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The Emergence of the Integrated Musical: Otto Harbach, Rhetorical Theory, and the Cinema

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<T>In 1920, Oscar Hammerstein II—fresh from the modest success of his debut musical *Always You*—was eager to write the show for Frank Tinney that his uncle Arthur was to produce. As Hugh Fordin wrote, “Arthur, confident of his nephew’s ability but aware that he needed to learn more about his craft, brought in Otto Harbach to collaborate on the book and lyrics.”¹ The two men joined forces on that show—*Tickle Me*—and went on to write such classics as *Rose-Marie* (1924, Rudolf Friml), *Sunny* (1925, Jerome Kern), and *The Desert Song* (1926, Sigmund Romberg). After working with Harbach, Hammerstein would venture on his own and write *Show Boat*, *Oklahoma!*, and be credited as having ushered in a new era of musical theatre, chiefly defined by his success at “integration.” As literary scholar Scott McMillin writes, the conventional idea of integration is that “all elements of a show—plot, character, song, dance, orchestration, and setting—should blend together into a unity, a seamless whole.”² In popular commentary, this development is often attributed to Rodgers & Hammerstein’s 1943 musical *Oklahoma!*, as seen in John Kenrick’s claim that “[t]hroughout the show, every word, number, and dance step was an organic part of the storytelling process. Instead of interrupting the dialogue, each song and dance continued it. For the first time, everything flowed in an unbroken narrative line from overture to curtain call.”³ Other historians and critics are more tempered,

touting the success of *Oklahoma!* while insisting that its integration must be seen as part of a broader historical arc. Andrew Lamb, for example, celebrates *Oklahoma!* by noting that it was the realization of “[w]hat Kern and Gershwin had experimented with as far back as the 1920s—a piece that was not just a collection of catchy numbers, but a fusion of drama, song, and dance.”⁴ In a 1962 article, Stanley Green notes that the creators of *Oklahoma!* “blended all the theatrical arts with such skill tha[t] many accepted it as a revolution in the theatre,” but he argues that their accomplishment was actually “more evolutionary than revolutionary. Rather than inaugurating any trend toward the well-integrated show, what it did achieve was a perfection in technique of a development that had been going on ever since the second decade of the century.”⁵ Citing the Princess Theatre musicals of Bolton, Wodehouse, and Kern as the earliest examples of integration. However, this lineage goes back further than Hammerstein, further than Gershwin, further than Kern. To understand the history of the idea of “integration” in musical theatre, we must go back to the artist whose 1910 musical *Madame Sherry*, hailed as the “musical comedy rage of a generation,” was celebrated by critics for the way in which its “entertaining elements” were “cleverly interwoven into a consistent whole,”⁶ for the innovative ways that “the songs, lyrics, and ensemble numbers . . . are directly related to the story of the comedy, and there is a plausible excuse for every musical interruption.”⁷ That artist—who not only developed an innovative approach to musical theatre but also articulated a coherent theory of it—was Otto Harbach.

Contemporary theatre histories tend to pass quickly over Harbach, yet earlier commentaries often celebrated his talent for writing musicals as a “consistent whole”: Lawton Mackall, for example, boasted in 1926 that in Harbach’s shows, “songs are not just ‘pinned on’ the story; they *belong in* the story.”⁸ In a similar vein, a 1935 magazine article opined that

Harbach “has probably done more than any other individual to change the existent technique of musical comedy production,” arguing that he had known as early as 1907 that musical comedy needed to “grow up” and transcend the inevitable formula of “a weak, small plot, whose sequence was broken when it offered a favourable opportunity for a song or a dance.”⁹ Even Hammerstein said as much in his 1949 book *Lyrics*, acknowledging Harbach’s achievement: criticizing the librettists of early musical comedy, Hammerstein wrote that most were “hacks and gag men who extended the tradition of ignominy attached to musical comedy books.” However, he continues, “[t]here were, on the other hand, a few patient authors who kept on writing well-constructed musical plays, most of which were successful, and they continued to give their best with very little chance of being praised for their efforts. Among these was my dear friend and erstwhile tutor, Otto Harbach,” whom Hammerstein describes as “the best play analyst I have ever met.”¹⁰ Indeed, Hammerstein credits Harbach with having taught him “most of the precepts I have already stated in these notes”—precepts that include, for example, the classic Hammerstein dictum that “[t]here are few things in life of which I am certain, but I am sure of this one thing, that the song is the servant of the play, that it is wrong to write first what you think is an attractive song and then try to wedge it into a story” and his preference for songs when “they are required by a situation or a characterization in a story.”¹¹

Given Harbach’s impressive theatrical resume—which included forty-three musicals on Broadway, among them *No, No, Nanette*, *Roberta*, and *The Cat and the Fiddle*¹²—and the uniqueness of his contribution, Hammerstein writes that “[i]t is almost unbelievable that a man with this record of achievement received so little recognition.”¹³ This remains as true today as it was in 1949 when Hammerstein wrote it, with most histories of musical theatre affording Harbach only a cursory tip of the hat.¹⁴ To remedy this oversight, I explore Harbach’s revolution

in musical dramaturgy by considering three principal questions: What did Harbach set out to achieve? What intellectual traditions influenced his dramaturgical innovations? And what prepared the audiences of his time to apprehend and desire this new approach to musical comedy? By situating Harbach's work within a broader cultural context, I show why the audiences of around 1910 became newly invested in the narrative dimensions of music and why musical theatre—which had long relished its fragmented structure of interpolations and diversions—began to embrace aesthetic principles of organicism.

Born Otto Hauerbach in Salt Lake City in 1873, Harbach began working in the theatre after several years in academia and a brief detour in advertising. In Harbach's first two shows on the Broadway stage—*Three Twins* (1908) and *Bright Eyes* (1910)—he contributed the lyrics, while Karl Hoschna composed the music and Charles Dickson wrote the book. However, attributing the failure of *Bright Eyes* to its book, Harbach set out to pen his own libretto in *Madame Sherry*, a show that garnered critical and commercial success. One critic, reviewing the Chicago tryout in 1910, wrote that the show “is a full measure of bright, tuneful and immensely entertaining elements, cleverly interwoven into a consistent whole.”¹⁵ This claim of “interwoven into a consistent whole” is precisely the claim of integration, suggesting that the “tuneful” elements—the songs and dances—have been braided into an integrated totality. Another critic remarked of *Madame Sherry*:

<EXT>Here is a farce with a wealth of good songs welded into its structure.

Nothing is malapropos; even an Irish ditty of seemingly conventional type has its justification. The character and situations give rise to the tuneful outbursts, as well as to the humorous entanglements. The craftsmanship in lyric farcicality is to be applauded; it invests the musical stage with a sense of artistic self-respect.¹⁶

<T>The overarching narrative strength of the piece was also touted, with the *New York Times* writing that “the plot plays a much more important part than it usually does in an American musical comedy,”¹⁷ while the *Brooklyn Life* critic wrote that *Madame Sherry* “is almost unique among musical comedies in having a plot which survives to the end.”¹⁸ Another New York critic agreed, writing that a “marked difference between ‘Madame Sherry’ and the present-day musical comedy is that the new play has a real plot,” adding that “of course, we do not care to see musical comedies overburdened with plots, as they are likely to become stupid, but an ingenuous story, containing so many humorous complications, is at all times welcome.”¹⁹ The realistic quality of the drama was also widely noted. A 1910 souvenir music book of *Madame Sherry* notes the lifelike qualities of its characters: “In the perspectives of the land of make-believe, the people of ‘Madame Sherry’ are real and their experiences logical.” Discussing Theophilus, a somewhat oblivious collector of antiquities, the program notes that the “world is joyously filled with Theophiluses,” as the role “presents eccentricities and qualities of character that are instantly recognizable as things of comic truth despite his eccentric oddity and his many uproarious idiosyncrasies.” The part of Edward is similarly said to “continue its bright transfer from life to the stage of characters vital with comic life,” while the character of Yvonne “embodies the attitude of countless millions of other Yvones of all ages.”²⁰

These reactions suggest that Harbach succeeded in his quest to end the “battle between the story and the score of a musical play” that he felt had infected musical comedy: “Rehearsals,” he wrote, “were often a tug of war between book and music, in which music won.”²¹ In other words, the book—the story—was given short shrift, while the musical elements, untethered to the plot, were given free rein. He sought to approach musicals differently, claiming to have pursued three goals when he began writing in 1906: “to put more sense into the book of a

musical play; to use no vocal numbers without logical motivation; and to make the introduction of music a natural part of the action.”²² Thus, Harbach aimed to construct libretti that depended more on realistic situations and plausible human motivations; to write songs that served the broader narrative; and to naturalize the act of singing and dancing through subtler introductions.²³ He was especially interested in the narrative dimensions of song, arguing that numbers “have got to be so put where they’ll do the most good and where they’ll help to tell the story,” arguing elsewhere that when a song was over, it should be “as though a scene had taken place rather than a song.”²⁴ As he put it, “I had gotten into the mood of wanting things done as legitimately in a musical play as though it were a straight play.”²⁵

