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AMERICAN CINDERELLAS ON THE BROADWAY MUSICAL STAGE  
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# Introduction: Glass Slippers and Glass Ceilings in the Twenty-First Century, or Cinderella Returns to Broadway

In the years following America's Great Recession, an icon until recently regarded as a retrograde feminine relic began to reappear with stunning regularity on the musical stage. On the fictional Broadway stage of the 2012 ABC television musical "Smash," producer Eileen Rand scrapped plans for a revival of *My Fair Lady*, instead launching into another twentieth-century Cinderella story: a musical based on the life of Marilyn Monroe, attracting two rival chorus girls named Karen and Ivy to implore dreamily, "Let Me Be Your Star." In 2014, real-life Broadway producers announced that a "revisal" of the 1958 MGM Lerner and Loewe classic *Gigi*, centered upon the makeover of a courtesan-Cinderella in Belle Époque Paris, would have its pre-Broadway premiere at the Kennedy Center in January 2015—adding to previously announced plans for in-the-works Broadway musicals based on the film *Ever After* (the Cinderella story set in Renaissance Italy) and *Pretty Woman* (Perrault's story transposed to the Rodeo Drive shops of 1990s Los Angeles, with a brassier working girl heroine than the title character of *Gigi*).

Meanwhile, another "revisal"—the Broadway premiere of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Cinderella*—enchanted audiences at the Broadway Theatre. With a new book by Douglas Carter Beane, this Occupy Wall Street-era *Cinderella* released its heroine from dreaming "In My Own Little Corner" to a bold and self-activated young woman fighting for income equality, as well as the Prince, in a "once upon a time" resembling twenty-first-century America. In Hollywood, Cinderella's resurgence also continued with no less than two Disney-produced blockbusters: a glamorous, live-action remake of the 1950 Disney classic, directed by Sir Kenneth Branagh, and

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a star-studded film adaptation of Stephen Sondheim's postmodern musical fairy tale *Into the Woods* (1987), with Anna Kendrick cast as a Cinderella for the Millennial generation. *The New York Times*'s Stephen Holden noted of Kendrick's performance, "With her avid glare and jack-o'-lantern smile, Ms. Kendrick is not a classic Cinderella, but a sly, modern go-getter plotting her future."<sup>1</sup>

A vexed icon for second-wave feminists—scorning her for Disney-princess passivity in cultural studies like Colette Dowling's *The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence* (1981)—the fairy tale heroine originating with Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm had emphatically reentered the popular consciousness. She appears in the 2010s amid a Recession era of female identity crisis: the age of both the Hollywood stylist and the Hilary pantsuit; of both the proverbial glass slipper of the Duchess of Cambridge—anointed by the media as the Cinderella bride of Prince William—as well as unprecedented shattering of the glass ceiling. In 2014, bloggers and advertisers split the attention of American women between empowered paeans to "Leaning In," and commercial hype for the mobile game, "Kim Kardashian: Hollywood," in which the reality star assumes the role of digital Fairy Godmother. Within this contemporary context, the recharged Cinderella myth resonates with women's dreams and anxieties in an age of vigorous but conflicted twenty-first-century feminism, as well as with class tensions in the age of the 99 Percent.

On Broadway, at least, Cinderella had never fully gone away. She has appeared as the emblematic heroine of a genre at once strongly populist in orientation and feminine in form. Because the Broadway musical, throughout its history, has celebrated the rags-to-riches narratives of the American dream, while vibrantly centralizing female performers and characters, its creators have persistently gravitated toward Cinderella stories. In 1924, *The Baltimore Sun*, reviewing the musical *Flossie*, asserted "musical comedies without Cinderellas for heroines belong to one of the rarest of the *genus dramaticus*."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, an obscure 1946 Broadway musical flop called *If the Shoe Fits* led one critic to posit that the majority of Broadway musicals are in fact adaptations of the Cinderella story. Louis Kronenberger of *PM* mused of this forgotten fairy tale burlesque: "Possibly on the theory that most musicals only end up re-telling the Cinderella story anyway, *If the Shoe Fits* has gone straight back to Cinderella herself."<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the Broadway musical has repeatedly transformed Cinderella in countless makeovers and metamorphoses: from the Edwardian days of the Gaiety musical comedies, and their Americanized 1920s descendants

