

**“Automatically, radically gay!”: How screen-to-stage musicals that rely on nostalgia normalize gay male stereotypes.**



Actor Grey Henson performs a tap number as the character Damian in *Mean Girls: The Musical*.



**Utrecht University**

Vera Slager, 5717833

MA Thesis Contemporary Theatre,  
Dance and Dramaturgy

Supervisor: Liesbeth Groot-Nibbelink

Word count: 16520 words

Date: October 18<sup>th</sup> 2019

## Abstract

In a world where spectators increasingly turn towards recreations of old and familiar narratives, this thesis aims to critically discuss one of musical theatre's answers to this nostalgic turn: the screen-to-stage musical. Using media scholar Ryan Lizardi's theory regarding "perpetual nostalgia" and Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering's concept "retrotyping," I argue that the nostalgia that is present in screen-to-stage musicals can hinder critical reflection by repeating idealized versions of old narratives that only pay attention to the positively valued aspects of these narratives and ignore their negative aspects. These idealized remakes of old media texts leave already held beliefs and ideological positions unchallenged, meaning that spectators aren't given the opportunity to reflect on their ideologies.

Another aspect of the screen-to-stage musical that I discuss, is the translation of conventions that is involved when a film is remade into a musical to appeal to nostalgia-driven spectators. Because the conventions of musical theatre can usually be characterised by making things bigger and brighter, I argue that certain aspects of films can be exaggerated in a screen-to-stage musical, which facilitates the reinforcement of stereotypes. In this thesis, specific attention is paid to gay male stereotypes, because musical theatre has a relatively large gay male spectatorship and it therefore seems strange that gay males are often represented in a stereotypical manner. It is also a subject that up until now has not been discussed very much.

I then move to an analysis of three different screen-to-stage musicals: *Heathers: The Musical*, *Mean Girls: The Musical* and *Legally Blonde: The Musical*. In these analyses, I demonstrate how these screen-to-stage musicals can be understood as retrotypical remakes of their source material, which means that they hinder critical reflection in their spectators. I also demonstrate that with their use of musical theatre conventions, these musicals represent gay males in a stereotypical manner. I end each analysis by discussing how each musical addresses a certain longing that is related to its stereotypical representation of gay males, with which I illustrate how these musicals normalize gay male stereotypes and keep problematic ideologies with regards to gayness in place.

## Acknowledgements

Although it feels a bit cheesy, there are a few people I wish to thank for their tremendous support during this thesis process. To my amazing supervisor Liesbeth, thank you! Somehow, you had the solutions to problems before I could even determine what the problems were. I feel lucky to have been able to call you my supervisor, because I believe you bring out the best in me academically. A big thanks also goes out to my family, thank you for never believing me when I tell you that everything I'm doing is absolute rubbish. And Jeroen, thank you for all the times you tell me that you believe in me, it means a lot.

At the end of this Master's, I also wish to thank all my classmates and teachers. Thank you for your insights, experiences, fun conversations and much more. It's been an amazing year.

# Table of contents

Introduction .....	1
Method and theoretical framework .....	2
1 Nostalgia Defined.....	4
1.1 Nostalgia .....	4
1.2 Perpetual nostalgia .....	5
1.3 Nostalgia as a tool for analysis.....	7
2 Remakes, conventions and stereotypes .....	9
2.1 The conventions of musical theatre .....	9
2.2 Stereotypes normalized .....	13
2.3 The gay male stereotype.....	14
3 <i>Heathers: The Musical</i> .....	16
3.1 How <i>Heathers: The Musical</i> evokes retrotypical nostalgia .....	17
3.2 How gay males are represented in <i>Heathers: The Musical</i> .....	19
3.3 The object of longing that <i>Heathers: The Musical</i> addresses .....	21
4 <i>Mean Girls: The Musical</i> .....	22
4.1 How <i>Mean Girls: The Musical</i> evokes retrotypical nostalgia .....	22
4.2 How gay males are represented in <i>Mean Girls: The Musical</i> .....	24
4.3 The object of longing that <i>Mean Girls: The Musical</i> addresses .....	25
5 <i>Legally Blonde: The Musical</i> .....	27
5.1 How <i>Legally Blonde: The Musical</i> evokes retrotypical nostalgia .....	27
5.2 How gay males are represented in <i>Legally Blonde: The Musical</i> .....	29
5.3 The object of longing that <i>Legally Blonde: The Musical</i> addresses .....	30
Conclusion.....	32
Bibliography .....	34
Appendix A: “My Dead Gay Son” song lyrics .....	37
Appendix B: “Where Do You Belong?” song lyrics.....	41
Appendix C: “There! Right There!” song lyrics.....	46

## Introduction

When taking a look at our contemporary popular culture, it becomes clear that nostalgia is booming. Disney is reproducing most of its old animations in a live-action format, tv-shows from the past like *Gilmore Girls* are constantly being rebooted and even new series like *Stranger Things* use the aesthetic of the eighties to feel like a blast from the past. When nineties sitcom *Friends* was in danger of being removed from Netflix, fans even started petitions that resulted in the streaming service paying one hundred million dollars to keep the show on its platform.<sup>1</sup> In his book *Mediated Nostalgia: Individual Memory and Contemporary Mass Media*, media scholar Ryan Lizardi discusses this turn towards nostalgia. He argues that new technologies offer us the opportunity to curate and control our own media consumption, which often causes us to keep watching the shows and films that we're already familiar with.<sup>2</sup> Netflix, for example, offers its viewers an opportunity to create a personal list of films and series that they can keep turning back to. According to Lizardi, this "perpetual nostalgia" that comes into being when we repeatedly watch old media narratives that we already know can cause us to become stuck in the past, unable to use newer or different narratives in order to reflect on the past.<sup>3</sup>

Although musical theatre doesn't necessarily have these new techniques, the phenomenon of nostalgia-driven spectators turning back to old narratives can also be witnessed there. Even though musical remakes of films – often called screen-to-stage musicals – have existed for a long time, they have become a much more prominent part of the American musical theatre landscape in the last few years. Theatre scholar Amy Osatinski writes that thirty-one of the eighty-four original musicals that played on Broadway from January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2015 were based on films. In comparison, of the seventy-nine original musicals that played on Broadway from January 1, 1950 to December 31, 1955, only five were based on films.<sup>4</sup> This seems to point to an increased longing felt by spectators to re-experience old and familiar narratives. Instead of wishing to experience new narratives to which they can relate, they would rather see something they already know. It should be pointed out here that screen-to-stage musicals are often strongly based on American films and narratives, which means that they will probably be more appealing for American spectators or spectators who are familiar with these texts.

When I first noticed the connection between nostalgia and the screen-to-stage musical, I couldn't quite put my finger on it. It was only when I started thinking about the potential functions and effects of nostalgia that I could see a more tangible connection between the two. It seemed far-fetched at first, but soon I started to see how nostalgia in musical theatre, felt especially strong in musicals based on existing films since they try to re-create already existing images and narratives, could lead to the normalization of stereotypes. Important to note here, is that I am an academic who feels like she always has to prove that musical theatre truly is an artform that can break through certain barriers and address taboos. Therefore, when I see musicals that reinforce stereotypes, my heart breaks a little bit. For that reason, with this thesis I wish to create an awareness of the potential consequences of nostalgia in screen-to-stage musicals, so that we can work towards a use of nostalgia that doesn't normalize stereotypes.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Friends Will Stay on Netflix Throughout 2019 – But There's a Catch," *Vanity Fair*, accessed October 13, 2019, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2018/12/friends-staying-on-netflix-through-2019>.

<sup>2</sup> Ryan Lizardi, "Introduction to the Perpetual Individual Nostalgic's Playlist Past," in *Mediated Nostalgia: Individual Memory and Contemporary Mass Media* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, 6-9.

<sup>4</sup> Amy S. Osatinski, "Ghosts in the Machine: Digital Technology and Screen-to-Stage Musical," in *iBroadway*, edited by Jessica Hillman – McCord (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 76-77.

It was my intention at first to analyze different stereotypes, but the prominence of the gay stereotype stood out from the others. First and foremost because it seems strange to me that an artform that is so closely connected to the gay community would exacerbate stereotypical ideas about gay males by representing them in a stereotypical manner.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, because very few scholars seem to be paying attention to stereotypical representations of sexuality in musical theatre. Therefore, in this thesis I will answer the following question:

*How do screen-to-stage musicals that rely on a sense of nostalgia normalize gay male stereotypes?*

## Method and theoretical framework

The main argument that I will put forward in this thesis is based on a two-step argument. Firstly, I wish to study nostalgia in screen-to-stage musicals because they seem to rely heavily on nostalgia to appeal to their spectators. Therefore, I will study how nostalgia is evoked and examine its potential effects, paying specific attention to its ability to hinder critical reflection in the spectator. I will argue that because critical reflection is hindered, the presence of nostalgia in these musicals can potentially keep certain old-fashioned ideologies in place that existed in their source material.

Secondly, I will make a connection between the presence of nostalgia in screen-to-stage musicals and its consequences for the repetition and normalization of stereotypes. This is based on the idea that a certain translation takes place when a film is converted into a musical due to the differences between the conventions of film and musical theatre. Because the conventions of musical theatre can usually be characterised by making things bigger and brighter, certain aspects of films can be exaggerated in a screen-to-stage musical. It is my assumption here, that this often leads to a stereotypical representation of people. In this thesis, I will focus specifically on the representation of gay males. Ultimately, these two steps allow me to demonstrate how the presence of nostalgia in screen-to-stage musicals leads to the normalization of gay male stereotypes.

Following this two-step argument, I will start by answering the following question in chapter one: *How can nostalgia be defined and how can it be understood as a tool for analysis?* The books *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future* by media scholar Katharina Niemeyer and *The Future of Nostalgia* by literary scholar Svetlana Boym will help provide a broad definition of the concept of nostalgia that addresses the object of longing related to the concept. Ryan Lizardi's book *Mediated Nostalgia: Individual Memory and Contemporary Mass Media* and his concept of perpetual nostalgia will then be used to craft a more specific understanding of nostalgia that will demonstrate how spectators keep turning back to the same idealized narratives, which ultimately hinders critical reflection. To further support this argument, memory scholars Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering's book *The Mnemonic Imagination: Remembering As Creative Practice* and their concept of "retrotyping" will be used to discuss how an idealized version of the past or a past narrative can be created by celebrating its positive aspects and discarding others that would "compromise the celebratory process."<sup>6</sup> I will end the chapter by illustrating how the understanding of nostalgia that is created in this chapter could be used as an analytical tool for performance analysis.