Harbach complained that critics “usually didn’t give a damn whether they liked the book or not because they made fun of the book. The whole theory was to kick the book around.” However, he wrote that his goal was to write “a new kind of musical, in which there was a serious book, which I wanted to be believed.”²⁶ Indeed, this desire for “belief” was something that Harbach termed “sincerity,” which he defined as “a good reason for the number when it came.”²⁷ (591). Harbach also identified this approach to musicality as the reason for his reputation for fixing troubled shows: “I had gotten known as the greatest play doctor. And my play doctoring depending on getting rhyme and reason into the why and wherefor of the music in the play. To try to find some reason why we should have a number here.”²⁸

Harbach sometimes used architectural metaphors to explain how he provided the structure of the musical play. The scenario of the play, he argued, was the “blueprint” that determines whether the house is “a mansion . . . a cute, little lovers’ nest, or . . . a church.” Significantly, he argued, builders don’t “start to gather brick and mortar and start to put it up until architects have spent hours and maybe days and months on the plan.” Similarly, once the

bookwriters know exactly the structure of the show—which he analogized to “how big the bedrooms are going to be, and where this will be, and so on”²⁹—then the musicians can begin work, since

<EXT>in this scenario you have probably figured out where the windows are going to be. If it’s a church, the most beautiful part of a church, we’ll say, are the beautiful stained glass windows. There are numbers . . . that have got to be so put where they’ll do the most good and where they’ll help to tell the story, the atmosphere of the church. . . . But the building, which nobody ever notices, is what went down underneath.³⁰

<T>Harbach’s argument about dramatic structure thus privileged the scenario—the narrative core—in a way that was truly exceptional for the time. In this metaphor of architectural planning and integrity, Harbach understands the general narrative as the play’s foundation, which in turn determines the structural relationship between the elements of the drama and the musical episodes. Significantly, the songs, though seemingly decorative, also have a strong functional purpose: they “help to tell the story” and are thus extensions of the narrative.

The premise that songs should develop from the narrative was remarkable in an era when interpolation—the practice of inserting songs by other writers into shows, of shuffling songs in and out of shows to generate novelty, satisfy performer and audience demands, and sell sheet music—was the dominant practice. An article in a 1908 trade magazine, for example, observed that “It would be impossible to outline the hundreds of interpolations used in productions throughout the country. We can only dwell upon a few of the more important ones, in which the songs interpolated, are beyond question, the genuine song successes of the entire show.” After detailing various interpolated songs then on the boards, the author concludes, “So we might go

indefinitely along the line of every production of consequence on the road.”³¹ Even shows by distinguished composers were subject to the practice: one review of *Nearly a Hero*—also from 1908, the year Harbach debuted on Broadway—reported that “the book is by George Grant, and the music by Reginald de Koven, but neither name appears on the programme, the reason given to those in the know being that both author and composer objected to the alterations and interpolations made during the rehearsals by the stage manager and the star.”³² When reviewing shows, newspaper critics regularly urged that songs be interpolated to improve a show’s variety or rhythm. By comparison, Harbach’s philosophy reveals a much greater commitment to narrative, understanding it as the impulse that must determine every element of the presentation—including, significantly, the music.

He also compared his musical theatre to a living tree. “The old, stereotyped musical,” he said, “hung its numbers on the plot the way you hang balls on a Christmas tree. And the Christmas tree is usually dead.” On the other hand, “Good musical comedy results when the music grows out of the plot, as the living blossoms grow on the branches of a living tree.”³³ Elsewhere, he used the tree analogy to argue that a play must “have roots for all the motivations of the characters, and a trunk—it’s got to be about one subject—and then it blossoms out in leaves, dialogue, or maybe some flowers which become music.” However, above all, these leaves and flowers had to emerge “out of the inside rather than to be like a Christmas tree with a lot of ornaments put on it, which is what happens very often when you try to write a musical play. You kill the play; you kill the tree. And a lot of entertainment on it.”³⁴ This organic metaphor again insists that the blossoming songs find their roots in the motivations of the characters, that music and dialogue must be the external manifestations—the motivated expressions—of an internal unity.

These aesthetic ambitions appear all the more striking in the context of 1910 musical comedy, dominated as it was by simple scenarios that invited musical interpolations. In fact, many musical comedies were a hybrid of play and revue, with a cursory narrative accommodating a disjointed assemblage of songs, dances, and routines. In the month before *Madame Sherry* opened, for example, the Casino Theatre offered *Up and Down Broadway*, a show that billed itself as “a more or less incoherent resume of current events, theatrical and otherwise,”³⁵ with one critic opining that while the show possessed “songs, dances, processions, effects” and “skits,” “the whole . . . is rather poor stuff, and at present scarcely contains sufficient backbone to carry it very far.”³⁶ In this context, we can better understand why one reviewer would praise *Madame Sherry* for having “a plot that runs throughout the three acts and is not lost in vaudeville turns.”³⁷

Indeed, in contrast to this world of slapdash construction, Harbach envisioned and later articulated a new vision of musical comedy. What was the source of this revolutionary idea? Harbach gives us a clue when he mentions that “I expected to be a teacher all my life, I suppose. But the kind of work that I’d be doing up there kind of led me into the theater.”³⁸ Professors, take heart: a syllabus once changed the course of musical theatre history! So what was Harbach teaching? His field of expertise was the oratorical philosophy of Charles Wesley Emerson, whose “contributions to acting theory in America and to expression in general,” James McTeague writes, “were unique and in many ways prophetic of certain modern ideas concerning acting.”³⁹ It was precisely through Harbach’s deep training in Emersonian oratory that he developed his theory of dramaturgical structure—and thus, the intellectual pedigree of musical theatre integration can be traced to nineteenth-century philosophies of elocution.

The influence of oratorical culture on Harbach cannot be overstated: he once identified as the highlight of his life his 1895 victory in the distinguished Inter-state Oratorical Association championship in Galesburg, Illinois. Appearing before five judges, including William Jennings Bryan, Harbach delivered “The Hero of Compromise,”⁴⁰ an oration whose success was hailed with a bonfire and the blasting of cannons. “That night, I really struck twelve,” he recalled years later. “All the rest has been just epilogue.”⁴¹ Harbach’s decisive victory followed years of oratorical training. Though he grew up poor, his father arranged—partly through barter—for his children to attend the Collegiate Institute school in Salt Lake City. There, Harbach received a comprehensive liberal arts education that included, among many other subjects, “what was then called ‘oratoricals,’” as he later recollected. “Once a month every pupil had to learn a recitation that he did before the whole school. . . . I liked that because I was pretty good.”⁴² When his father lost his job, he planned to quit school and seek employment, but his principal, a graduate of Knox College, intervened, insisting that he would help Harbach make it to Knox College, which had a distinguished oratory program. Upon enrolling at Knox, he recalled, “I went in for public speaking, my teacher wanted me to be a minister because I was pretty good at elocution and I remember I wanted to wear a big black hat and a string tie so I could look like William Jennings Bryan, the foremost spellbinder of the time.”⁴³ In his years at Knox, Harbach would win numerous prizes in English and declamation, culminating in his triumph at the renowned Inter-state Oratorical Contest.

After graduating, Harbach moved to Whitman College, where he was named the professor of “rhetoric, elocution, and oratory” and taught English literature as well. Among Whitman’s 1895 course offerings was Harbach’s course in elocution, which, according to the school’s catalog, focused on the “psychological development of expression.” Further, another of

Harbach's courses is noted as following the "Emersonian system now used in such schools as the Emerson school of oratory, Boston, and the Columbia school of oratory, Chicago."⁴⁴ Indeed, it is precisely the "psychological development of expression" of the Emersonian system—this interpretive and literary method that Harbach spent years studying and teaching—that leads to his revolutionary work in musical theatre.