*Irene* (1919) and *Sally* (1920); to “Golden Age” musicals like *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946) and *My Fair Lady* (1956); to ironic anti-Cinderella fables such as *Evita* (1979); to contemporary musicals with unconventional Cinderella heroines, including *Hairspray* (2002). Yet as Kronenberger’s quote indicates, few Broadway musicals have literally retold the Cinderella story, instead relying on strategies of adaptation that resonate with modern American myths and narratives of assimilation and upward mobility. Stuart Hecht has termed this adaptive model “the Cinderella paradigm”:

For the most part, it is not (in) the story itself but rather its use as a model that Cinderella has made its greatest and most meaningful mark. Rarely do they include characters named “Cinderella” or “Prince Charming;” most feature distinctively American characters and settings. The Cinderella story, when thus used as a model, itself becomes what I term a “paradigmatic script” rather than a story unto itself.<sup>4</sup>

The Cinderella paradigm has endured persistently as a storytelling structure throughout the history of the Broadway musical. Yet, as not only an assimilatory narrative but as a complex constellation of feminine cultural mythologies, Cinderella appeared with particular ubiquity in the Broadway musicals of the 1920s through the 1950s. She has resonated most deeply and pervasively with the decades of American history in which women first started to enter the white-collar labor force in significant numbers at the end of World War I. These shifts both irrevocably altered the cultural landscape and provoked heated and widespread discussion about the proper roles for American women: a debate culminating with the 1963 publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* and the emergence of second-wave feminism. Using 1919’s *Irene* (noted as the first of the 1920s “Cinderella musicals”) and the 1959 milestone *Gypsy* as bookends, *American Cinderellas* looks at the years between these two musicals as Broadway’s Cinderella Era, while considering how the Broadway musicals adapted and transformed the fairy tale icon in order to address changing social and professional roles for American women.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Broadway musicals repeatedly reimagined Cinderella as an American “working girl.” Much as the Recession-era resurgence of Cinderella narratives has responded to rapid and revolutionary changes for women in the workforce, these early and mid-twentieth-century Broadway musicals portrayed heroines torn between feminine domesticity and professional autonomy, between Prince Charming and the rags-to-riches Alger narrative enshrined at the heart of

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both the American success myth and the Broadway musical, which Hecht has aptly called America's "cultural Ellis Island."<sup>5</sup> While not a few of Broadway's Cinderella working girls have opted for romantic happily-ever-afters, these musicals frequently portray ambitious and assertive heroines in pursuit of professional success and self-realization. These Cinderellas have appeared throughout a historical cavalcade of many forms, ranging from the immigrant shopgirls of the 1920s to the princesses and prostitutes of the 1950s. Because American culture's interpretations of the Cinderella narrative have been marked by their contradictions, I consider transformations of the Cinderella myth in the Broadway musical through a series of archetypal pairings.

Chapter 1 juxtaposes dual expressions of the Cinderella mythology on Broadway in the 1920s: the working girl heroines of the Cinderella musical, and the cultural stereotype of the gold-digging chorus girl. In this chapter, I consider how the American musical, while also drawing from Edwardian British musicals like *A Gaiety Girl* (1893), feminized the Horatio Alger narrative in the Cinderella musical genre of the 1920s: a decade marked by its ethos of prosperity and business enterprise, as well as by the rise of the New Woman. Such quintessential Cinderella musicals as *Irene* (1919) and *Sally* (1920) valorized the Protestant work ethic through its assimilation by the musicals' heroines: industrious yet fashionable working girls, often from Irish-American immigrant backgrounds. By contrast, the media stereotypically represented chorus girls in *The Ziegfeld Follies* and other extravagant 1920s "Beauty Trust" revues as both modern "American Cinderellas" and as mercenary vixens: the antithesis of the honest Algeresque women of the Cinderella musical. In response, authors like Avery Hopwood and Anita Loos critically subverted the caricature of the gold-digging chorus girl in works like *The Gold Diggers* (1919) and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925), respectively. In addition to the previously mentioned works, chapter 1 discusses the following texts: *Mlle. Modiste* (a proto-Cinderella musical from 1905), *Mary* (1920), *The Gingham Girl* (1922), *Helen of Troy, New York* (1923), Rodgers and Hart's *Peggy-Ann* (1926), and the 1920s-style French movie musical *Princess Tam-Tam* (1935), as well as two early twentieth-century novels themed around the figure of the gold-digging chorus girl: Roy McCardell's *The Show Girl and Her Friends* (1904) and Kenneth McGaffey's *The Sorrows of a Show Girl* (1908).