---

<sup>5</sup> For more on this subject, see *Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical* (2000). In this book, D.A. Miller discusses musical theatre's history as a meeting place for gay men and describes how and why musical theatre appeals to them.

<sup>6</sup> Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, "Retrotyping and the Marketing of Nostalgia," in *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*, ed. Katharina Niemeyer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 88.

Moving to step two of my argument, I will answer the following question in chapter two: *How do the conventions of musical theatre exaggerate aspects of the films they were based on and thereby reinforce stereotypes?* In this chapter, Scott McMillin's book *The Musical as Drama* will provide a basis from which to explore the most prominent conventions of musical theatre, helping me to illustrate how these conventions facilitate the exaggeration of aspects of the films that screen-to-stage musicals are based on. I will then illustrate how these conventions and the exaggeration they facilitate can have consequences for representation. Film scholar Charles Ramírez Berg's text "Categorizing the Other: Stereotypes and Stereotyping" will be used here to discuss theories regarding stereotypes, how stereotypes come into being and how they are normalized. Film scholar Richard Dyer's text "Seen to be believed: some problems in the representation of gay people as typical" will then help me to zoom in on the most dominant gay stereotype. Along with queer scholar David Halperin's book *How to be Gay*, this text will also help me to provide a more nuanced discussion of that stereotype.

Having established the theoretical framework, I will then move to the analyses of three different screen-to-stage musicals: *Heathers: The Musical*, *Mean Girls: The Musical* and *Legally Blonde: The Musical*.<sup>7</sup> In these analyses – which are based on song lyrics and recordings of the musicals – I will illustrate how retrotypical nostalgia is evoked and how gay males are represented.<sup>8</sup> The main goal, however is to question the object of longing that these musicals address with their use of nostalgia and how this is related to the stereotypical representation of gay males. To reach this goal, I will use three questions to analyse each case-study. The first is: *How is retrotypical nostalgia evoked in this screen-to-stage musical?* Using retrotyping as a concept, I will address the topics and themes, means and operations used by screen-to-stage musicals to make an idealized recreation of the films they were based on. This will demonstrate how critical reflection is hindered. I will then move to my second question: *How are gay males represented in this screen-to-stage musical?* To answer this question, specific scenes will be analysed from each case-study to discuss how gay males are represented. Employing theory about the gay male stereotype by Dyer, I will focus on the stereotypical characteristics they display or that are displayed by others who express ideas about homosexuality. Hereby, I will demonstrate that these musicals reinforce gay stereotypes.

Using the observations gathered from these questions, I will then answer a third question: *What object of longing does this screen-to-stage musical address and how does this relate to its representation of gay males?* In this part of my analysis, I will thus question what the object of longing is that the nostalgia in screen-to-stage musicals appeals to. Referring to the narratives and messages that these musicals try to communicate, I will argue that each of these musicals appeals to longings that are rather problematic in light of their stereotypical representations of gay males.

In my conclusion, I will address the possibility of a progressive use of nostalgia in screen-to-stage musicals. Additionally, I will express concerns regarding my critical treatment of the gay stereotype.

---

<sup>7</sup> *Heathers: The Musical*, Kevin Murphy and Laurence O'Keefe, directed by Andy Fickman, New World Stages, 2014; *Mean Girls: The Musical*, Nell Benjamin, Tina Fey and Jeff Richmond, directed by Casey Nicholaw, August Wilson Theatre, 2018; *Legally Blonde: The Musical*, Nell Benjamin, Laurence O'Keefe and Heather Hach, directed by Jerry Mitchell, Palace Theatre, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, I was unable to find official recordings of most of these shows. Therefore, I turned to illegal recordings made by spectators. At the moment of writing, these recordings are still online, but they are often removed.

# 1 Nostalgia Defined

Since screen-to-stage musicals appeal to spectators who wish to re-experience old and familiar narratives, it can be said that they rely on nostalgia.<sup>9</sup> In fact, these musicals often tend to play up their connection to the films they were based on to evoke nostalgia in their spectators. Before that can be addressed, however, there needs to be a clear understanding of the concept nostalgia. Therefore, in this chapter I will reflect on what nostalgia entails. Starting with a broad definition which addresses the object of longing that is related to nostalgia, I will present nostalgia as a longing for an elusive object. Then, I will discuss how nostalgia can be understood as a mechanism that can hinder critical reflection. Lastly, I will craft an understanding of nostalgia as an analytical tool.

## 1.1 Nostalgia

The concept of nostalgia first emerged in the seventeenth century. Swiss mercenaries complaining of homesickness were diagnosed with nostalgia, a sickness that doctors believed could be cured by opium, leeches or a trip to the Swiss Alps.<sup>10</sup> Understandably, the word nostalgia comes from *nostos*, which means return home and *algia*, which means longing. Over the years, however, the meaning of the concept shifted from a disease to an affect. Today, nostalgia is often defined as “a sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the past,” like it is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary.<sup>11</sup> Thus, it is usually assumed that nostalgia is a longing that is only directed at the past. However, many scholars agree that the object of longing in nostalgia is not so easily definable. For example, Niemeyer speaks of nostalgia as a longing for the past, present *and* future.<sup>12</sup> She defines nostalgia in relation to time, whereas not every scholar confines the concept to time. The longing can be directed at more than that. Someone can long for the way they felt at a certain point in their life, or for the way they think the world was like. Even a longing for something they’ve never even experienced is possible.<sup>13</sup> Because the object of longing is not always clear, Boym writes that nostalgia is often directed “sideways” and that “the nostalgic feels stifled within the conventional confines of time and space,” meaning that confining the concept only to the realms of time and space doesn’t grasp its significance.<sup>14</sup> One of the qualities of nostalgia is in fact its elusiveness and the idea that people don’t exactly know what they’re longing for.<sup>15</sup>

Although definitions of nostalgia differ, most of them share the utopian nature of nostalgia and the notion of a certain impossibility. As Boym argues: “It is about the repetition of the unrepeatable, [the] materialization of the immaterial.”<sup>16</sup> It recalls times or places that once have been or that are out of reach.<sup>17</sup> As a result, nostalgia can also be seen as a longing for something unreachable. The unreachable can then only be “re-enacted, repeated, reconstructed, reshown, rethought and restored by an artificial act, by *mimesis*.”<sup>18</sup> In light of our current obsession with

---

<sup>9</sup> Osatinski, “Ghosts in the Machine: Digital Technology and Screen-to-Stage Musical,” 75.

<sup>10</sup> Svetlana Boym, “Introduction,” in *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), XIV.

<sup>11</sup> “Nostalgia,” Lexico, accessed August 28, 2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/nostalgia>.

<sup>12</sup> Niemeyer, “Introduction,” in *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Boym, “Introduction,” XIV

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, XIV.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, XVII

<sup>17</sup> Niemeyer, “Introduction,” 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, 3.



nostalgia, our attempts to reach the unreachable explain why remakes of old media texts can be so appealing.

## 1.2 Perpetual nostalgia

### **Stuck in the past**

In his book *Mediated Nostalgia: Individual Memory and Contemporary Mass Media*, media scholar Ryan Lizardi critically discusses the current nostalgia boom, aiming to start a critical intervention in contemporary media. In his discussion, he defines nostalgia as a longing for “the past or some past state.”<sup>19</sup> According to him, this longing leads us to focus on the past or on an object that represents the past to soothe our longing and to “reassure already held ideological positions.”<sup>20</sup> Lizardi argues that instead of constructing a comparative, collective or adaptive view of history, contemporary media construct individualized pasts that are defined by “idealized versions of beloved lost media texts pumped up with psychic investment to a level of unreality.”<sup>21</sup> He explains this by using a helpful distinction made by Sigmund Freud between mourning and melancholia. In Freud’s view, mourning is a healthy longing for the past that helps us to reflect on and work through the past to improve our present or future.<sup>22</sup> However, he views melancholia as an attempt to re-create the past which demonstrates our incapability to move on from it.<sup>23</sup> According to Lizardi, contemporary media encourage us to take up a melancholic stance by remaking familiar narratives. These remakes are often presented as idealized versions of the source material, since the recognizable and positively valued aspects of the source material are highlighted and hyped up whilst their less attractive elements are ignored. Lizardi doesn’t offer examples of this, but there are plenty. For example, look at Disney’s remake of *Dumbo*, which highlighted the delights of a flying elephant but pretended that the racist characters and songs never existed in the original.<sup>24</sup> Instead of addressing the critiques that the original film got, the remake completely erased any problematic elements, also erasing any opportunity for comparative reflection in the process.<sup>25</sup>

Because we are encouraged to take up a melancholic stance, Lizardi argues, our situation as contemporary media consumers can be compared to a scene from Harry Potter. In this scene, Harry finds a mirror that shows him what he longs for the most. When he looks at his reflection, he sees himself, reunited with his deceased parents. Slowly, he becomes more enchanted by this image of something unreachable and he starts spending all of his time in front of the mirror, until another character stops him and takes the mirror away. Lizardi argues that just like Harry, we have been constructed as “past-focused subjects” by the current nostalgic trend, which he detects in all aspects of popular culture, although he focuses mostly on film and television. Continuing the analogy with Harry Potter, he observes:

“Where we could use the past as an adaptive functional mirror with which we could compare and contrast to our contemporary situation, possibly learning something along the

---

<sup>19</sup> Lizardi, “Introduction to the Perpetual Individual Nostalgic’s Playlist Past,” 7.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Lizardi, 7

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> *Dumbo*, directed by Tim Burton, Los Angeles: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> For an in-depth analysis of *Dumbo* and other Disney remakes, watch Lindsey Ellis’ video essay “Woke Disney” via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xU1ffHa47YY>.

way, the past instead is the same individualized version that transfixes Harry, thereby constructing us as uncritical citizens of our own culture."<sup>26</sup>

Lizardi thus argues that the current nostalgia boom transfixes us inside our own idealistic experience of the past, which makes us blind to negative aspects of the actual past.