The Emersonian method of "psychological development of expression" grew out of the significant nineteenth-century interest in public lectures and recitations, facilitated by the burgeoning movements of the lyceum and the chautauqua. In a time when dramatic productions were sometimes viewed with suspicion, "readers," as they were often called, presented not only speeches, but also oral interpretations of prose, poetry, and dramatic works. As oratory grew more popular, prominent lecturers began to develop theoretical and pedagogical approaches to elocution.⁴⁵ The "psychological development of expression" refers to a broad trend in elocutionary theory in this period that incorporated popular psychological ideas. Influenced by Charles Darwin and William James, elocutionary theorists—foremost among them Charles Wesley Emerson—moved away from mechanical theories of vocal or gestural production and toward an approach based on the psychological foundations of speech. As Mary Margaret Robb noted, "Under the influence of an interest in psychology, elocution seemed destined to become the 'art of expression,' the means of communicating the inner thoughts and feelings."⁴⁶ In other words, this school of oratorical thought formulated that the mind possesses a coherent *inner* thought or sensibility that would then be *expressed* by the body. As Mary A. Blood and Ida Morey Riley write in the introduction to their *Psychological Development of Expression*, "Expression has to do with the whole man. In this art thoughts, emotions and purposes form the content, while the body and voice present the form. A noble body and a beautiful voice can only

express what the mind can comprehend and feel.”⁴⁷ The idea of subordinating a “noble body” and “beautiful voice” to the mind represents precisely the aesthetic hierarchy that Harbach was cultivating in musical theatre. No longer would a flimsy narrative cede the stage to songs that were about their own delectations—or that conjured emotion, if they did so at all, only through a range of conventional techniques rather than through the psychological motivations of the character. Instead, the joys of voice and body would become servants of a cerebral narrative, the expressions of the “inner thoughts and feelings”; or, as Harbach put it in his tree analogy, all of the branches and flowers of the tree emanate from the trunk—the “one subject” in a musical comedy—with its roots in the actions of the characters. In a similar vein, Jessie Eldridge Southwick observed that “a person is never graceful without harmonious response of all agents to one impulse.”⁴⁸

Harbach was obviously most influenced by the Emersonian emphasis on the singular and unifying “inner force,” to quote Southwick, that would generate the outer manifestations.⁴⁹ This significance of internal unity is clear in Emerson’s insistence that “like every organism, every true work of art has organic unity; it represents a unit of thought, the whole, made up of essential parts. Each part is a part of the whole, because in its own way it reflects the whole. The perfect unity of an organism or of a work of art results from the service rendered by each part to every other part.”⁵⁰ Understanding expression in this way prompted a revolutionary mode of training speakers, which Harbach practiced in his classroom at Whitman—and which, as he noted, led directly to his work in musical comedy. That Harbach would find Emerson useful outside the domain of oratory is unsurprising, as Renshaw noted that the “principles [of Emerson’s *Evolution of Expression*] were applied not only to oral interpretation, but to voice training, gesture, public speaking, and the allied arts of singing and piano playing as they were taught in

the early days of the school.”⁵¹ The Emersonian model of oral interpretation thus posits an authorial unity, a singularity of vision, an aesthetic harmony—an organicism that has obvious parallels to Harbach’s desire to bring all the elements of musical theatre under the sign of narrative. As Emerson wrote, “The pupil must live with his author, see through his eyes, think with his intellect, feel with his heart, and choose with his will, picturing to himself every scene, putting himself in the place of every character described.”⁵²

Just as Harbach was troubled by musical numbers imposed without regard for the narrative, numbers that generated their effects through superficial singing techniques instead of reference to the plot or dramatic experience of the characters, the Emerson approach found the more conventional approaches of formalized voice and gesture deeply problematic, as Southwick noted: “mechanical exercise of the muscles is merely the physical effort to execute the formal dictates of the mind without necessarily experiencing the reality either through imagination or feeling; and people who have followed the school of mechanical technique have often debated the point as to the need of experiencing any emotion in order to effectively move others.” This kind of “superficial representation inhibits and supplants the natural and spontaneous expression of real inner life” and lends itself to the “exhibition of skill in performance with no psychological force behind it but vanity and ambition.”⁵³ By contrast, the Emerson approach emphasized the “development of the inner force as the producer of the outer forms.”⁵⁴ To use Southwick’s phraseology, Harbach’s musical theatre similarly sought to replace “superficial representation[s]” and the narrative adulterations that performers and producers, through their “vanity and ambition,” visited upon musical comedy.

After teaching the Emersonian approach for several years, Harbach ventured to New York City in 1902 to undertake graduate study in English at Columbia University. He planned to

complete a dissertation on a topic in which he recalled being “very much interested . . . a sort of a psychological approach to public speaking and reading.”⁵⁵ While he abandoned his plans to write a dissertation on the topic, it was precisely that subject—on which he expounded in the rhetoric classrooms in Walla Walla, Washington—that led to the dramatically ambitious work he pursued on Broadway. The remarkable intellectual history of integration in the American musical theatre, therefore, links the dramatic developments of Rodgers and Hammerstein with nineteenth-century public speaking.

Significantly, the rhetoric of “integration” has been called into question in recent years, as scholars have complicated the definition, motivations, and plausibility of integration.⁵⁶ My goal in this essay is not to analyze Harbach’s works to suggest that he succeeded or failed at integration, but rather to contribute to the history of musical theatre aesthetics by articulating Harbach’s aims, the aesthetic roots of those aims, and the broader cultural context that structured his audience’s desire for—and apprehension of—his dramatic innovations. That said, we can get a sense of how Harbach’s training influenced his own work by looking at his 1910 musical *Madame Sherry*, the first for which he wrote both the book and lyrics—the one hailed for having “entertaining elements, cleverly interwoven into a consistent whole.” The curtain opens to reveal a dance studio in which a teacher, Lulu, is giving lessons in “aesthetic dancing.” She sings her lesson:

<PTY>Every little movement has a meaning all its own,
Every thought and feeling by a posture can be shown,
And every love thought that comes a’stealing o’er your being
Must be revealing

All its sweetness in some appealing

Little gesture, all, all its own.⁵⁷

<T>Indeed, the very first idea introduced in *Madame Sherry* is precisely the Emersonian idea that the job of expression is to externalize an internal thought. Significantly, it is *dance*—the principal signifier of the bodily pleasures of musical comedy—that is here subordinated to the narrative, as “every little movement” is imbued with an underlying “thought and feeling.” And crucially, the song is introduced diegetically—in other words, explicitly as a song being sung by the dance teacher in the world of the play—fulfilling Harbach’s ambition to endow songs with “logical motivation.”

Further, the conceit is developed throughout the piece. After the initial scene with her students in the dance studio, Lulu later pretends to give an individual lesson to Leonard, a man with whom she has been surreptitiously having a romantic liaison. To him, she sings the song, with the same chorus but a fitting verse: “Just let your soul inflame / Your arms and legs grow eloquent / And inner thoughts sublime / Express themselves with temperament / While you are keeping time” (17). The theme is further developed in the play, as its strains are played under two climactic moments. When the orchestra plays it during the climax of the first act—after Edward has been surprised by a visit from his Uncle Theophilus—Yvonne “*dances about him in an entrancing way, giving him sweet little caresses, but very innocently. . . . At the climax, he suddenly rises, snatches her in his arms and is about to kiss her. Then watches himself and lets go*” (38). During the second act, the pair are once again tiptoeing around their passions, but they are angry at each other. The stage directions indicate that “*suddenly mandolins . . . start the refrain of the ‘Love Dance’ [“Every Little Movement”]. She begins to relent. . . . By degrees she dances nearer and nearer until finally she is back of him and repeats the dance which ended Act*

I except that now her actions have taken on a deeper and more womanly significance” (59). The play also makes a wry reference to the theme, when various farcical circumstances require a character to play the piano—despite not knowing how. As comedic fate would have it, the piano in question turns out to be a player piano. Edward subtly mimes playing the instrument, prompting his uncle to declare, “Such marvelous technique” (50). When Yvonne notes that it’s Mendelssohn’s “Wedding March” being played, the uncle remarks, “Look at the movement of that body. Every little movement has a meaning all its own” (50).

This kind of internal development, with the song accreting significance through the course of the dramatic action, implicates song within a network of thematic coherence—cultivating the sense that the music is serving a narrative purpose and thereby prompting a different kind of hermeneutic engagement in the audience. (Indeed, one review noted that even the melody alone of “Every Little Movement” becomes a narrative device over the course of the play: “Presently words are not necessary—a few notes and everyone knows that the music is saying: ‘Every little movement has a meaning all its own.’”)⁵⁸ Thus, the two threads of Emersonian elocutionary theory are knitted together in *Madame Sherry*: the theme of “Every Little Movement”—itself about the psychological development of expression—is repeated and developed throughout the play, giving a sense of internal unity and the sense that we are following a coherent entity in which the various parts relate to a whole, as orchestrated by a single governing vision. It is worth mentioning in this context that while Harbach’s innovations still took place within the confines of the absurd farces of the period, a 1910 souvenir program noted that “the concession is general that never before in a libretto have the same captivating elements been so delightfully blended.”⁵⁹

This eagerness for the “delightfully blended” work by Harbach is notable. While opera had a longstanding investment in questions of organicism, the popular musical theatre had no such pretense to narrative coherence—since its songs were principally elements of pleasure. This is precisely why interpolation was so prevalent at the time: the primary function of song and dance was to delight audiences through humor, wordplay, and the exhibitionist display of bodies; so whatever narrative there might have been—if there were any—was not endangered by the addition or removal of songs. However, audiences began to change around 1910, eagerly embracing Harbach’s narrative emphasis that posited a different relationship to music. This leads to an important historical question: While Harbach’s training in elocutionary theory gave him the conceptual apparatus to imagine a new form of musical storytelling, why did audiences receive his novel approach so warmly?

