals the liberal Protestant influences on Hammerstein that informed his musical plays, no musical written by Hammerstein could be regarded as explicitly Christian in nature. With the exception of *Carousel*, the content of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s musical play is neither explicitly confessional nor is it explicitly Christian. While there are significant liberal Protestant influences on Hammerstein that can be read throughout his lyrics and libretti, there is no overriding sense that it was his intention to convert non-believers to faith. What can be seen is the effort of a man who had a tremendous faith in goodness and humanity conceiving a better world, and

⁶⁵² Norton, “Some Lovely Music and Some Errors”, *Carousel* Scrapbook.

encouraging his audience to join him in making this imagined world a reality. In this, Hammerstein's musical plays can be seen as examples of Elaine Graham's definition of popular culture as theology as practice rather than theology as doctrine.⁶⁵³ The musical theatre audience consists of believers and non-believers who come together to explore what it means to be human outside of the church context. Graham argues that through popular culture human beings 'experience themselves as creative, moral, and purposeful beings',⁶⁵⁴ and the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein certainly provide a forum for this to occur. Inspired by liberal Protestant influences, Hammerstein confronts the morality and purpose of humanity, inviting his audiences to question the nature of humanity and divinity.

The continuing relevance of these questions is undisputable as human beings continue to explore existential questions and seek ways in which to understand the reality they find themselves in. These musicals may have first been produced in the 1940s and the 1950s in America, but the relevance of some continue to this day. The largely unpopular rewrite of *Flower Drum Song* and protests against cultural stereotyping in the original have rendered it irrelevant, or even damaging, by twenty-first century standards, but *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, and *The Sound of Music* have a continuing influence that is irrefutable. The popularity of revival performances, amateur productions, the *Sing-Along-A Sound of Music*, and the enduring love for the film adaptation of *The Sound of Music* in particular, reveal a continuing relevance stemming from a combination of the excellent craftsmanship of

⁶⁵³ Graham, 'What We Make of the World', 66.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid 69

Rodgers and Hammerstein, and the enduring themes of human equality and love. Having identified the liberal Protestant influences on Hammerstein's lyrics and libretti there is much work that could be done investigating how audiences receive these musicals and how they actually use them in their everyday lives as it is significant that musical numbers from Rodgers and Hammerstein musical plays have been used in Church worship, funerals, and solemn national occasions.

As popular cultural art forms, the musical plays of Rodgers and Hammerstein explore what it means to be human, our relationships with one another, and our relationship with God. They ask serious questions about the reality of human existence and offer perspectives on religious, ethical, and political issues. Theologians engaging with popular culture are keen to point to the role popular art forms play in helping human beings to understand and shape their lives through the use of narrative. This role can be clearly identified in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play. Having ascertained the liberal Protestant influence on Hammerstein, I have revealed the foundations of his personal philosophy, which informed his philanthropic work and artistic output. Hammerstein's musical plays are not confessional, but they carry a significant liberal Protestant message informed by the Unitarian and Universalist understanding of humankind and the relationship between human beings and God. Each is an example of theology as practice; a practical exploration of what it means to be human and the ethical mandate we all have to treat each other with respect and dignity. Relentlessly asserting the goodness of humanity and each individual's responsibility to act morally, Hammerstein's musicals in this period display an unwavering belief in the progress of humankind onward and upward forever.

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I was granted permission to access the Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, which is held at the Library of Congress by The Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization and Andrew Boose Ltd. At the time of submission this collection is held in two parts; the Original Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, and the New Oscar Hammerstein II Collection. These collections are presently uncatalogued, although Amy Asch has created a helpful preliminary inventory to aid in the search for documents. These archives are the source for all correspondence, drafts, rehearsal scripts, speeches, memorial services, newspaper clippings, and other unpublished material for this study. When referencing material from this archive, I have identified the document, the date (when possible), the collection, and the box or scrapbook that it can be found in.

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