Lizardi approaches this subject from a media perspective, but the same subject has also been explored from the perspective of memory studies. In their book *The Mnemonic Imagination: Remembering as Creative Practice*, Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering describe how a process they call the "mnemonic imagination" is integral to our experience of nostalgia. Mnemonic imagination can be described as an interplay between memory and imagination that helps us to make sense of the relationships between the past, present and future.<sup>27</sup> The mnemonic imagination as a concept helps to understand how we constantly use our memories to reassess past experiences and to imagine different outcomes. When we are presented with different narratives of the past, as Lizardi describes, the mnemonic imagination thus helps us to compare these narratives and to reflect on this comparison.

According to Keightley and Pickering, the experience of nostalgia comes into being through three components: loss, lack and longing. We experience a loss, for example the loss of our childhood. This loss presents a transition from childhood to adulthood. When we become aware that we've left our childhood behind, we can experience a sense of lack, since our childhood will not be a part of our future. This can then result in a longing for what once has been. This longing in combination with the realization that our childhood is now out of reach, can result in the experience of nostalgia.<sup>28</sup> Keightley and Pickering relate the distinction between loss, lack and longing in various ways to the notion of past and present: "While longing is an orientation to the past from the perspective of the present, lack is oriented to the present and an absence within it. By contrast, loss is longitudinal as it involves a movement or transition from the past to the present."<sup>29</sup> The three components of nostalgia – loss, lack and longing – are thus all connected to the past, present and future in different ways. For this reason, Keightley and Pickering argue that nostalgia can create sharper distinctions in our perception of the past, present and future. These distinctions invite us to use our mnemonic imagination in order to reflect on our experiences and to compare the past with the present.

### **Perpetual return to the past**

Following Lizardi's argumentation, the loss of our childhood and the ensuing lack that we experience, could lead us to long for narratives that soothe our feelings of nostalgia. However, instead of assuaging our yearnings with different narratives from the past, which would sharpen the distinctions between these narratives and the narratives we're familiar with and thereby invite reflection, contemporary media invite us to take up a melancholic stance which causes us to turn back to familiar narratives on a loop.<sup>30</sup> Lizardi therefore terms the nostalgia that we see in contemporary culture perpetual nostalgia, pointing to a nostalgia that keeps itself alive by perpetually "coming back to the same point and reproducing itself."<sup>31</sup> The idealized versions of lost

---

<sup>26</sup> Lizardi, "Introduction to the Perpetual Individual Nostalgic's Playlist Past," 6.

<sup>27</sup> Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination : Remembering as Creative Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, 117.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> Lizardi, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Lizardi, 7.

media texts that we keep coming back to can be described by a concept introduced by Keightley and Pickering called retrotyping. Retrotyping, they argue, is “a distinctive manner of remembering which depends on a purposive selectiveness of recall that celebrates certain aspects of a past period and discards others that would compromise the celebratory process and, of course, in this case undermine its commercial intent.”<sup>32</sup> Often used as a marketing strategy, the concept points to the ways in which nostalgia can be used to create a positive attitude towards a product or media object. Although Keightley and Pickering use the concept to refer to a simplified general past, retrotyping can also be used to understand how past media texts that are remade, such as the earlier mentioned *Dumbo*, become idealized versions of their source material.

Like Lizardi, Keightley and Pickering believe that an idealized presentation of the past can hinder critical reflection. They argue that the mnemonic imagination can only function when the trinity of loss, lack and longing is kept intact. The idealized presentation of the past that is constructed by retrotyping corrupts this trinity, because it transforms longing that is at first directed at the past into a longing to consume, a form of longing “necessary for consumption.”<sup>33</sup> Because the trinity of loss, lack and longing is corrupted, the mnemonic imagination cannot move freely between the different temporalities they represent. Consequently, our ability to reflect meaningfully on what we’re seeing is impacted. What remains is a form of perpetual nostalgia that repeats an idealised image of the past without inviting spectators to critically reflect on that past, thus maintaining the problematic structures and underlying ideologies of it. Instead of causing progression due to inviting spectators to experience a multiplicity of narratives about the past which challenge their ideas, the perpetual and melancholic nostalgia they are exposed to causes stasis.

### 1.3 Nostalgia as a tool for analysis

Since perpetual nostalgia describes how we constantly return to old and familiar narratives, the term can also be applied to the screen-to-stage musical, which is essentially a musical remake of a film. With regards to these musicals, nostalgia can firstly be understood as a feeling that comes into being through loss, lack and longing as defined by Keightley and Pickering and as a yearning that results in a spectator focusing on objects from the past to soothe their longing and reassure ideological positions as defined by Lizardi. A spectator experiences a loss, becomes aware of the fact that they’re now lacking something which then turns into a longing for something unreachable. Although this longing is often directed at the past, the object of longing can best be defined as elusive. In this regard, the concept of nostalgia can be used to question the object of longing in screen-to-stage musicals. If they evoke a certain longing, what do we long for? If they reassure ideological positions, which positions do they reassure and how?

Keightley and Pickering’s concept of retrotyping helps to demonstrate precisely how screen-to-stage musicals evoke memories of the past or how they appeal to certain longings. In their text *Retrotyping and the Marketing of Nostalgia*, they demonstrate how retrotyping is used in a Hovis bread advertisement from 1993. In their analysis of the advert, Keightley and Pickering describe how objects in the photo, the family in the photo, elements of the text and references to well-known media objects are used to create a cosy image of the past. They argue that with its representation of a past family situation, the advert creates “a romanticised interpretation of the past and an essentialised conception of everyday life built around unquestioned gender roles and relations.”<sup>34</sup> A similar analysis can be done for the screen-to-stage musical. Here, retrotyping can be used to

---

<sup>32</sup> Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, “Retrotyping and the Marketing of Nostalgia,” 88.

<sup>33</sup> Keightley and Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination*, 141.

<sup>34</sup> Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, “Retrotyping and the Marketing of Nostalgia,” 87.

analyse how theatrical means such as scenic design, costumes, dialogue, musical numbers and more are used to re-create cinematic worlds, thereby possibly creating an idealised image of films that highlights their positive aspects and ignores the negative aspects. Combined with theory by Lizardi, such an analysis can help to better understand how critical reflection is hindered in spectators of screen-to-stage musicals and how certain ideologies are kept in place.

## 2 Remakes, conventions and stereotypes

As a result of nostalgia, we often turn to objects from the past to soothe our nostalgic feelings. Contemporary media have responded to our longings with remakes of old and familiar narratives, resulting in – among other things – screen-to-stage musicals. However, there is a certain translation involved when a film is remade into a musical, since the conventions of film and musical theatre differ greatly. This translation can have a large impact on the way information is communicated to the spectator and therefore also has an influence on the way people are represented. For that reason, I will now focus on some of the most prominent conventions of musical theatre to create an understanding of how elements of the films that screen-to-stage musicals are based on are often exaggerated. This exaggeration, I will argue, facilitates the reinforcement and normalization of stereotypes. After the discussion on musical theatre conventions, I will therefore explore the concept of the stereotype, paying specific attention to the gay male stereotype since that is the subject of this thesis.

### 2.1 The conventions of musical theatre

Conventions can be described as the characteristics that define certain media. According to film scholars David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, they are a natural consequence of artists living and participating in society. Their artworks reflect this, because they always relate to other artworks or well-known events in some way or another. Thereby, artworks come to share certain common traits which are recognizable due to our own former experiences with other artworks.<sup>35</sup> Thus, conventions can be understood as recognizable traits that certain artworks share, and which audiences know based on their former experiences with similar artworks. For example, in film, conventions are heavily used in genres. Horror films often make use of the same tactics, such as jump scares, to build suspense. Stylistically they often look similar, using dark colours and white-faced ghosts. The conventions they make use of are often so common that viewers can recognize when something scary is going to happen.

In musical theatre, not much has been written on different genres and their corresponding conventions. Instead, musical theatre is often considered a genre itself, in which every show shares the same conventions. Many of these conventions have to do with the type of songs that every show is expected to have. For example, musicals are expected to have an “I want song,” which is a song that takes place early in the musical and which tells the audience a character’s main motivation. Another well-known musical convention is the “eleven-o-clock number,” which used to take place at the end of a musical and “heightened the energy level or dramatic interest in the second act.”<sup>36</sup>

Although I set out to discuss the differences between the conventions of musical theatre and film, discussing all of these would result in a whole new research project. Therefore, I will limit the comparison to the conventions that I believe have the largest influence on the representation of people in musical theatre.

---

<sup>35</sup> David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Jeff Smith, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education, 2008), 56.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Laird, “Musical Styles and Song Conventions,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, ed. Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris and Stacy Wolf (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2, <https://www-oxfordhandbooks-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195385946.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195385946-e-4?rkey=COZCdP&result=1>.

## The function of musical numbers

One of the most prominent conventions of musical theatre, is the musical number. It is often assumed that songs in musical theatre serve to further the action. Although this is true for some songs, theatre scholar Scott McMillin argues that more often, the songs are used to elaborate on the action taking place. McMillin critically analyzes the integration theory, which is used in relation to musical theatre to imply that it is an accumulation of many different theatrical elements which blend together seamlessly.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, according to McMillin, the creators who speak of an “integrated musical” often speak about the close communication between different creatives instead of speaking about the end product as “integrated.” McMillin feels that many musicals cannot be experienced as a unified whole, due to their conventions. According to him, the integration theory especially overlooks the difference between the book and the numbers. In musical theatre, the book usually contains the story, character development and stage directions whereas the numbers have to do with the music and lyrics. In McMillin's words: “Usually the book sets forth the turn of plot and the number elaborates it, in the spirit of repetition and the pleasure of difference.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, it can be said that the function of musical numbers is to elaborate on the action taking place by repeating elements of the story or by further adding to it.