This transformation in the public’s expectations regarding musical narrative can be explained by the broader context of popular entertainment around 1910. To get a sense of the context, we might look to a 1910 newspaper article that announced the program of San José’s Theatre José. Promising that “Electra will do stunts with high tension electric currents” and “Herold, man of wonderful physical development, will lift weights and display control of various muscles,” the vaudeville bill also noted that “these numbers will be strengthened by musical selections from the orchestra and motion pictures of the highest standard. Each week an opera of the latest origin will be given. ‘Madame Sherry’ will be the rendition next week.”⁶⁰ Here, we see—on the very same bill—*Madame Sherry* juxtaposed with motion pictures alongside music from the orchestra. This vaudeville bill merely condenses the broader cultural economy of the time, when theatre and film were shown as part of the same evening and when the two media were influencing each other. And indeed, the musical accompaniment of film—precisely what

preceded *Madame Sherry* on the San José vaudeville program—would influence how audiences began to develop new expectations regarding musical storytelling.

This evolution of musical narrative might be said to begin with the “illustrated song,” a protofilmic entertainment that was a staple of turn-of-the-century vaudeville houses—like the one in San José that featured *Madame Sherry*. Illustrated songs involved an “illustrator” singing a popular ballad, accompanied by a pianist, as exhibitors simultaneously projected a series of colored lantern slides that portrayed the scenes described in the song. Thus, as the pianist and the singer performed the song, audiences would watch as one slide followed another, depicting simplistic tableaux that were visual representations of the lyrics. Ballads were understandably popular, since they told stories that could be easily illustrated in vivid scenes of action.⁶¹ The ubiquity of this entertainment can be seen in Charles Harris’s 1907 comment that “[t]he art of illustrating songs with the stereopticon is now one of the features at all vaudeville performances; in fact, it has become one of the standard attractions.”⁶² It soon became an essential part of cinematic presentations, often staged in alternation with short films.⁶³ As John W. Ripley noted, “in 1910, at the peak of the craze, practically every one of the nation’s 10,000 movie houses, from the lowly nickelodeons to the plush ten-cent cinema palaces, featured ‘latest illustrated songs.’”⁶⁴ Esther Morgan-Ellis notes that some early nickelodeons were even referred to as “moving picture illustrated song theaters.”⁶⁵

The “illustrated” song insisted on the *narrative* elements of both musical and visual presentation—and through this narrative primacy, forged a bond between the two media. The greatest evidence for the intensifying fusion of music and narrative are the complaints that arose in the absence of such correspondence. Indeed, the genre fell out of popularity when unskilled exhibitors with a limited library of slides began to present slides that did not match the song

being performed. As Charles K. Harris noted in a 1907 article, “There are many song illustrators who do not take the trouble to make their pictures harmonize with the sentiment of the songs. . . . They illustrate their songs by passing off upon the public a hodge-podge of old engravings which they have picked up in the old print shops and picture stores.”⁶⁶ A few years later, an article in *Billboard* similarly recalled that “[i]n many instances the words of the song and the pictures were out of harmony, due to the fact that many singers would utilize slides that had no relation to the songs they sang.” However, the same article waxed nostalgic on the power of an illustrated song when executed well: “from our personal viewpoint there has never been a stage presentation that produced the sentimental emotionalism of an apropos song and slide accompaniment by an accomplished singer.”⁶⁷ This is the significant issue: audiences were primed to expect a certain kind of continuity between song and image, and they became increasingly dissatisfied by any disharmony between song and image. The insistent use of music in the service of narrative, the demand that it sacrifice the pleasures of performance for narrative revelation, reoriented audiences to listen for the story—a reorientation that became all the more necessary as film emerged.

Indeed, this dynamic of narrative expectation—and frustration—only intensified when silent film eclipsed the illustrated song as the dominant form of visual–musical popular culture—notably, right as Harbach’s career was beginning. Of course, as scholar Rick Altman has shown, the so-called silent cinema was never truly silent.⁶⁸ Whether accompanied by a pianist, a pianist and drummer, an organist, an orchestra, or even a mechanical instrument, “silent” films were almost always accompanied by music. Welford Beaton remarked that “[w]e had music with our silent pictures in obedience to a natural law that demanded it, just as a natural law of chemistry demands cabbage with corned beef and beans with pork.”⁶⁹ Early films were generally

accompanied by songs—as opposed to generic musical passages meant to convey certain conventional emotions (e.g., anticipation, pathos). This new context for song presentation—building on the illustrated song—reframed how audiences perceived songs. Of course, there was nothing new about a song conveying a story, but in this context the narrative function was not only foregrounded but, in fact, rendered an essential hermeneutic element in experiencing early film. Audiences were forced to attend to the narrative elements of music in order to (try to) make sense of the film presentation.

Far from filling a merely entertaining or diverting role, musical performance served as the very binder of filmic experience, bridging otherwise obvious structural and experiential ruptures in the image itself, editing, and narrative. As film exhibitors deployed music to facilitate a sense of narrative, audiences engaged differently with the narrative potential of music. And as music was grafted onto the images, the temporality of the cinema, with its constant flow, imposed itself on songs—leading songs to be perceived less as lyrical moments that suspended time, and more as narrative devices progressing in time. This new hermeneutics—this new *attitude* toward popular song that reached spectators in communities across America—transformed the musical expectations of audiences and paved the way for Harbach’s dramaturgy.

Music thus helped to transform cinema from its episodic beginnings into a complex narrative form, as song was deployed to create or facilitate a sense of *narrative* continuity, which was lacking or even nonexistent in many early films. As one writer noted in 1909, “many film pieces . . . fail because of some obvious disconnectedness in action.”⁷⁰ When a critic feels the need to exhort filmmakers to do something as seemingly obvious as to “maintain unbroken connection with each preceding scene” in order to keep audiences engaged—it testifies to the narrativic chaos that reigned in those early days.⁷¹ Some critics, musicians, and exhibitors argued

that music could create the continuity otherwise lacking and endow a sense of narrative where none seemed to exist. Defining continuity as “the logical sequence of scenes and action shown in the picture,” organist and author George Tootell wrote that music can work to finesse illogical editing: “The organist must therefore attend to the continuity, and he will find that in most cases, where the continuity of the picture is bad, he can by skilful attention remedy that weakness through his music to a very large extent.”⁷² As artists grappled with how to structure the continuous flow of images, they looked to songs—as stories told through a vehicle of rhythmic integrity—to help support the narrative possibilities of cinematic temporality. This particular deployment of music foregrounded and emphasized the narrative possibility of music to help the action cohere.

Crucially, however, just as audiences judged successful musical accompaniment capable of remediating failed narrative, *bad* musical accompaniment—the subject of much public discussion—was thought to impede any fledgling attempts at cinematic narrative. To be sure, critics who urged musicians to aid in filmic continuity were usually motivated by what they viewed as the lethal ministrations of hack musicians who accompanied scenes with ill-suited songs. Early film criticism abounds with descriptions of primitive musical accompaniment killing any effect that the burgeoning art form might have been attempting to convey. Many early films were accompanied by musicians who played whatever repertoire they knew or selected, often popular songs or folk songs, and often ones with only marginal, if *any*, relationship to what was being screened.⁷³ As late as 1917, Montiville Morris Hansford reported in the *Dramatic Mirror* that “[m]any leaders play a whole string of tunes, culled from the catalogues of different publishing houses, without much reference to their character as applied to the film.”⁷⁴ At times, audiences found the choice of song worse than irrelevant—veering into the inappropriate. In

1913, Eugene Ahern quoted his contemporary, William Lord Wright, describing a film: “When Bob, the brave lieutenant who gives his life for his country, is breathing his last on the stricken battlefield, the enlivening strains of ‘Everybody’s Doin’ It’ on the pianoforte has quickly sundered the chord of sentiment connecting the audience with the picture screen, and has transformed an appealing scene into incongruous comedy.”⁷⁵ Ahern wryly concluded that the pianist should avoid playing “‘Everybody’s Doin’ It’ unless two or more parties die in the same scene.”⁷⁶ Indeed, audiences gradually began to reject popular music played indifferently; one pianist, for example, reported that audiences in the South would not “stand for death, renunciation, or the pathetic to the tune of a popular rag or comic song.”⁷⁷

Sometimes this critique of inappropriate music took the form of mocking its embodiment, the female accompanist.⁷⁸ A 1911 issue of *Moving Picture World*, for example, quoted a poem by Wilbur D. Nesbit that appeared in the *Chicago Post*, titled “Lizzie Plays for the Picture”:

“Lizzie plays at the nickelo— / Plays for the moving picture show / . . . / With a tum-te-tum and an aching thumb / She keeps the time with her chewing gum, / She chews and chaws without a pause, / With a ragtime twist to her busy jaws / . . . / But Lizzie plays like a grim machine, / And she never thinks what the measures mean.”⁷⁹ Lamenting that “the musical accompaniment to the picture has much room for improvement,” another critic was particularly incensed by a 1911 presentation of *The Witch and the Cowboys*, during which, despite the film being ripe for dramatic accompaniment, the “lady was contented to play waltzes, two-steps and ‘popular’ stuff all through. The music fits the picture about as well as a shirt would fill a wheelbarrow.”⁸⁰

As audiences grew increasingly intolerant of ill-fitting accompaniment, an endless discourse emerged in public forums on the “appropriate” and “correct” way to align music with stories. This insistence that music must “play to the picture”—in other words, carry along the

action—led to a broader valorization of correspondence, of music being judged to amplify the dramatic action.⁸¹ In *Musical America*, William C. Carl advised that “people do not attend the ‘movies’ to hear an organ recital. They want the picture reproduced in tone.”⁸² A 1911 article in *Moving Picture World* similarly advised that “[t]he accepted ‘correct music’ for any motion picture is only that which helps to unfold the plot or tell a story. It may be a medley of classic, operatic, comic, patriotic, or dramatic, but it must be so threaded together that it carries the audience on with the action of the story.”⁸³ This philosophy of cinematically “correct music,” like Harbach’s own philosophy, insists that music serve a narrative function—and this is precisely the context in which Harbach’s ideas took hold.