Chapter 2 looks at Cinderella in the Great Depression in the form of the broad: the democratic antithesis of the refined lady, as represented in the 1930s and early 1940s Broadway musicals of Ethel Merman. This

chapter considers how the brash and brassy Merman, while drawing upon a powerful offstage female Alger narrative, consistently played against the Cinderella mythology of feminine dependence, as she repeatedly burlesqued the lady and the “genteel tradition” of Victorian prudery and WASP high culture. This chapter surveys the potent influence of both Mae West and Minsky’s—era burlesque on Merman’s stage persona, while also considering her multiple Broadway collaborations with Cole Porter. In a decade of musicals greatly inspired by Gilbert Seldes’ landmark 1924 work of cultural criticism, *The 7 Lively Arts*, the pedigreed Porter drew upon Merman’s broad “vitality” as he too strove to puncture the genteel tradition, Puritanism, and the forces of censorship. In chapter 2, I discuss the following texts: the Merman-Porter Broadway collaborations *Anything Goes* (1934), *Red, Hot and Blue* (1936), *Du Barry Was a Lady* (1939), and *Panama Hattie* (1940), as well as the 1939 Merman vehicle *Stars in Your Eyes* (1939; cowritten by J. P. McEvoy, Arthur Schwartz, and Dorothy Fields).

Chapter 3 looks at Cinderella in the Broadway musicals of the 1940s in the form of the Boss Lady and the Enchantress (conflicting roles that torment Liza Elliott in the milestone 1941 musical *Lady in the Dark*). In response to American women’s mass mobilization into the labor force during World War II, the 1920s working girl and the 1930s broad metamorphosed into the 1940s career woman in a number of Broadway musicals animated by “battle of the sexes” themes. These musicals, about the “taming” of powerful career women, and their transformation into more suitably feminine glamour girls, resonated with an era marked by the popularization of Freudian theory. In this chapter, I consider how a particularly misogynist strand of Freudianism called ego psychology underpinned the postwar backlash against career women. These psychoanalytic strains fed into the formal reformations of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “integrated book musicals,” which echoed postwar rhetoric about the domestic integration of American women. Yet in response to the integrated musical play revolution, female lyricists and librettists—including Dorothy Fields, Betty Comden (in close collaboration with Adolph Green), Bella Spewack, and Anita Loos—created musical comedies that slyly subverted the postwar backlash to the “Boss Lady.” In chapter 3, I discuss the following shows: *Something for the Boys* (1943), *One Touch of Venus* (1943), *On the Town* (1944), *Bloomer Girl* (1944), *Up in Central Park* (1945), *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946), *Love Life* (1948), *Kiss Me, Kate* (1949), *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1949), *South Pacific* (1949), as well as *Lady in the Dark* and the 1945 Elmer Rice play *Dream Girl*.