However, the fact that musical numbers are used to elaborate on the action allows them to be a breeding ground for exaggeration, since they emphasize certain themes or events that were briefly mentioned in the plot. A good example of this is the song “Meet The Plastics” in *Mean Girls: The Musical*.<sup>39</sup> In this song, the main character Cady is introduced to the mean girls, called The Plastics, who go to her high school. First, her two friends sing about how The Plastics bully everyone and that Regina George, the leader of the group, is the “queen bee” of their high school. They also introduce the other Plastics as people who serve Regina. Regina George then confirms her “queen bee” status herself, when she sings that she is a “massive deal” and that she is “like, drunk with power.” She then adds that their high school “humps my [her] leg like a chihuahua,” illustrating again how powerful she is. The song thus repeats the ideas that were already stated at the beginning of the song and then adds to those ideas until they feel like an exaggeration.

## The ensemble as community

Another musical theatre convention that has to be dealt with when a film is remade into a musical, is the ensemble, which is sometimes referred to as the chorus. In the past, the ensemble was a group of performers who sang and danced in the background of main actors, often in a chorus line. However, with the rise of the ‘book-based’ musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein, the chorus line was transformed into an ensemble of “psychologically believable characters.”<sup>40</sup> Nowadays, members of the ensemble fulfil many smaller roles in musicals. In addition, they are used to represent crowds and communities. As a representation of a crowd, they are also used to set the scene.<sup>41</sup> An example of this can be found in the beginning of *Mean Girls: The Musical*, when Cady first sets foot in her new

---

<sup>37</sup> Scott McMillin, *The Musical as Drama* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 15.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, 19.

<sup>39</sup> “Meet the Plastics,” Genius, accessed on September 1, 2019, <https://genius.com/Original-broadway-cast-of-mean-girls-meet-the-plastics-lyrics>.

<sup>40</sup> Zachary Dunbar, “How do you solve a problem like the chorus?: Hammerstein’s *Allegro* and the Reception of the Greek Chorus on Broadway,” in *Choruses, Ancient and Modern*, ed. Joshua Billings, Felix Budelmann and Fiona Macintosh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 243.

<sup>41</sup> Millie Taylor and Dominic Symonds, *Studying Musical Theatre : Theory and Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 9.

high school. Members of the ensemble are dressed in varsity jackets and wear backpacks to represent the students of North Shore High. They are choreographed in a manner that shows the audience how Cady experiences these students. They move as if they're walking through school corridors in a rush, bumping into Cady and even pushing her on the ground. They are unkind, which is demonstrated when Cady tries to ask for help because she's lost and a student tells her to use Google Maps. The ensemble also gathers in smaller groups, simulating high school students' tendency to form smaller cliques. The ensemble thus sets the scene by representing an intimidating high school crowd.

Although the means used to communicate information to the audience differ, the use of performers to represent crowds is also used in film, where background actors can be used to set the scene in a similar manner, only without song and dance. Song and dance, however, is also what sets the musical theatre ensemble apart from background actors. McMillin discusses *the ensemble effect*: a feeling of excitement that erupts when a number starts with few singers and ends with an entire ensemble.<sup>42</sup> Although these numbers might start individually, ultimately everyone is singing and dancing in unison as if sharing the same thoughts. According to McMillin, they are making "the voice of the musical heard," meaning that every number and performance fits into a musical's aesthetic and that ensemble numbers are the prime example of this aesthetic. However, when taking into account that the ensemble is oftentimes used to represent a community, *the ensemble effect* deserves closer inspection.

McMillin writes about how Rodgers and Hammerstein emphasized the community aspect of ensembles by writing numbers in which "groups of fellow citizens get together and demonstrate through singing and dancing that a community spirit prevails."<sup>43</sup> Although this convention has been questioned and played with in many later musicals, the ensemble is still used to represent groups or communities with similar characteristics. In the example above, the community consists of high school students who are all mean and intimidating. Ensembles can thus generalize certain groups of people, risking the use and normalization of stereotypes. Additionally, ensembles might endorse the messages sung by other characters by providing harmonies and repeating or singing along to the lyrics. This isn't problematic in itself, but it potentially becomes problematic when the messages sung by these characters are, especially when the ensemble represents a general crowd. In this situation, the endorsement from the ensemble represents the dominant opinion of the community in the story. This potentially communicates to the audience that everyone shares a certain problematic opinion and that it is therefore fine to have that opinion. Combined with the excitement and power of *the ensemble effect*, it becomes clear how an ensemble could represent a powerful exaggeration of communities and facilitate the normalization of certain opinions or views.

### **Unsubtle representations**

Another convention of musical theatre has to do with the way they represent characters. The manner of representing characters is often anything but subtle. This is a big difference compared to the ways films represent characters. For example, Bordwell and Thompson describe in their chapter on film form how certain patterns are used to represent characters. They describe a scene from the film *Collateral* in which a taxi driver cleans his cab before his shift and carefully attaches a postcard with a tropical view. He then gazes at the postcard. According to Bordwell and Thompson, these subtle pieces of information given to the viewer invite the viewer to see him as an orderly person who occasionally tries to find a moment of peace in a busy city. They argue that this is reestablished

---

<sup>42</sup> McMillin, *The Musical as Drama*, 71.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, 72.

when the pattern is repeated later in the film when in response to people having a fight in his backseat, he puts up the visor and stares at the postcard.<sup>44</sup> This example shows that while films also depend on the repetition of certain patterns, the patterns are usually much more subtle when it comes to the representation of people.

Of course, there are also many examples of films with unsubtle representations, but films don't have to rely on exaggeration in the same way that musicals do, because they usually don't have to communicate information to a thousand or more spectators in one theatre. In his discussion on the representation of ethnicity in musical theatre, theatre scholar Todd Decker writes that the musical "thrives on exaggeration" and that "the ethnic and racial masks deployed throughout its history have represented racial and ethnic others in an altogether unsubtle fashion."<sup>45</sup> Although Decker specifically discusses the representation of ethnicity, his text also reveals something about how musical theatre represents people in general. He argues that throughout its history, musical theatre has often relied on stereotypes as a dramaturgical shorthand to add entertainment value for specific audiences.<sup>46</sup> In the past, these stereotypes were often ethnic or racial.

These days, almost everyone agrees that racial or ethnic stereotypes are not done. However, musical theatre still relies on stereotypes to communicate information to their spectators. Regarding the subject of stereotypes, cultural scholar Stuart Hall writes that "stereotypes get hold of the few 'simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized' characteristics about a person, *reduce* everything about the person to those traits, *exaggerate* and *simplify* them, and *fix* them without change or development to eternity."<sup>47</sup> For musical theatre, stereotyping is an easy way of communicating a lot of information about a character by representing the character in a simple way that immediately ascribes certain characteristics to them. For example, feminine characters are often dressed in white to communicate to spectators that they are young, naïve and innocent. A notable example is Maria from *West Side Story*.

In musical theatre, voices are also used to stereotype. In her discussion on vocal range and corresponding roles, musical theatre scholar Stacy Wolf writes that ingénue characters such as Christine Daaé in *The Phantom of the Opera* are usually sopranos. Comedic characters or villains are typically mezzo-sopranos, an example of this would be the witch from *Into The Woods*. The roles of middle-aged or older women are usually reserved for altos.<sup>48</sup> Musicals thus contain many stereotypes accompanied by stereotypical ideas about what a person is supposed to look, sound and be like. Combined with other conventions that facilitate exaggeration, these stereotypes are exaggerated even more. For screen-to-stage musicals that rely on nostalgia, this can mean that stereotypes from the source material are repeated in a more exaggerated way, further reinforcing them and causing them to become fixed, as Hall described.

---

<sup>44</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 52-53.

<sup>45</sup> Todd Decker, "Race, Ethnicity, Performance," in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, ed. Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3, <https://www-oxfordhandbooks-com.proxy.library.uu.nl/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195385946.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195385946-e-15>.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Stuart Hall, "The spectacle of the 'other,' in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, eds. Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans and Sean Nixon (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE in cooperation with Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2013), 258.

<sup>48</sup> Stacy Wolf, "Gender and Sexuality," in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, edited by Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 211.



## 2.2 Stereotypes normalized

Hall's definition of the stereotype illustrates how stereotypes take the most recognizable characteristics of a person and how they reduce a person to a stereotype by simplifying and exaggerating these characteristics. In his book *Latino Images in Film : Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance*, media scholar Charles Ramírez Berg further elaborates on this subject. According to Berg, stereotypes are the result of category making, ethnocentrism and prejudice. While the first is relatively harmless and something we all take part in to make sense of the world around us, the second and third element of the process come into being when we place ourselves and members of our in-group (people like us) at the centre of our world and then judge others based on the differences this ethnocentrism creates.<sup>49</sup> For that reason, stereotypes can be understood to create large distinctions between what is deemed normal and what is deemed abnormal, from the position of the in-group. Berg therefore describes the concept as “a negative generalization used by an in-group (Us) about an out-group (Them).”<sup>50</sup> In this process of stereotyping, members of the out-group are reduced to a few characteristics that highlight their Otherness.<sup>51</sup> Instead of recognizing them for the individuals they are, they are seen as a homogenized group sharing the same traits.

The prejudice that is involved can cause us to see members of the homogenized groups as less worthy than our own in-group based on their differences in gender, sexuality, skin colour and more. When the belief in stereotypes is strong enough, stereotypes can bring about discrimination or violence. Berg even refers to Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's study of the Holocaust, which showed that anti-Semitic stereotypical beliefs held by the Germans were in large part responsible for the Holocaust.<sup>52</sup> This demonstrates that stereotypes and the belief in stereotypes can have extreme and horrible consequences.

Besides highlighting why stereotypes are problematic, Berg also describes how the belief in stereotypes can be strengthened when stereotypes become normalized. He names repetition as the biggest agent in the normalization of stereotypes. Berg argues that when stereotypes are repeated, for example in films, they can become plot elements accompanied by predictable behaviours and storylines. We expect someone to act in a certain way because we have seen the same type act that way many times before. This way, Berg argues, “A “vicious cycle” aspect to repeated stereotyping arises because expressing learned stereotypes reinforces and to that extent validates and perpetuates them.”<sup>53</sup> Seeing known stereotypes being repeated thus confirms the beliefs we have about those stereotypes and strengthens those beliefs. When nostalgia-driven spectators watch a musical based on a film that already contained stereotypes, chances are that these stereotypes are recreated and further exaggerated in that musical, strengthening the beliefs connected to these stereotypes. This is because screen-to-stage musicals are often expected to stay as close to their source material as possible. In the text “Ghosts in the Machine: Digital Technology and Screen-to-Stage Musical,” theatre scholar Amy Osatinski analyses the *Yelp* reviews of theatregoers who went to see *Ghost: The Musical*, which is based on the film *Ghost*. Her conclusion after analysing these reviews was that the theatregoers were mostly expecting the musical to recreate the film “with as much fidelity as theatrically possible.”<sup>54</sup> Just a short search on *Yelp* tells me that this is also the case

---

<sup>49</sup> Charles Ramírez Berg, “Categorizing the Other: Stereotypes and Stereotyping,” in *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002), 15.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, 16.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, 21.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, 19.