The widespread dissatisfaction with accompaniments of randomly chosen popular songs prompted musicians and managers to devise elaborate strategies for preparing music, each development aiming to further bind music and story. In 1911, movie palace impresario S. L. Rothapfel received praise for his practice of using an advance screening to “gather the theme and . . . arrange the music for the story and work toward the psychological point in the story.”⁸⁴ As this practice became more common, Joseph Fox argued that the musical director “must have an uncanny sense of fitness so that he can unerringly pick out those compositions which best suit the action on the screen before him. In other words, he must live the emotions of the actors so that he can paint them in musical phrases.”⁸⁵ Implicit in this discourse—with its invocations of “sympathetic emotion”⁸⁶ and “liv[ing] the emotions of the actors”—is an invitation for pianists to participate in a kind of psychological expression not unlike that promulgated in Emersonian rhetorical theory.

Given the demands placed upon pianists, and given the wide range of their talents and skills, the industry began to strategize how to standardize accompaniments. By 1909, Edison and

Vitagraph were making suggestions for scoring—if not specific numbers, then at least moods and speeds—and industry columns also emerged whose purpose was to guide pianists in more “appropriate” playing.⁸⁷ While the rhetoric surrounding the accompaniment had initially focused on the appropriateness of a song to a particular situation or moment, broader concerns about organicism began to factor into these columns and debates. George Beynon argued that music needed to be not only appropriate to the story, but also musically consistent across a single film. Some urged a stylistic coherence, avoiding the wanton mixing of classical and popular music,⁸⁸ whereas others advocated, either explicitly or implicitly, for a Wagnerian approach—as for example in Rothapfel’s comment that “each big picture . . . must be interpreted musically by a general theme which characterizes the nature of the film play. . . . In the play of *Such a Little Queen* . . . I caught the atmosphere of the play and variations of the theme accompanied all the telling scenes.”⁸⁹ *The Musician* magazine similarly wrote that “any musical scene-shifter who takes his job seriously” should aim to “send your folks home with the theme whispered on their breath, and ever afterwards associated in their minds with a certain character in a certain picture.”⁹⁰ However, even as industry magazines were suggesting these elaborate strategies for organicism, the musical accompaniment at many theatres remained quite primitive, prompting the public debates about appropriate music. Indeed, complaints about ill-fitting music continued throughout the silent film era of the 1910s and 1920s—which encompasses almost all of Harbach’s years as a writer. In fact, it was in 1927—nearing the end of the silent era—that Tootell was counseling organists to “attend to the continuity,” so that “where the continuity of the picture is bad, he can . . . remedy that weakness.”⁹¹

Thus, the illustrated song and silent cinema created the need for “appropriate” music, framing music as a principally narrative element and thereby fueling the hunger for the kind of

musical theatre Harbach had imagined. Meanwhile, the emergence of synchronized sound would only accelerate this trend as it focused attention on a different element of musical narrative: the ligaments between music and dialogue. Just as audiences were being introduced to sound film in the late 1920s, Harbach was invited to write films in California. As he recounted years later:

<EXT>At that particular time pictures that had music in them simply would not go. The minute an audience started to hear them doing music they'd get up and walk out. It was a very peculiar situation. This was about 1928. I'll tell you what had happened. They had done some of the old operettas without in any way revising them or rebuilding them, so that the numbers were properly motivated. You know, in a typical old-fashioned operetta or musical comedy people sit talking, and all of a sudden they start to sing for no [rhyme] or reason. Now they did that in the film, and they simply wouldn't stand for it. And it is ridiculous. That's what has damned, I think, for many years any serious consideration of books in these musical comedies. Because the book couldn't be believed with that kind of treatment.⁹²

<T>The "realistic" nature of film, according to Harbach, made audiences reject "old-fashioned musical shows put on the screen...with poorly motivated numbers," since one could not plausibly accept the singing and dancing as "realistic" pursuits of people in everyday life. As he phrased it, "When you see a photograph, you say, well, it must have happened or they couldn't have taken a photograph of it. In other words, in pictures it's a realistic enterprise; you believe what you see in a picture." In the cinema, he said, "You see only something that's supposed to be happening and they want to believe it. And if you do it in such a way that they can't believe it, they just say, 'Well, it's ridiculous; I won't sit through it.' And I think

psychologically that's what happened." He argued that film had brought into stark relief the absurdity of the long-standing conventions of the musical genre: as he put it, "two people talking and then starting to sing and then, what's worse, getting up and doing a funny dance to it" prompted viewers to say, "Well, this is all hokum; we won't listen to it." He felt that film, which prompted spectators to "want to believe" that what they saw was real, required music to be introduced "in a way that it is believed, really."⁹³ As such, Harbach's interest in modernizing musical comedy anticipated the demands that sound film would place on the distinctly unrealist genre of musical theatre to adopt realist conventions. The earlier debates about silent music accompaniment reoriented songs as narrative vehicles, a realignment that enabled them to be subsumed into the kind of narrative order that Harbach brought to musical comedy. Insisting on the continuity between spoken narrative and musical narrative, Harbach also advocated for subtle diegetic introductions that would mute the most egregiously unrealistic moment of bursting into song—a moment whose absurdity would be brought into relief by the photographic realism of film. Harbach's own Hollywood career was short-lived, and his musical episodes, ironically, were removed during editing. As he lamented, "Having been built for music to sustain the interest and many of the turning points of the story, [the film with the musical episodes excised] was a pretty slim affair."⁹⁴ However, even if Harbach's foray into Hollywood was unsuccessful, he clearly felt that the cinematic demand for realism affected how audiences approached musical theatre.

In 1931, after returning to New York, Harbach wrote *The Cat and the Fiddle*, a stage musical that was the culmination of his career-long quest to develop a modern musical theatre. In the context of 1931—right as Harbach recalls film audiences rejecting the implausible conventions of musical theatre—*The Cat and the Fiddle* avoided the kinds of generic incongruity

rendered obvious by the emergence of film. Harbach considered this show as a pinnacle of musical theatre construction, deeming its technique “modern-play-with-music.” As he recalled years later, “I said, ‘I’m going to see if I can’t write a play in which the music is there because it’s got to be there. It isn’t the result of musical comedy technique or operetta technique. This story could not be told without the music.’” For example, “the first number was a street singer in Brussels—a song peddler would meet you and want you to buy something, or he would illustrate it by singing a touch of one of the songs; and that was the motivation for the first song.”⁹⁵ In this piece, “no number was introduced just for the sake of having a number,” and since its main characters were composers, “the people can make music logically.”⁹⁶

Harbach recalled that *The Cat and the Fiddle* interested its composer, Jerome Kern, “precisely because it was believable and suitable for music that wouldn’t kill the story by popping out at the wrong time.”⁹⁷ In one review, a critic remarked on the “up-to-date musical play,” noting that “[t]here is no chorus, but there is a definite well-constructed plot in which songs and dances occur only when and as they would in real life.”⁹⁸ In celebrating the idea that song and dance take place “as they would in real life,” Harbach inadvertently reveals one principle involved in his new form of storytelling: to have people sing and dance as in real life generally involves the “real world” of those already singing and dancing, often in theatrical contexts. Thus, the ostensible desire for realism paradoxically promotes only more theatricality. And indeed, the two main characters of *The Cat and the Fiddle* are of the theatrical world: two composers who fall for each other, one of whom expresses his feelings in the songs that he writes.