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Finally, chapter 4 looks at how the 1950s musical remolded Cinderella into the dual form of the princess and the prostitute, during a decade that circulated the domestic ideals of the feminine mystique as well as sexual containment (as termed by the historian Elaine Tyler May).<sup>6</sup> While the icon of the princess served to affirm domesticity, the prostitute challenged the decade's prevailing gender myths. *My Fair Lady* (1956) and *Gigi* (1958) crested a new wave of Cinderella musicals that drew upon the cosmopolitan glamour of the legendary 1956 royal wedding of Grace Kelly to Prince Rainier of Monaco. Chapter 4 demonstrates how many of these Europhilic 1950s Cinderella/Galatea musicals—while often revolving around the heroine's high-fashion makeover—also concerned the simultaneous regeneration of an older “Sleeping Prince” male. However, a number of Broadway and Hollywood musicals satirically subverted the feminine mystique years before the 1963 publication of Freidan's landmark book. In addition to the works mentioned above, I look at *Happy Hunting* (1953), *Wonderful Town* (1953), *House of Flowers* (1954), *Pipe Dream* (1955), *Bells Are Ringing* (1956), and *Gypsy* (1959), as well as Terrence Rattigan's *The Sleeping Prince* and Samuel Taylor's *Sabrina Fair, or a Woman of the World* (both plays from 1953).

*American Cinderellas* focuses on the texts, as well as cultural and performance contexts, of Broadway musicals from *Irene* to *Gypsy*. At the same time, I hope to expand interdisciplinary dialogue between the Broadway musical and Hollywood films, as well as drama and fiction (both of literary and commercial genres). In particular, the Cinderella motifs of the Broadway musical from the 1920s through the 1950s find close parallels in studio-system Hollywood. Both the “Golden Age” Broadway musical and the Hollywood “Dream Factory” owed much of their foundational development to Jewish American immigrants, and both advanced and mythologized the democratic promise of the American dream—a vision heavily marketed to the dreams and fantasies of women. While studio-system Hollywood contrasted considerably from its Broadway counterpart in numerous ways—including the formalized implementation of censorship in Hollywood through the Production Code—I consider the Cinderella mythologies of Broadway and Hollywood to be closely and often symbiotically intertwined, as both appealed to a working- and middle-class popular demographic, as well as to women. In the decades discussed in *American Cinderellas*, I consider the Broadway musical and the studio-system Hollywood movie to comprise the same overarching genres, even while representing different mediums.



*American Cinderellas* is intended not only to bridge studies in musical theater and film, but also to expand the path of current scholarship connecting American musical theater and modernism. I am influenced by the theories of the late film theorist and historian Miriam Hansen, who influentially introduced the term “vernacular modernism” (as distinct from “high modernism”) into academic discourse with her 1999 essay “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism”:

Whether or not one agrees with the postmodernist challenge to modernism and modernity at large, it did open up space for understanding modernism as a much wider, more diverse phenomenon, eluding any single-logic genealogy that runs from Cubism to Abstract Expressionism, from Eliot, Pound, Joyce and Kafka, to Beckett and Robbe-Grillet. . . . Rather, modernism encompasses a whole range of cultural and artistic processes that register, respond to, and reflect upon processes of modernization and the experience upon modernity.<sup>7</sup>

*American Cinderellas* considers the Broadway musical in the interwar years and post–World War II era as a vehicle of vernacular modernism—one of the major topics and conflicts of which concerned the role of the New Woman in modern society and the labor force. In my discussion of the Broadway musical in relation to its shifting registers of cultural hierarchy, I also draw from the work of David Savran, who, in *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class* (2009) and other works, has compellingly drawn from the theory of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (and the latter’s *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*) to consider “musicals as (not) outside the tradition of theatrical modernism,”<sup>8</sup> but as a part of an extended discourse connecting American theater and drama with jazz, vaudeville and variety theater, and the Broadway musical as part of the twentieth-century modernist project.