<sup>54</sup> Amy S. Osatinski, “Ghosts in the Machine: Digital Technology and Screen-to-Stage Musical,” in *iBroadway*, edited by Jessica Hillman – McCord (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 79.

for *Mean Girls: The Musical*, where many visitors applaud the fact that the musical kept in all the quotes from the film.

In addition to offering an explanation as to why stereotypes are repeated, the fact that screen-to-stage musicals try to be true to their source material also presents another way in which critical reflection is hindered in these musicals. As demonstrated by the Yelp reviews, screen-to-stage musicals are often only judged on how close they get to their source material. This potentially leaves less room for other critiques.

### 2.3 The gay male stereotype

One of the stereotypes that is repeated over and over in contemporary media, is the gay male stereotype. Although gayness is not something that necessarily shows on the outside, there are multiple characteristics that are often assigned to gay men. These range from specific gestures, ways of talking, clothing and such to specific cultural interests. Queer scholar David Halperin therefore likes to make a distinction between gay identity and gay male subjectivity. Where gay identity simply describes that someone identifies as gay, gay male subjectivity refers to a “queer way of feeling,” which is expressed “through a peculiar, dissident way of relating to cultural objects ... and cultural forms in general.”<sup>55</sup> According to Halperin, this is why gay males often share a love for fashion, the Broadway musical or for icons like Judy Garland.

Although it is true that many gay males take part in the activities related to gay male subjectivity, viewing it as a fact that if you are a gay male, you must like certain things, plays into popular stereotypes. It especially plays into the stereotype of the queen. Film scholar Richard Dyer introduces this type as the most widespread stereotype about gay males. The queen stereotype is a consequence of the assumption that sexuality is strongly connected to gender and that gay men are therefore somewhere in-between genders.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, the queen type naturally likes things that are marked as feminine, such as fashion and home decoration. They also move in a more effeminate way and might even like crossdressing. By all means, they are not masculine enough to pass as a “real man” but not effeminate enough to be a woman. Because of this “failure” to appear masculine enough to be perceived as a “real” man, Dyer argues, they are often perceived as “tragic, pathetic, wretched, despicable, comic or ridiculous figures.”<sup>57</sup> Because they are perceived this way, the queen stereotype could lead gay males to experience discrimination.

Important to note here is that the discourse on gay male stereotypes is very nuanced. Where Berg is quick to condemn all stereotypes, many scholars actually provide arguments against the rejection of the gay male stereotype. Halperin, for example, argues that the rejection of the stereotype amplifies the belief that homosexuality can simply be reduced to same-sex sexuality without acknowledging that the identity of gay males is often influenced by gay culture.<sup>58</sup> According to Halperin, denying the stereotype thus shames gay males who do identify with aspects of that culture. In addition, Dyer argues that the stereotypical representation of gay males allows “gay subcultural perspectives to be always present in a scene,” offering gay males a position from which they can identify with and experience the narrative.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> David M. Halperin, *How to Be Gay* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 12.

<sup>56</sup> Important to note here, is that Dyer refers to the subculture of drag queens with the word “queen” and not to actual royalty.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Dyer, “Seen to be believed: some problems in the representation of gay people as typical,” in *The Matter of Images : Essays on Representations* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 32.

<sup>58</sup> Halperin, *How to Be Gay*, 61.

<sup>59</sup> Dyer, “Seen to be believed,” 24.

Although the two authors certainly have a point and a blunt rejection of the stereotype might be counterproductive, it also remains true that stereotypes are often responsible for discrimination. Additionally, Dyer's theory about gay stereotypes offering gay males a perspective from which to view a scene begs the question whether they should settle for a single perspective when heterosexual people are usually given a variety of perspectives from which they can identify with and experience narratives. Therefore, careful examinations of the stereotype are still necessary.

### 3 Heathers: The Musical

As I have previously discussed, the presence of nostalgia in screen-to-stage musicals can affect the representation of gay males and our ability to reflect on this representation. However, I have not yet demonstrated how this actually works in practice. Therefore, I will now elaborate on this by analysing three different screen-to-stage musicals and answering the following questions:

- How is retrotypical nostalgia evoked in this screen-to-stage musical?
- How are gay males represented in this screen-to-stage musical?
- What object of longing does this screen-to-stage musical address and how does this relate to its representation of gay males?

With the first question, I will discuss how these musicals can be understood as idealized versions of their source material by demonstrating how they highlight positive aspects of their source material without acknowledging their negative or even problematic aspects. In my analysis, I will focus on the theatrical means and operations used to recreate cinematic worlds, characters and more.

The second question will address the representation of gay males in screen-to-stage musicals. In my analysis, I will use Richard Dyer's theory regarding the queen stereotype, where gay males are represented as effeminate males with traditionally feminine interests as my guide. I will focus mostly on the song lyrics in these scenes, but I will also address the gestures, visual aspects and more that are used to express sexuality.<sup>60</sup>

The third question will focus on the object of longing that these musicals address with their use of nostalgia, which will illustrate what nostalgia-driven spectators are actually longing for and how these musicals keep problematic ideologies in place. Eventually, this will help to create a deeper understanding of how the representation of gay males is affected by nostalgia.

I will start with an analysis of *Heathers: The Musical*. *Heathers* (1988) is originally a dark comedy film which deals with themes such as bullying, popularity and young love.<sup>61</sup> It tells the story of Veronica Sawyer, a girl who wishes to be accepted by the most popular mean girls in her school to prevent herself from being bullied. The girls in question are called the Heathers, because all three of them share the same first name. Heather Chandler is the leader of the group and her followers are Heather McNamara and Heather Duke. Veronica manages to impress them and joins their group, but struggles with their mean behaviour. She starts to feel attracted to a new student at her high school who just moved to their town, Jason Dean (mostly referred to as JD). JD is somewhat of a bad boy, but Veronica only discovers exactly how bad when they "accidentally" kill Heather Chandler. They pretend that Heather has committed suicide and get away with it. Later, JD presents her with a plan to scare two high school jocks who almost assaulted Veronica by shooting them with tranquillizers. Veronica believes that this plan is truly only meant to scare them, but when she discovers that her gun contained actual bullets and that she has killed them, she realizes that JD really is dangerous. Because he believes that heaven is the only place where all the different people in their high school can peacefully live together, he plants a bomb in their high school. Veronica fights him and JD eventually takes the bomb outside and explodes with it. Order is restored in their high school and Veronica takes Heather Chandler's place as the most powerful girl in school. Except, instead of using it to bully others, Veronica prevents everyone from ever being bullied again.

---

<sup>60</sup> Full versions of the song lyrics I will analyse can be found in the appendix.

<sup>61</sup> *Heathers*, directed by Michael Lehmann, Atlanta: New World Pictures, 1988.

When the film came out, it didn't do very well at the box office due to its dark humour being slightly too dark for that time.<sup>62</sup> Over the years, however, it became a cult hit, which resulted in the creation of a musical with music, lyrics and book by Laurence O'Keefe and Kevin Murphy. In 2014, the musical started with a sold-out run in Los Angeles, before moving Off-Broadway.<sup>63</sup> Although the musical was re-opened Off-Westend in 2018, I will focus mostly on the Off-Broadway version, because most of the information that is available on the musical is of that version.

### 3.1 How *Heathers: The Musical* evokes retrotypical nostalgia

*Heathers: The Musical* employs many different tactics to recreate the film and the time during which it was set. One of the main ways in which they do this, is by recreating the aesthetics of the film, which is most obvious in the use of costumes. The iconic red-green-yellow colour scheme worn by the Heathers – which is loved by many as demonstrated by its appearance at many Halloween parties – is reused, including the accompanying eighties perms, which shows that they wish to highlight this aspect of the film (Fig.1).<sup>64</sup> Although the stage costumes are not one on one copies, they are clearly inspired by the film (Fig. 2). The costumes, both in the film and in the musical, clearly reference eighties fashion. As art historian Daniel Delis Hill writes in his discussion on American fashion during the mideighties: “Shoulder interest and padding returned with a vengeance. Wide, sculptural belts at small waistlines and slim skirts—usually short—created a curvilinear contrast with the shoulders.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, the musical clearly recreates the well-known and widely appreciated aesthetic of the eighties that appears in the film, potentially evoking memories of a time when everyone wore similar fashions.

Figure 1 Costumes worn in *Heathers* (1988)



---

<sup>62</sup> Steve Rose, “The legacy of *Heathers* 30 years on: ‘Donald Trump is like a big *Heather*,’” *The Guardian*, accessed on October 10, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/aug/04/michael-lehmann-on-the-legacy-of-heathers-cult-teen-film>.

<sup>63</sup> Adam Hetrick, “*Heathers The Musical* Begins Sold-Out L.A. Premiere Engagement Sept. 21,” *Playbill*, accessed on October 10, 2019, <http://www.playbill.com/article/heathers-the-musical-begins-sold-out-la-premiere-engagement-sept-21-com-209764>.

<sup>64</sup> Just searching for the #halloweenheathers on Instagram shows many teenagers dressed up in the iconic blazers.

<sup>65</sup> Daniel Delis Hill, *As Seen in Vogue : A Century of American Fashion in Advertising* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2004), 125.



Figure 2 Costumes worn in *Heathers: The Musical* (2010)

Another tactic used by the musical to reference the eighties, is with its music. The film soundtrack was seemingly completely created with a synthesizer, which creates an electronic sound that immediately reminds one of the eighties.<sup>66</sup> It is reminiscent of that time because it was a huge hit, with synthpop bands such as *Eurythmics* and *a-ha* creating many popular songs at the time. The same sound can be heard during many of the musical's numbers, albeit more in the background. For example, in "Beautiful," and "Big Fun," synthesizers create repetitive musical motifs that can be heard during song intervals, where the dialogue takes place. Because the synthesizer sound is so strongly connected to the eighties, the musical's use of it invites audiences to be transported back to that time.