And this show—this culmination of his life’s work, this “new kind of piece”—what should it be about? The plot of *The Cat and the Fiddle* focuses on nothing less than the dangers

of interpolation. The show begins in Brussels, where American songwriter Shirley Sheridan encounters Victor Florescue, a Romanian composer of symphonies now working on “something a little more commercial” that he hopes to sell as a stage work. They flirt, and Victor promises to write her letters in care of general delivery. However, due to a misunderstanding, the letters are not delivered, and each believes that the other has lost interest. Meanwhile, Victor, heartbroken by Shirley, expresses his grief in his stage work, *The Passionate Pilgrim*. As Victor previews some of his music, one of his producers expresses concern that the piece is too “somber” and needs “lightening”—at which point strains of jazz piano waft in from a nearby apartment. Getting into the beat, the producer says, “*That’s* what we want . . . something rhythmic and dancy! Can’t you give us something like that?” Victor, indignant, replies that “I write music, I cannot write trash!”⁹⁹ Unbeknownst to Victor, though, the musician in the nearby apartment is Shirley Sheridan. Shirley is excited to discover that the producer is interested in her music—but horrified to discover that he “only want[s] a few numbers” to “lighten up” another composer’s piece. Shirley declines, noting that she “know(s) how a composer feels about his score,” adding that “I’d just feel sick if somebody wanted to re-write my stuff.” The producer tries to calm her by noting that it’s “merely two or three interpolations,” prompting her outrage: “Interpolations in a consistent opera! Horrible!” Despite the producer’s excuse that it’s “a sort of Revue”—thereby aligning Victor’s piece with the popular musical theatre—Shirley steadfastly refuses, but her brother overrides her. When Victor hears the music to be incorporated into his score, he quakes with rage: “This trash in my play? Never!”¹⁰⁰ Despite Victor’s insults, Shirley still honors his genius and repeatedly urges the producer not to interfere with his work. Eventually they reconcile, as Shirley shows him how a simple change in the accompaniment might make his

number brighter—prompting both a romantic and musical détente that will lead to Victor’s rewriting the ending of his play.

In writing a play that vilified interpolations, Harbach certainly succeeded in writing a play about real life, since his entire aesthetic philosophy worked against the prevailing trend of interpolation. Ironically, though, Harbach—like almost everyone else of this era, including Jerome Kern—began his career by trying to interpolate numbers into other shows. Years later, Harbach expressed gratitude that he failed at this brief aspiration: “Thank God I never did get one in, because I think that’s one of the measliest things that a man can do.”¹⁰¹ And he would spend the rest of his career working to strengthen musical theatre into a genre whose narrative structures could not accommodate interpolated musical numbers. Significantly, the fact that the anxiety of interpolation could be itself be comprehensible as the *subject* of popular culture testifies to how widespread these concerns were among the public at the time Harbach was writing. Indeed, as audiences were entertained by Victor’s fears, they would have drawn not only on caricatures of composers’ egos, but also on the widespread discourse surrounding interpolations and musical narrative that had been circulating about film and theatre for more than a quarter century. And it was precisely the discontent surrounding filmic accompaniment—and the discourses generated by this discontent—that prepared mass audiences to appreciate, and to desire, Harbach’s novel form of theatrical storytelling.

Thus, Otto Harbach’s revolutionary work in musical theatre was a product of the elocutionary world in which he was trained, received in a cinematic context of widespread concern about musical storytelling. And so the history of “integration” in musical theatre finds its roots in the Emersonian traditions of the nineteenth century and the cinematic innovations of the dawn of the twentieth. This sense that modern musical theatre spectatorship has been shaped

by cinematic experience certainly inflects the frequent laments about Hollywood's infiltration of Broadway today, encapsulated in a line by Peter Marks: "Gaze up at the marquees in the theater district, and you might think you've stumbled into a film festival."¹⁰² Writing in the *New York Times* in 2002, Marks goes on to note the incredible number of musicals based on films that were either on or en route to Broadway at the time, writing that "[i]n many ways, Broadway's extraordinary embrace of the movies is not a sign of strength," and complaining that "[t]o some in the theater business, the Broadway musical is becoming an appendage of Hollywood."¹⁰³ As we have seen, though, this has been true now for more than a century.

In 1953, Oscar Hammerstein II wrote in the *New York Times* of the importance of the "framework of a well conceived and solidly built book."¹⁰⁴ He concluded by writing:

<EXT>My friend and teacher, Otto Harbach, once explained the situation very clearly to me. He likened the elements of acting and dancing and all the other parts of a musical play to the ingredients that go to make a fire—logs, kindling, matches, a good fireplace, etc. All these ingredients, he said, are necessary, but they won't make a good fire unless they are properly assembled. The logs must be placed on top of the other so that there is provision for draught. They must be put in the right place in relation to the chimney in the fireplace. The kindling must be arranged properly under the logs. When everything works—when the logs crackle and the bark sputters, when the blue and gold flame waves and flies toward the chimney and sends out warmth and good feeling to cheer a room full of people, it is because some plodding, perhaps not very brilliant fellow knew how to put one log on top of another in just the right way.¹⁰⁵

<T>And it was Otto Harbach who first lit the flame in 1910, when he brought the secrets of his “oratoricals” to the Broadway stage. That flame, which burns brightly even today in the heart of everyone who feels the transcendent joy when book and music meet, is an old flame that never dies.

<H1>Endnotes

<EN>¹ Hugh Fordin, *Getting to Know Him: A Biography of Oscar Hammerstein II* [1977] (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 46.

² Scott McMillin, *The Musical as Drama* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1.

³ John Kenrick, *Musical Theatre: A History* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 248.

⁴ Andrew Lamb, *150 Years of Popular Musical Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 258.

⁵ Stanley Green, “New Trends in Musical Comedies, or Are They?” *Variety* 225.7 (10 January 1962): 233.

⁶ “At the Colonial,” *Chicago Live Stock World*, 18 June 1910, 2.

⁷ “*Madame Sherry*, Opulent in Song, Here Sunday,” *Evansville Journal-News*. 8 January 1911, 5.

⁸ Lawton Mackall, “How a College Professor Made a Fortune on Broadway: The True Story of Otto Harbach’s Astonishing Success as a Playwright,” *Pictorial Review* 27.11 (August 1926), 96; emphasis original.

⁹ “Otto Harbach: Creator of ‘Rose Marie,’” *Town and Country Review* (1935), 28-29, at 28.

¹⁰ Oscar Hammerstein II, *Lyrics* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1949), 41–2.

¹¹ Ibid., 43, 19, 14.

¹² With Friml, Harbach wrote nine musicals, including *The Firefly* (1912), *High Jinks* (1913), and *Katinka* (1915). He also collaborated with Harry Tierney (*Kid Boots*, 1923) and Vincent Youmans (*No, No, Nanette*, 1925) as well as an array of lesser-known composers, including Aladar Renyi (*Suzi*, 1914), Percy Wenrich (*The Crinoline Girl*, 1914), Louis Hirsch (*Mary*, 1920; *The O'Brien Girl*, 1921; *Betty Lee*, 1924), Tom Johnstone (*Molly Darling*, 1922), Augustus Barratt (*Jack and Jill*, 1923), and Con Conrad (*Kitty's Kisses*, 1926). Other shows written in collaboration with Hammerstein include *Jimmie* (1920, Herbert Stothart), *Wildflower* (1923, Stothart & Youmans), *Rose-Marie* (1924, Friml), *Sunny* (1925, Jerome Kern), *Song of the Flame* (1925, Stothart & George Gershwin), *The Wild Rose* (1926, Friml), *The Desert Song* (1926, Sigmund Romberg), *Golden Dawn* (1927, Stothart & Emmerich Kalman), and *Good Boy* (1928, Stothart).

¹³ Hammerstein, *Lyrics*, 42.

¹⁴ Harbach is generally ignored in the scholarly literature, but Thomas S. Hirschak's *Boy Loses Girl: Broadway's Librettists* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002) contains an excellent précis of Harbach's career (23–35).

¹⁵ "At the Theatre."

¹⁶ Qtd. in "The Week in Chicago," *The Billboard* 22.17 (23 April 1910): 7.

¹⁷ "Polka Dominates *Madame Sherry*," *New York Times*, 31 August 1910, 9.

¹⁸ "At the Theatre," *Brooklyn Life*, 10 September 1910), 18. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* similarly wrote that "here we have ample proof that an involved plot can be introduced with the music without confusion or concealment." Clay M. Greene, "Timely Chat on Timely Topics," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 September 1910, 3.

¹⁹ Emory B. Calvert, “New York Theatrical Letter,” *Colorado Springs Gazette*, 11 September 1910, 23.

²⁰ *Music Book and Memories of “Madame Sherry”* (New York: Witmark & Sons, 1910).

²¹ Rose Heylbut, “It Shouldn’t Be a Battle,” *Etude* 73.12 (1955), 11–12, 45, 47, at 12.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ To be fair, some of his works did not rise to the same level of ambition and quality: as one review of his 1911 piece *The Girl of My Dreams* noted, “‘The Girl of My Dreams’ is at the Criterion. Wilbur D. Nesbit and Otto Hauerbach did the dreaming. It was a peaceful sleep. What little the authors remembered of the mind mirage, they called a ‘plot.’ Each ate at a different burlesque afterpiece, polished up.” Sime., “The Girl of My Dreams,” *Variety* 23.10 (12 August 1911), 18.

²⁴ “Life of Otto Harbach,” **April 1962**, 137, 380. (Otto Harbach Papers, New York Public Library, *T-Mss 1993-038, Box 21.) Indeed, despite his tremendous success in musical theatre, Harbach always expressed ambivalence about the genre, lamenting that he never produced a canonical straight play. Remarking that he “never loved the musicals,” Harbach said that he was “called into every musical that [he] got mixed up in,” securing what he felt was essentially lucrative though uninspiring work (235).