Above all, I seek to illustrate the origins and development of a Cinderella narrative that is still very much with us in the present day—on the Broadway stages and in the cinemas of 2015, as well as in the cultural psyche. While a new wave of Cinderella musicals has reconceived the fairy tale icon toward contemporary feminist ideals of independence and agency, I argue that the Broadway musical’s Cinderellas have a long history of complicating and defying the stereotypes of feminine passivity that have long been associated with Perrault’s

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(and, later, Disney's) heroine. In this aspect and others, I am inspired by the work of Stacy Wolf, who asserts the performative centrality of Broadway's female characters and performers in her studies *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical* (2002) and *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (2011). In the former book, Wolf observed, "the Broadway musical is the one performance form that features women as neither passive objects nor subjects of vilification"<sup>9</sup>:

The very action of singing and dancing—the foundation of performance in musicals—requires an athleticism that demonstrates women's physical and vocal strength. The female principal in the most musicals is visually and aurally dominant. She stands center stage, the story is built around her, and the songs are written for her as solo presentations. . . . And even when the character sings a song of being in love (with a man) . . . the female performer 'owns' the song; the performance itself is all about her (in a) feminine yet active cultural form that does not locate a woman as a passive to-be-looked-at object but allows her to take up the position of self-spectacle. Women in musicals look back.<sup>10</sup>

The early-mid-twentieth-century Broadway musical has traditionally been historicized predominately through the works of its male creators—from Irving Berlin and the Gershwins, to Rodgers and Hammerstein and Lerner and Loewe, among others. By contrast, I argue for the existence of a canon of musicals by prominent female lyricists and librettists that openly advanced progressive ideals of women's rights within a form that, until quite recently, has not traditionally been considered compatible with feminist ideologies (Wolf's books, and increasingly those of other feminist musical theater scholars, have persuasively demonstrated that this is not entirely the case).<sup>11</sup> The works of Dorothy Fields, Anita Loos, and Betty Comden (with Adolph Green), as well as early twentieth-century pioneers like Zelda Sears, receive substantial discussion, even as these underappreciated female artists and craftswomen continue to gain due recognition through new imaginings of their works. These include the Broadway revival of *Gigi* (originally the theatrical brainchild of Loos), which played at the Neil Simon Theatre in spring of 2015, and the recent Broadway staging of *On the Town*, with its trio of "exuberantly take-charge gals."<sup>12</sup> Director John Rando's "jubilant revival" of the Bernstein–Comden–Green masterwork opened to rave reviews at the Lyric Theatre in October of 2014.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, *American Cinderellas* considers the limitations, as well as the liberations, of the Cinderella narrative as applied to Broadway musicals between 1919 and 1959. Reflecting this period of the history of the American musical, the Cinderella motif was traditionally addressed toward the stories of white, middle-class American women: reducing, and often outright omitting, the stories and experiences of women of color. Like the Broadway musical, the genre's Cinderella mythologies have reflected a selective vision of American democracy: an only partially inclusive "melting pot" resonating with the assimilatory aspirations of its (predominately) Jewish American creators. Yet, a small number of musicals represented black Cinderella heroines, and this book considers notable intersectional examples of the genre, including 1935's *Princess Tam-Tam*, starring Josephine Baker, and the 1954 Broadway musical *House of Flowers*.

Given the endurance of the Cinderella myth throughout the history of the Broadway musical, I have selected the perimeters of 1919 and 1959 with a number of considerations and criteria. While 1919 represents the opening of *Irene* (the first of the 1920s cycle of Cinderella musicals, though certainly not the first musical with a Cinderella narrative), the year is also pivotal in marking the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. Similarly, I consider 1959's *Gypsy* as the climactic show in the mid-century cycle of Broadway musicals that followed *Irene* in juxtaposing the classic Old World fairy tale with motifs of modern American working women, even as the ironic "musical fable" departs dramatically from the winsome ethos of the 1919 hit. Of course, a number of Broadway musicals in the working girl Cinderella tradition (i.e., 1964's *Funny Girl*) continued to arrive after *Gypsy*, and the coda at the end of this book considers new directions of Broadway's Cinderella mythologies in the latter half of the twentieth century, as well as the first two decades of the twenty-first century. In this fresh century, new iterations of feminism summoned the fairy tale heroine out of the ash-heap, and back into the cacophonous ballroom of American popular culture. Much as she was the quintessential feminine icon of the 1920s—starting with *Irene* and *The Gold Diggers*—Cinderella is again a debated belle of the ball.

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