*Heathers: The Musical* also literally references its source material in its recreation of the film by using lines from the film that over time have become iconic. For *Heathers*, these are lines like: "How very", "What's your damage?" and "Fuck me gently with a chainsaw."<sup>67</sup> Theatre scholar Amy Osatinski uses Marvin Carlson's concept of "ghosting," with which he refers to the retelling of stories that are already known to the public, to describe this operation of re-using elements from the source material in screen-to-stage musicals to recreate cinematic worlds. *Heathers: The Musical* also ghosts its source material in this manner, by reusing the formerly mentioned lines. Although the context in which the line "Fuck me gently with a chainsaw" is said differs greatly, it is met with a big round of applause on the recording. This is because with the use of iconic lines like this one, the musical "ghost[s] the original film and remind[s] spectators of the connection between the film and the live production; therefore, the audience cheers the ghost of the film rather than the action on stage."<sup>68</sup> Thus, using iconic lines aids in the recreation of a film onstage, because it evokes memories of the source material and invites audiences to re-experience that source material in a different manner.

---

<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, I have been unable to find the precise means that were used to create the film soundtrack. However, after comparing it to sounds made by synthesizers, I'm fairly certain that a synthesizer was used to create it.

<sup>67</sup> A search for *Heathers* merchandise shows that there is a market for a myriad of products – from T-shirts to phone cases – which display these lines. For examples, see the following website:

<https://www.redbubble.com/shop/heathers>.

<sup>68</sup> Osatinski, "Ghosts in the Machine," 77.

The musical thus clearly ghosts the film by highlighting its fashions, sounds and iconic lines, thereby showcasing the positively valued aspects of the film and evoking nostalgia for the eighties. There is a notably less positive aspect of the film that the musical merely glosses over: rape. During the film, three men try to rape Veronica. Although none of them succeed, some of the Heathers are raped. In the film, this is not addressed adequately.<sup>69</sup> Veronica even has a romantic moment with JD whilst one Heather is being raped in the background. The musical does address the boys' predatory natures, but this is done with a comedic number sung by the two jocks who try to assault Veronica about how she makes their balls blue. The musical thus recreates *Heathers* in a retrotypical way, by celebrating the fun and recognizable aspects of a past narrative without acknowledging the problematic aspects the film had. By not acknowledging these aspects, it prevents critical reflection in spectators.

### 3.2 How gay males are represented in *Heathers: The Musical*

As I previously explained, in *Heathers*, Veronica is almost sexually assaulted by two (heterosexual) high school jocks and JD thinks up a plan to get revenge. This plan involves Veronica luring them into the woods, telling them to undress and then shooting them, which results in the death of the jocks.<sup>70</sup> To cover up the murders, JD and Veronica write a suicide note explaining that the two jocks were in love and that they died by murder-suicide because they felt that they couldn't live in a world where their love wouldn't be accepted.

In the film, this leads to a short scene at the funeral of the boys. One of their fathers speaks to his dead son and tells him that he didn't care if he really was "some pansy" and that he's proud of him. He then addresses the crowd and says: "My son's a homosexual. And I love him. I love my dead gay son!"

In the musical, this moment is turned into a bigger scene where one of the boys' fathers sings a song to the other which explains that he should love his son, even if he was gay, because there is nothing wrong with being gay.<sup>71</sup> At one point during this song, he reminds the other man of a fishing trip in the past, where they apparently had a short relationship. This leads the other father to accept his son's (and his own) sexuality and the two men start kissing.<sup>72</sup>

Although the song is about accepting gay males as they are, its lyrics present a very stereotypical image of them. This image is presented through what the boys' fathers see as an ideal heaven for gay males. An ideal heaven according to them is a place where gay men can work on their tans, referring to the assumption that gay males spend more time on their appearance than

---

<sup>69</sup> Ben Schwartz, "Heathers Got Old and So Did You," Book & Film Globe, accessed on October 16, 2019, <https://bookandfilmglobe.com/film/heathers-got-old-so-did-you/>.

<sup>70</sup> Just for clarity: Veronica thinks that her gun contains tranquillizers and doesn't intend to kill the jocks, JD does want them dead and placed actual bullets in her gun.

<sup>71</sup> "My Dead Gay Son," AZ Lyrics, accessed on September 10, 2019, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/heathersthemusicalcast/mydeadgayson.html>.

<sup>72</sup> LlyfrgellMerched2511, "Dead gay son – Heathers the Musical," Youtube Video, 4:27, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWtZsnds46w>.

heterosexual males. It is also a place where everyone is dressed like their “fav’rite Village Person,” referring to the Village People, who are often regarded as a part of gay culture.

In response to the two fathers, the ensemble – who represent the guests at the funeral – starts singing along and repeating the statements sung by Kurt’s father, singing that gay men are not dirty or perverse. They also confirm the image that is created of gay males by his father by singing: “They were just two stray rhinestones on the Lord’s big purse!” which repeats the assumption that gay males like things that are often seen as feminine, like rhinestones.

The two fathers then describe what they think their sons are doing in heaven. They’re disco dancing, roller skating, listening to Judy Garland and wearing pearly necklaces whilst living a “fancy-free and reckless” afterlife. This again repeats the image of effeminate men who have specific interests that are marked as gay and who like to dress up in items that are considered feminine such as pearly necklaces. It also connects this image to living “fancy-free and reckless,” which is especially offensive in light of the AIDS epidemic that became prominent during the eighties and which affected many gay males. Because sex between males could cause a fatal illness, gay sex was seen as dangerous and reckless, causing negative feelings towards gay men. The fact that this song reinforces the connection between being gay and living recklessly thus also potentially perpetuates negative attitudes towards gay males. The ensemble, which endorses this message with their happy “oohs” and “yeahs” in the background adds to this and thereby normalizes this image of gay males.

The fathers thus make use of the musical theatre convention of repetition in song lyrics to present an image of gay males similar to the stereotype that Richard Dyer described. They add to the stereotype by making a connection between being gay and living recklessly. Another musical theatre convention, the ensemble, then endorses the messages communicated by the fathers. This is a striking difference between the film and the musical, because in the film, the fathers don’t really present any image of homosexuality. In the film, the moment is funny because it is rather odd that a father shouts “I love my dead gay son!” and it is funny because we know very well that his son probably wasn’t gay at all.<sup>73</sup> In the musical, they try to make this funnier by expanding on it via musical theatre conventions. In the process, however, the fathers’ acceptance of their dead sons’ presumed sexualities becomes a joke due to the extreme and funny descriptions of homosexuality that they provide. Additionally, negative attitudes towards gay males are perpetuated and the stereotype is normalized.

[KURT’S FATHER:]  
Now, I say my boy’s in heaven!  
And he’s tanning by the pool  
The cherubim walks with him and him,  
and Jesus says it’s cool!  
They don’t have crime or hatred, there’s  
no bigotry or cursin’..  
Just friendly fellows dressed up like their  
fav’rite Village Person!

[CONGREGATION:]  
Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa  
Whoa, whoa, whoa!  
They were not dirty..  
Whoa!  
And not perverse..  
No, no!  
They were just two stray rhinestones  
On the Lord’s big purse!

---

<sup>73</sup> Everyone only thinks that the boys were gay because JD and Veronica wrote a fake suicide note which said that they were.



### 3.3 The object of longing that *Heathers: The Musical* addresses

Since nostalgia is a longing for something elusive, it is important to discuss what the object of longing that this musical appeals to could be. For *Heathers: The Musical*, it would seem that on a surface level, the longing is directed at eighties aesthetic and music, since it presents an image of the eighties in which certain fashions were prominent and specific music was popular.

However, on a deeper level, the story of *Heathers* also points to a longing for a less complicated time. A time during which bullies, popular girls and bad boys were your biggest worries. It shows high school as a representation of society in which people can easily be categorized. A mean girl is beautiful, popular and mean, a jock is a dumb but popular bully and gay males are feminine and flamboyant. In *Heathers: The Musical*, everyone is a stereotype. Although it can be said that all stereotypes are bad, gay male stereotypes are worse because being gay is a part of your identity forever, also after high school. Throughout the musical, Veronica makes it clear that she can't wait to get out of high school and to start her real life, which implies that after high school, the stereotypes become less important and don't define you anymore. However, being gay is not something that stops when you leave high school, which means that the stereotypes surrounding it can linger and lead to discrimination.

Additionally, with its comedic character, the musical presents a past in which people could laugh at the gay stereotype. As my analysis of the lyrics shows, the fathers' descriptions of gay males were funny and the musical number is clearly meant as a comedic device. What could have been a touching number about two fathers starting to accept gay males when they discover that their sons were gay, becomes a number that people laugh at. On the registration, you can also hear the spectators laughing loudly. In light of current debates surrounding insensitive or discriminatory jokes, where many people condemn the fact that "everything is politically correct these days," the longing from the audience can therefore also be interpreted as a longing for less politically correct times when offensive jokes were not as widely frowned upon as they are now.<sup>74</sup> These days, there are repercussions when you make an offensive joke. American comedian Kevin Hart, for example, stepped back as presenter for the Oscars after receiving backlash for his past jokes about gay males.<sup>75</sup> The fact that in *Heathers: The Musical*, the gay stereotype and jokes surrounding it are presented as acceptable, thus seems to indicate that spectators are longing for a time when they could still make these jokes without experiencing repercussions. This is supported by a poll that was conducted for the American National Public Radio, which showed that fifty-two percent of Americans is "upset that there are too many things people can't say anymore."<sup>76</sup> Hence, it can be said that the musical points to a longing for a time in which gay males could still be discriminated against by making offensive jokes about them. Combined with the musical's idealized presentation of *Heathers*, which impacts critical reflection, it can thus be argued that *Heathers: The Musical* normalizes the gay male stereotype and reassures ideological positions defined by a longing to be less politically correct.

---

<sup>74</sup> This article discusses the turn towards becoming more politically correct and the sentiment expressed by many that people have become "too sensitive" <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/dec/14/politically-correct-culture-millennials-generation>.