²⁵ Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, “**Interview with** Mr. Otto Harbach,” Otto Harbach Papers, NYPL, Box 20, Folder 3, 40.

²⁶ “Life of Otto Harbach,” 379.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 591.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 344.

²⁹ Columbia, **16–17**.

³⁰ Ibid, 17.

³¹ “Important Interpolations,” *The Billboard* 20.38 (19 September 1908): 9.

³² “The American Stage,” *The Stage*, 12 March 1908, 23.

³³ Heylbut, “It Shouldn’t Be a Battle,” 47.

³⁴ Columbia, “Interview with Mr. Otto Harbach,” 17.

³⁵ “The Amusement Week in Chicago: Up and Down Broadway,” *The Billboard* (31 December 1910), 8.

³⁶ “The American Stage,” *The Stage*, 4 August 1910, 22.

³⁷ “Mme. Sherry a Success,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 31 August 1910, 4.

³⁸ Columbia, “Interview with Mr. Otto Harbach,” 2.

³⁹ James H. McTeague, *Before Stanislavsky: American Professional Acting Schools and Acting Theory, 1875–1925* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1993), 95.

⁴⁰ Otto A. Hauerbach, “The Hero of Compromise,” in *Winning Orations of the Inter-State Oratorical Contests, with Biographies of Contestants, 1890–1907*, vol. II, ed. Charles Edgar Prather and J. E. Groves (Topeka, KS: Crane & Co., 1907), 109–17.

⁴¹ A. J. Liebling, “Learned Lyricist,” *New Yorker* (20 February 1937), 22–27, at 22.

⁴² “That Night I Really Struck Twelve,” manuscript in the Otto Harbach Papers, NYPL, 4.

⁴³ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁴ *Catalogue of Whitman College and Whitman Academy, 1895–’6* (Walla Walla, WA: Press of the Walla Walla Union, 1895), 18–19.

⁴⁵ See Edyth Renshaw, “Three Schools of Speech: The Emerson College of Oratory; the School of Expression; and the Leland Powers School of the Spoken Word” (Ph.D. diss., Teachers College, Columbia University, 1950).

⁴⁶ Mary Margaret Robb, *Oral Interpretation of Literature in American Colleges and Universities: A Historical Study of Teaching Methods* (New York: H. Wilson, 1941), 165.

⁴⁷ Mary A. Blood and Ida Morey Riley, *The Psychological Development of Expression: A Compilation of Selections for Use in the Study of Expression*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Columbia School of Oratory, 1907), 8.

⁴⁸ Southwick, 13.

⁴⁹ Jessie Eldridge Southwick, *Principles of Oratory: An Outline Philosophy of Emerson College Methods* (Boston: Everett Press, 1912), 9.

⁵⁰ Charles Wesley Emerson, *Evolution of Expression*, 27th ed., vol. 1 [1888] (Boston: Emerson College of Oratory, 1908), 11.

⁵¹ Renshaw, *Three Schools of Speech*, 40.

⁵² Emerson, 17.

⁵³ Southwick, *Principles of Oratory*, 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 9. Similarly noting that “all mechanical modes of teaching oratory are utterly rejected,” Cecil Harper wrote in 1893 that “the method of instruction differs fundamentally from that usually employed in teaching oratory. . . . While other systems work for appearances of power, this system develops source of real power; while other systems have dealt with effects, this system has also dealt with causes.” Cecil Harper, “The Emerson College of Oratory: Its History, Methods of Teaching and Courses of Instruction,” *Emerson College Magazine* 1.3 (February 1893): 108–13, at 108.

⁵⁵ Columbia, “Interview with Mr. Otto Harbach,” 1.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); David Savran, *Highbrow/Lowdown:*

Theatre, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); and Bradley Rogers, *The Song Is You: Musical Theatre and the Politics of Bursting into Song and Dance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2020).

⁵⁷ Otto Harbach, *Madame Sherry* (n.p.: Theatre Arts Press, 2015), 8. Subsequent citations are given parenthetically in the text.

⁵⁸ “John Drew and Mary Boland in New Maugham Offering,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, 11 September 1910, 27.

⁵⁹ *Music Book and Memories*.

⁶⁰ “Music, Comedy, Scientific Phenomena Will All Have Place on Jose Bill,” *San Jose Evening News*, 12 August 1910, 3.

⁶¹ The early history of the illustrated song is not well traced, but its contours are suggested by a few oft-cited facts. Tony Pastor, generally cited as the earliest song illustrator, is said to have used slides of military generals and battle scenes to illustrate his song “Heroes of the War” during the Civil War. Once the war was over, Pastor abandoned the act, and illustrated songs returned only in 1895, with Allen May, followed by such artists as Alonzo Hatch and Meyer Corey. See Harry S. Marion, “Illustrated Songs,” *Moving Picture World* 85.4 (26 March 1927): 331–2.

⁶² Chas. K. Harris, “Illustrating Song Slides,” *Moving Picture World* 1.1 (9 March 1907): 5–6, at 5.

⁶³ H. S. Sanderson, “The History of Song Slides” (letter to the editor), *Moving Picture World* 4.22 (29 May 1909): 716–17.

⁶⁴ John W. Ripley, “All Join in the Chorus,” *American Heritage* 10.4 (June 1959): 50–9, at 51.

⁶⁵ Esther M. Morgan-Ellis, *Everybody Sing!: Community Singing in the American Picture Palace* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 56. Significantly, a few particularly experimental illustrators began to accompany their songs with film instead of slides. Harry S. Marion recalled that George Diamond and Al Hoon were the first to illustrate a song with a film. They paired the song “The Man with the Ladder and the Hose” to a “film . . . made up of bits of fire scenes, nicely assembled.” See Marion, “Illustrated Songs,” 331. Epes W. Sargent, meanwhile, recalled that “[o]ne team, Falke and Lillian . . . used motion pictures instead of slides. . . . Several others were talking about using films for illustration, but film cost money.” See Epes W. Sargent, “The Illustrated Song of Yore,” *Variety* 129.4 (5 January 1938): 172. While the use of film was an exception, the continuity in these few cases between the two media affirms the importance of this genre for thinking through the relationship between song and (filmic) image.

⁶⁶ Harris, “Illustrating Song Slides,” 6. It is worth noting that while this entertainment was most prevalent in the earliest days of cinema, even in 1912 *Moving Picture World* noted that “[t]he so-called illustrated song seems to be holding out more strongly and is still in vogue in many houses which are in other respects conducted with great care and efficiency.” “Facts and Comments,” *Moving Picture World* 14.3 (19 October 1912): 220. The other great narrative impulse came from the use of sound effects, which in the early days had been deployed somewhat willy-nilly, simply because the effects man enjoyed making idiosyncratic noises and raising a ruckus. A January 1913 article in *Moving Picture World* looks back on an earlier period of film exhibition and notes that “generally, noisy, crude, and misplaced” sound effects “contributed largely to the awakening of managers and others to the importance of appropriate music for accompanying the picture.” Clarence E. Sinn, “Music for the Picture,” *Moving Picture World* 15.4 (25 January 1913): 352.

⁶⁷ “Revival of Illustrated Song Slides,” *The Billboard* 30.49 (7 December 1918): 14.

⁶⁸ See, among Rick Altman’s many excellent studies in this regard, “The Silence of the Silents,” *Musical Quarterly* 80.4 (1996): 648–718. See also Martin Miller Marks, *Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies, 1895–1924* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁶⁹ Welford Beaton, *Know Your Movies: The Theory and Practice of Motion Picture Production* (Hollywood: Howard Hill, 1932), 82.

⁷⁰ Thomas Bedding, “The Modern Way in Moving Picture Making,” *Moving Picture World* 4.11 (13 March 1909): 294–5, at 295.

⁷¹ Qtd. in Elaine Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema: 1907–1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 57.

⁷² George Tootell, *How to Play the Cinema Organ* [1921] (London: Paxton, 1927), 81.

⁷³ See Tim Anderson’s well-researched “Reforming ‘Jackass Music’: The Problematic Aesthetics of Early American Film Music Accompaniment,” *Cinema Journal* 37.1 (Fall 1997): 3–22, for an excellent discussion of the fear of disjunctive music as the nickelodeon cinema moved from an audience-focused to a narrative-focused genre motivated by cultural uplift.

⁷⁴ Montiville Morris Hansford, “Preparing Music for Photoplay Accompaniments,” *Dramatic Mirror* 77.2017 (25 August 1917): 11.