<sup>75</sup> "Oscars 2019: Kevin Hart quits as host amidst tweet row," BBC News, accessed on October 17, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-46479017>.

<sup>76</sup> Domenico Montanaro, "Warning To Democrats: Most Americans Against U.S. Getting More Politically Correct," NPR, accessed on October 12, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/19/677346260/warning-to-democrats-most-americans-against-u-s-getting-more-politically-correct?t=1570199014122>.

## 4 Mean Girls: The Musical

Using the same approach as I did in the previous chapter, I will now analyse *Mean Girls: The Musical*. The film *Mean Girls* (2004) is a comedy that deals with popularity, bullying and finding your place in the world.<sup>77</sup> It tells the story of Cady Heron, a girl who moves from Africa to the United States and has her first high school experience. On her first day, she immediately befriends Janis Ian, a rebellious goth girl, and Damian Leigh, a guy who is “too gay to function” according to Janis. She’s also introduced to The Plastics: three girls named Regina George, Gretchen Wieners and Karen Smith. Cady is warned to watch out for the girls, but she’s also intrigued by them. Together with Janis and Damian, she conducts a plan to infiltrate The Plastics and destroy the friend group from the inside out. In the process, however, Cady becomes a mean girl herself. Regina discovers that Cady has sabotaged her and takes revenge, which results in a large chaos at their high school. Eventually, Cady redeems herself at their high school’s prom night and peace is restored.

*Mean Girls* was a large hit when it came out and still remains a popular film, with different brands releasing fashion items that feature quotes from the film and more.<sup>78</sup> In 2018, the musical started its open ended run on Broadway with music by Jeff Richmond, lyrics by Nell Benjamin and a book by Tina Fey, the original creator of the film. An important fact that I want to mention, is that this is the only case study that tries to update its narrative. *Mean Girls: The Musical* addresses life in high school in a digital age and makes references to things that were not as prominent at the start of the 00’s such as iPhones and the concept of wokeness. Although this is a noble attempt to reinvigorate the narrative, it still clearly tries to recreate images from its source material, potentially evoking nostalgia in the process.

### 4.1 How *Mean Girls: The Musical* evokes retrotypical nostalgia

One of the ways *Mean Girls: The Musical* tries to recreate the film and generate nostalgia, is by using digital technology. With regards to this subject, Osatinski uses Carlson’s concept of ghosting to describe how digital technology can be used to recreate narratives which already exist, and which can therefore be named “haunted”. According to her, “digital technology often aids in the manifestation of these apparitions not only by providing a haunted narrative, but also evoking nostalgic apparitions of the time periods in which the films were released.”<sup>79</sup> Digital technology can thus be used to accurately recreate a film in the theatre, but also to create nostalgic experiences by referencing the time periods in which audiences viewed the film for the first time.

In *Mean Girls: The Musical*, digital technology is mostly used to recreate the cinematic world of the film on stage. This becomes most clear in its recreation of settings. During the film, there is a beloved and well-known scene where Cady and the Plastics take part in their high school’s winter talent show (Fig. 3). They perform a dance routine to a backdrop that is decorated with snowy mountains, deer, a starry sky and large letters spelling out “Winter Talent Show.” Although this scene in the musical is rather different, the backdrop is almost identical, recreating the aesthetic of the film (Fig. 4). Because it is so similar to the image in the film, audience members who are familiar with the film are automatically reminded of the scene as it was there.

---

<sup>77</sup> *Mean Girls*, directed by Mark Waters, Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 2004.

<sup>78</sup> “Box Office,” IMDB, accessed on October 4, 2019, [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0377092/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0377092/?ref=fn_al_tt_1).

<sup>79</sup> Osatinski, “Ghosts in the Machine: Digital Technology and Screen-to-Stage Musicals,” 74.

Figure 3  
Winter Talent  
Show in  
Mean Girls  
(2004)



Figure 4  
Winter Talent  
Show in Mean  
Girls: The  
Musical  
(2018)



Another scene that heavily makes use of the LED screens to recreate a setting, is a scene that takes place in an American mall. In the film, there is a scene where one of the Plastics sees the boy she likes on a date with another girl. They are sitting on the edge of a fountain in the middle of the mall. To help break them up, Regina George calls the mother of the girl he's on a date with and pretends to be an employee for Planned Parenthood who has an urgent message regarding test results. A few seconds later, the girl is called by her mother and the couple is broken up. Although this scene doesn't take place in the musical, the setting for it is reused. Benches are used to recreate the fountain that the couple was sitting on in the film, the stairs that were in the background during the film scene are also used in the musical and small vendor stands are placed on each side of the stairs. However, the LED screens bring all these elements together to represent the mall. They show a mall that is two stories high, with different store fronts including fashion stores with mannequins wearing detailed outfits and cafés showcasing different bottles. The background that is created with the screens, blends the elements of the mall together and makes it a very realistic setting that immediately evokes memories of the scene in the film. Most importantly, though, the screens add a cinematic quality to the show. They blur the lines between stage and screen by seamlessly switching between different realistic settings. This allows audiences to be transported into the world of the film and to relive the scenes that they are so familiar with, likely to make them feel nostalgic for the times they watched the film in the past.

Thus, with its use of digital technologies, the musical clearly tries to recreate the cinematic world of *Mean Girls*, thereby evoking memories of beloved and memorable scenes. However, it also erases problematic elements from the film. In the film, Cady's friend introduces her to the different cliques in school and essentially stereotypes them. The cliques include "Asian nerds," "cool Asians" and "unfriendly black hotties." In the song that substitutes this scene in the musical, these categories are cleverly left out, while the "girls who eat their feelings" and "girls who don't eat" still remain. The musical thus presents *Mean Girls* in a retrotypical manner, erasing problematic aspects of the source material and celebrating the recognizable and positive elements. It thereby also impacts spectator's ability to reflect critically on the source material or on the subject of longing that the musical presents with its use of retrotypical nostalgia.

#### 4.2 How gay males are represented in *Mean Girls: The Musical*

The scene from *Mean Girls* that I will analyse, is the scene where Cady meets Janis and Damian for the first time.<sup>80</sup> Janis introduces Cady to Damian and tells her that he's too gay to function. They then show her all the different groups that she could join in high school and convince her to become friends with them. In the film, this is a short scene where Janis briefly names all the different groups accompanied by shots inside the cafeteria showing these groups. In the musical, the scene is extended into a musical number called "Where Do You Belong?" which is mostly sung by Damian.<sup>81</sup>

The scene starts in the bathroom, where Janis and Damian discover Cady hiding. Damian is wearing a shirt with a photo of Cher and tells Cady that he "once read on a totebag that everything fits somewhere," so Cady should be fine. He then starts to prepare himself to burst into song. Something that's notable here, is that he does this with a certain self-awareness. Where singing in musical theatre is usually a convention that is not acknowledged by characters during the musical, in this number, Damian constantly draws attention to the fact that he's singing or dancing by reminding other characters that he's singing or telling them that this is his dance break. By drawing attention to these conventions and pretending that they're not something he naturally does (during the rest of the musical, this self-awareness of singing and dancing disappears), he shows that musical theatre is one of his interests. This is further expressed by exaggerating the conventions. Damian sings in an extra dramatic mode, making wide gestures and singing loudly, similar to the way Broadway divas perform songs. In his descriptions of the high school cliques, Damian is sarcastic and he makes fun of them. For example, he makes fun of a group of girls who don't eat by eating cake around them.

[DAMIAN]  
There's girls that eat their feelings  
And girls that don't eat  
I like eating birthday cake around them  
Makes them crazy

Damian's sexuality is expressed in different manners. Firstly, his Cher shirt refers to his gay subjectivity, which was defined by Halperin as a queer way of relating to specific cultural objects. Cher is widely known as a gay icon, so her presence on Damian's shirt tells us that he participates in gay culture. His love for musical theatre as demonstrated by his knowledge of its conventions is another example of this. Lastly, his mean comments on the people around him create the image of a

<sup>80</sup> Insert a username, "girl who move from Africa slime tutorial," Youtube video, 2:20:08, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhrHLMxWmDg>.

<sup>81</sup> "Where Do You Belong?" Genius, accessed on September 12, 2019, <https://genius.com/Original-broadway-cast-of-mean-girls-where-do-you-belong-lyrics>.

sassy gay male, which is a stereotype based on the assumption that all gay males are campy and flamboyant.

Although this stereotype was already present in the film, where Damian loved the colour pink and had a love for drama, the musical makes it a much bigger part of *Mean Girls* than the film did. Its conventions allow Damian's gayness to be explored through song and dance as described above, but the musical also makes a deliberate decision to express his gay identity through clothing, which wasn't done in the film. This means that the larger presence of Damian's gayness in the musical as opposed to the film isn't just a by-product of musical theatre conventions, but that it was a conscious choice. An important factor here, is that Damian can speak for himself as opposed to the characters in *Heathers: The Musical*. He is given a voice and a bigger part, which allows us to look further than his sexuality and to discover that he is also a good friend and that he's funny. Although his sexuality is represented in a stereotypical manner, which repeats the idea that gay males must like certain things just because they are gay, he is not reduced to it. Still, the repetition can already be enough for the stereotype to be normalized.

### 4.3 The object of longing that *Mean Girls: The Musical* addresses

Interestingly, *Mean Girls: The Musical* doesn't necessarily present an image of the past with its nostalgia. It may refer to a past period in the spectator's life with its presentation of life in high school, but it actually situates the narrative of *Mean Girls* in the present. However, with its reuse of recognizable scenery, iconic lines and memorable scenes, it still turns the spectator into a past focused subject, because the spectator is constantly reminded of the film from 2004. What is notable here, is that the nostalgia is directed at a relatively recent past, since the original film is only fifteen years old and at the time of release, was situated in the present. In the years since its release, it has become somewhat of a shared cultural phenomenon. On October third, the internet displays an abundance of GIFs showing a scene where Cady tells her crush that it is October third. It has even unofficially been duped *Mean Girls* day.<sup>82</sup> Other contemporary cultural phenomena also reference the film. For example, in the video for Ariana Grande's hit *thank-u, next* the scene at the Winter Talent Show is recreated with Ariana and her famous friends.<sup>83</sup> Without knowledge of the film, these references go over your head. Hence, the nostalgia that is evoked in *Mean Girls: The Musical* seems to be directed at a sense of belonging and taking part in popular culture. With its ghosting of settings, repetition of iconic lines and recreations of scenes, the musical reassures the spectator that they know and understand all the references that have become a part of our shared popular culture.