⁷⁵ Eugene A. Ahern, “Selections from *What and How to Play for Pictures*” [1913], in *Celluloid Symphony: Texts and Contexts in Film Music History*, ed. Julie Hubbert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 45–52, at 49–50.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 52. A 1924 article in *The Musician* magazine similarly complained that “[j]ust as it is disconcerting for a singer to intone words of adoration with a facial expression indicative of pain,

so it is a disturbance of audience morale to witness some festive scene on the silent screen, and hear the sepulchral wheeze of a maudlin improvisation on some sorrowful theme with the melody distorted through lack of rhythmic proportion of any kind, or the halting cadences of a solemn ‘voluntary’ which hesitates ever so often as if one had to arrange an armistice in order to turn over the page.” De Profundis (pseud.), “Choir and Organ: In Which We Forsake the Choir Loft Temporarily to Investigate the Duties of the Moving Picture Organist—A Continuation of Last Month’s Suggestions to Those Who Would Profit by Playing for the Silent Drama,” *The Musician* 29 (December 1924): 41.

⁷⁷ Joseph Fox, “Interpretive Music for the Movies,” *Melody* 6.1 (January 1922): 24–5, at 24. Fox notes that “[m]anagers have come to realize that the day of the lone pianist sitting in the dark, tearing out jazz or attempting ‘Hearts and Flowers’ by ear, as the case may be, on an instrument all out of tune, is over” (24).

⁷⁸ In a 1911 screed in *Moving Picture World*, Louis Reeves Harrison complained about just such an accompanist, whom he named “Lily Limpwrist.” Harrison complained about theatrical managers who “allow their musicians to play the wrong accompaniment to the right composition. . . . O, what a noise when the lights are turned low and Lily Limpwrist takes her place at the usual instrument of torture.” Bemoaning Lily’s inappropriate repertoire, Harrison wrote that “no man will ever marry a girl who plays a dance while the pictured man is in a death struggle; she would probably be *at* one when the real one was in trouble. The girl of sympathy will play music in accord with the pictured story.” Harrison argued that such “klepto-pianoacs” ruin the audience’s pleasure, and he closes with a depiction of a scene in a film in which “a tender-hearted mother” is dying, “the world around her is subdued and silent, her face is pale, her frame attenuated, her respiration is heavy. . . . Tears are falling like her life illusions, she is

overcome with her double burden of pain and sorrow, her eyes, inflamed by the fever of unattained hopes, turn beseechingly to the infinite power above, a last faint sigh, the eyes close forever,” whereupon Lily ruins the moment with her “Bangity-bang-bang! Bing-bang-bang!” See Louis Reeves Harrison, “Jackass Music,” *Moving Picture World* 8.3 (21 January 1911): 124–5.

⁷⁹ Wilbur D. Nesbit, “Lizzie Plays for the Picture,” *Moving Picture World* 9.8 (2 September 1911): 618.

⁸⁰ Clarence E. Sinn, “Music for the Picture,” *Moving Picture World* 9.5 (12 August 1911): 370.

To be fair, though, some early managers might on occasion have demanded certain popular songs: as Eugene Ahern noted, “there are some exhibitors who want the popular hits played incessantly, regardless of the picture on the screen.” (Ahern, “Selections from *What and How to Play for Pictures*,” 48) Many of these exhibitors preferred pianists to play popular songs in the interest of bringing in audiences who in some cases even liked to sing along with the accompaniment. One pianist wrote that he had “lost my job on a try-out in a New York theater because the manager said, ‘You play well, but we want popular stuff so they can sing. Go back and try again.’ I doped out ‘Pony Boy’ and ‘My Wife’s Gone to the Country, Hurrah!’ and all the current songs and made good, but I couldn’t stand ‘My Wife’s Gone to the Country, Hurrah!’ shouted from a few hundred throats while I wanted to rescue the heroine from the burning ship with dramatic stuff.” (Clarence E. Sinn, “Music for the Picture,” *Moving Picture World* 10.1 (7 October 1911): 29.)

⁸¹ See, for example, Fox, 24. “Playing to the picture is an art in itself, one that calls not only for creative ability, but, in order to be successful, the leader of a picture orchestra must have a wonderful sense of fitness combined with an extensive library and a good memory.”

⁸² William C. Carl, “The Organist and the ‘Movies,’” *Musical America* [24.24](#) (14 October 1916): 43.

⁸³ Sinn, “Music for the Picture” (7 October 1911): 29.

⁸⁴ James S. McQuade, “The Belasco of Motion Picture Presentations,” *Moving Picture World* 10.10 (9 December 1911): 796–8, at 797. McQuade observed Rothapfel firsthand, writing that he “sat on the stage, with a stenographer beside him, facing the screen. At a signal the operator began projecting the first picture. As it was being run off and watched by all, Mr. Rothapfel announced the score, and details for sound effects. He mentally seizes on the musical selections, on the spur of the moment, as if inspired. If an afterthought flashes the intelligence that a better selection than the one announced would be more appropriate, he signals the operator to stop and run several scenes over again. If convinced that the change should be made, he so announces, and the members of the orchestra make notes accordingly. It is strange that Mr. Rothapfel should state that he does not know a note of music, except by ear, yet he has the scores of every light opera and musical comedy at his command, and can draw on grand opera and on the symphonies to assist him in playing the pictures. In addition, he is familiar with the popular lyrics of many countries” (797).

⁸⁵ Fox, “Playing the Picture,” 24.

⁸⁶ Another critic similarly reported a “bare and cold” effect when he watched a film without music, noting that he “was no more than a spectator, moved to interest and admiration, but not to sympathetic emotion.” Stuart Fletcher, “Two Arts That Meet as One,” *The Sackbut*, (9: June 1929), 374-5, at 374.

⁸⁷ One early Edison cue sheet, for example, indicates the seven scenes of *'Tis Now the Very Witching Time of Night*, with “pizzicato crescendo and decrescendo” as the suggestion for Scene 4, while the following scene is marked “Andante to donkey scene, mock march to

skeletons then hurry.” “Incidental Music for Edison Pictures” [1909], in *Celluloid Symphony*, ed. Hubbert, 39–41, at 40. As Fox noted, “producers, knowing that the picture with the proper musical setting stands a greater chance of getting over, in some cases provide what is known as a cue-sheet with a production. This is a list of numbers, all timed to the minute, which have been chosen because of their peculiar fitness to the subject being shown. Some few even go further and provide the whole musical score from beginning to end. However, as this is very costly, and as all theatres have not the necessary orchestras to properly play such scores, this practice is not much in vogue as yet. But it is quite safe to predict that the day is not far distant when some similar method will be universal.” Fox, “Playing the Picture,” 24.

⁸⁸ In his 1921 *Musical Presentation of Motion Pictures*, Beynon remarked that “we must have a standard style to our musical settings. Classic or non-classic music must prevail for the entire picture under ordinary conditions. It is unwise to mix into a musical setting, comprising excerpts from grand opera or symphonies, the popular ‘Shoo-fly’ one-steps of the day.” George Beynon, “Selections from *Musical Presentation of Motion Pictures*” [1921], in *Celluloid Symphony*, ed. Hubbert, 74–83, at 81. At other times, writers urged pianists to take advantage of the internal coherence offered by a musical composition that contained multiple movements. Thus, Eugene Ahern counseled pianists to use “appropriate music,” defined as “not only music that is in keeping with the atmosphere of the picture, but music that has two or more different movements, so you won’t need to make an entire change of music to fit the scenes, but just play some other movement in the same piece.” Ahern, “Selections from *What and How to Play for Pictures*,” 45.

⁸⁹ Qtd. in W. Stephen Bush, “The Art of Exhibition” [1914], in *Celluloid Symphony*, ed. Hubbert, 56–61, at 57.

⁹⁰ De Profundis, “Choir and Organ,” 41.

⁹¹ Tootell, *How to Play the Cinema Organ*, 81.

⁹² Columbia, “Interview with Mr. Otto Harbach,” 32-3.

⁹³ Ibid., 34–6.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁹⁵ “Ibid., 25.

⁹⁶ “Life of Otto Harbach,” 8-9.

⁹⁷ Heylbut, “It Shouldn’t Be a Battle,” 45.

⁹⁸ “Otto Harbach: Creator of *Rose Marie*,” 28.

⁹⁹ Manuscript of *The Cat and the Fiddle*, Otto Harbach Papers, NYPL, Box 9, Folder 6, I.40.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., I.76.

¹⁰¹ “Interview with Mr. Otto Harbach,” 11.

¹⁰² Peter Marks, “If It’s a Musical, It Was Probably a Movie,” *New York Times*, 14 April 2002, §2, 1.

¹⁰³ Ibid. Musicologist Raymond Knapp has noted the “odd schism that has developed between those who study stage musicals and those who study film musicals, which amounts to an engrained habit of not paying much attention to the other, and which means that neither the obvious similarities between the two, nor their important differences, get much scrutiny.”

(Knapp, “Getting Off the Trolley: Musicals *contra* Cinematic Reality,” in *From Stage to Screen: Musical Films in Europe and United States (1927–1961)*, ed. Massimiliano Sala (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 157–72, at 161.

¹⁰⁴ Oscar Hammerstein II, “Musical Keystone: An Expert Writes about the Importance of the Book in Stage Productions,” *New York Times*, 2 August 1953, §2, 1, 4, at 4.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

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