From this perspective, the representation of Damian can also be understood as a way in which the musical tries to appeal to the longing of spectators to take part in and interact with popular culture. As I previously discussed, Damian's gayness is made much larger in the musical than it was in the film. He is an out and proud gay male who takes part in gay culture, which in his case is expressed by his love for musical theatre and gay icons like Cher. The musical's conscious choice to make Damian's gayness more present suggests that the musical tries to be more connected to contemporary popular culture. In recent years, *RuPaul's Dragrace*, a television show that has drag queens competing with each other for the best costume design, has become very popular, and not just with the LGBTQ+ community. Another notable example of this is *Queer Eye*, a Netflix show that

---

<sup>82</sup> Samantha Grossman and Laura Stampler, "It's October 3rd: 19 Ways to Celebrate Mean Girls Day," Time, accessed on October 10, 2019, <https://time.com/3457797/mean-girls-day-october-3/>.

<sup>83</sup> Ariana Grande, "thank-u, next," Youtube Video, 5:30, November 30, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gl1aHhXnN1k>.

has five gay males improve people's lives by redecorating their house and giving them a makeover. These shows, which have become a part of our shared popular culture, all present gay males who are effeminate, flamboyant, dramatic and are interested in fashion and home décor. Damian would fit in perfectly with these men, which means that his representation addresses the appeal of these men in contemporary popular culture.

Of course, a character who is gay but who also plays one of the main roles is already an improvement compared to other musicals, where gay males often only play a small role that reduces them to the gay stereotype, but it is the question how much of an improvement this is if Damian's gayness only serves to appeal to popular culture's current fascination with gay culture. His gayness could have been used instead to explore the issues young gay males deal with in high school. If in the *Mean Girls* universe there really is a culture where popular people bully the underdogs, does he get bullied? How does he find the courage to express himself so freely in this culture? Does he face discrimination? None of these questions are addressed and the spectator only gets to see the happy, fun and flamboyant side of his gay identity that is reminiscent of the gay males that appear in contemporary popular culture.<sup>84</sup> This creates a very one-dimensional image of gay males without inviting any kind of reflection on the struggles they actually deal with. Taking into account that the musical also presents an idealized version of the film, which interferes with spectator's abilities to reflect critically, the way in which the musical represents Damian thus normalizes the gay male stereotype and ignores the difficulties gay males might be dealing with due to their sexuality.

---

<sup>84</sup> One could argue that comedy musicals don't have to deal with actual issues, but they often do. For example, *Mean Girls: The Musical* includes a song in which one of The Plastics seriously reflects on the insecurities that she deals with as a result of her friendship to Regina George.

## 5 Legally Blonde: The Musical

*Legally Blonde* (2001) is an American comedy film that tells the story of Elle Woods, a blonde fashion student living in a sorority house who is determined to marry her ambitious boyfriend Warner.<sup>85</sup> When he breaks up with her because he doesn't find her serious enough, Elle makes plans to win him back by joining him as a law student at Harvard University. Her first weeks at Harvard, Elle gets bullied for her fashionable appearance and lack of motivation. When she meets older student Emmett Forest, who looks further than the stereotype of the dumb blonde and believes in her, she perseveres and studies hard. Her hard work pays off when she is invited to do an internship with one of her professors, who has to defend a fitness guru accused of having shot her husband. The fitness guru only entrusts Elle, a fellow sorority girl, with her alibi. Although Elle is pressured to tell others the alibi, she keeps it a secret. During the trial, Elle's professor is fired by the fitness guru and Elle takes his position. Ultimately, she proves her innocence without sharing the alibi and wins the trial. In the end, we see how Elle graduates at the top of her class, starts dating Emmett and how her ex-boyfriend graduates in the bottom of her class.

The film opened to positive reviews and Elle Woods has become somewhat of a feminist icon, because she breaks through the stereotype of the dumb blonde by showing how you can be blonde and like things such as fashion and reality tv whilst also being a smart woman.<sup>86</sup> *Legally Blonde: The Musical* opened on Broadway in 2007 with music and lyrics by Nell Benjamin and Laurence O'Keefe and a book by Heather Hach.

### 5.1 How *Legally Blonde: The Musical* evokes retrotypical nostalgia

Elle Woods, the protagonist of the film *Legally Blonde*, is a character with many defining characteristics, both in terms of looks and in terms of personality and behaviour. She has a good figure, platinum blonde hair and almost only wears pink. Her looks are comparable to those of a stereotypical Barbie doll, since she is pretty and fashionable. In terms of personality, she is extremely positive, a good friend and a hopeless romantic. She's also intelligent, but at the start of the film, this intelligence is used mostly not to get ripped off at clothing stores by employees trying to earn extra money by selling clothes for higher prices to "dumb blondes". In terms of behaviour, Elle has a lot of defining mannerisms. When she walks, she swings her hands to the sides with her arms at a slight angle, almost as if she's trying to emulate the arms of a Barbie doll, which are always positioned with a slight angle at the elbow. When she talks, she has a high and dynamic voice that makes her sound happy all the time. When she feels very enthusiastic, she even squeals. Her face is also very dynamic when she talks, and she expresses a specific emotion for almost every sentence. For example, when she tells her sorority that their maintenance staff has switched their toilet paper from an expensive brand to generic toilet paper, she expresses clear disgust at the word "generic" by raising her upper lip.

In *Legally Blonde: The Musical*, the character of Elle Woods is almost an exact copy of the film. On the outside, she has platinum blonde hair and wears many pink outfits which are often the exact same as the ones in the film. She even wears the same jewellery, a silver chain necklace with a heart. She's cheerful and positive, she even sings "I'm positive" repeatedly in the song "Positive." But most importantly, the actress portraying Elle in the musical copies the mannerisms Elle displays

---

<sup>85</sup> *Legally Blonde*, directed by Robert Luketic, Beverly Hills: MGM Distribution Co., 2001.

<sup>86</sup> Tanya Pai, "Legally Blonde is a feminist romance between a woman and her own best self," Vox, accessed on October 10, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/2016/7/13/12160462/legally-blonde-feminist-romance>.

in the film. She even exaggerates them somewhat, which works well for the musical format since everything is made bigger in musicals to improve visibility for the audience. In doing so, she makes the character of Elle Woods feel like she's stepped out of the film screen and onto the stage. Even if she has different dialogue from the film or if she sings, which she doesn't do in the film, the audience can feel like they're watching the "real" Elle Woods. By perfectly recreating the character, the musical makes the connection between the film and the musical stronger, reminding audiences of the source material and potentially creating feelings of nostalgia for the times they watched the film in the past.

Recreating a main character is not the only technique the musical uses to remind audiences of its source material. It also tries to recreate film sequences using theatrical means. This becomes the clearest in the opening scene of both the film and the musical. In the film opening scene, images are shown of a girl preparing for something. She shaves her legs, applies makeup, brushes her hair and so on. These images alternate with other images of a college campus, where a girl is shown riding a bike to her sorority house. She takes a card inside the house. Its envelope reads "Elle". The card is then passed around the sorority house and every girl inside writes a message in the card. When we get a closer look at the card, we see that the front says "Good luck tonight!" and that there is a large heart on the front with the message "Elle + Warner". The card is eventually slid under Elle's door. Elle finds it and goes downstairs to thank her friends.

Onstage, this scene is not completely identical, since Elle is absent from the first part of the scene. However, the musical takes specific parts from the opening sequence and recreates them using theatrical means. In the opening scene, a large Delta Nu sorority house fills the stage. A window opens and a sorority girl with a large card expresses her good wishes for Elle and Warner in the first line of the opening song, while writing on the card. The window next to her opens and a second sorority girl appears. The girl on the left passes the card to her and the second sorority girl also starts with her well wishes. They pass the card until the chorus begins and all the windows of the house open, all with their own sorority girl. After the chorus, the girls close the windows and the set changes. The house is lifted up in the air and the inside of the sorority house appears, showing a spiral staircase similar to the one in the film. The girls all gather, holding candles and the card. They then sing a more classical sounding part of the song, which is reminiscent of the traditional songs girls sing when they are initiated into a sorority. This becomes especially clear when they start referring to Elle as a "daughter of Delta Nu". They walk up the staircase but discover that Elle is not in her room.

Although the conclusions to the scenes are different, the opening scene of the musical closely resembles the one from the film. They both start outside on campus, they show the journey of the card before it reaches Elle, they move to the inside of the sorority house and they show the girls supporting Elle. The moving set pieces used in the musical help in recreating the film sequence, because they move fast and make the changes between settings dynamic like the fast cuts made in cinematic sequences. The set pieces thus add a cinematic quality to the scene, potentially evoking memories of the opening sequence for the audience.

With its recreation of Elle's positive persona and flashy cinematic sequences, *Legally Blonde: The Musical* clearly ghosts its source material and tries to inspire a positive attitude in its spectators. Although the film didn't have many problematic elements, there is a particular element that I will discuss in the following subchapter, involving a very stereotypical representation of a gay man. Instead of acknowledging this and maybe offering critique, however, the musical turns it into a funny number, similar to the other numbers. Paired with these other funny numbers (there is an absurd song where Elle marches into Harvard with a marching band instead of handing in a personal essay), it is almost hard to recognize the number as a problematic exploration of the gay stereotype. In this case, the musical thus retrotypes by presenting the problematic element in the same bizarre and



funny manner as the other numbers, instead of erasing it. This makes it harder for spectators to recognize it as problematic and therefore hinders reflection.

## 5.2 How gay males are represented in *Legally Blonde: The Musical*

During the trial in *Legally Blonde*, Elle has to prove that the female fitness guru she is defending is innocent. However, her accusers are trying to prove that the fitness guru was having an affair with the pool boy and that she therefore murdered her husband. The pool boy is asked different questions during a court hearing. We can tell that his ethnicity is not Caucasian, but it is unclear where he does come from, although he is referred to as a “Latin boy.” The pool boy tells the lawyer questioning him that he was having sexual relations with the fitness guru. The fitness guru denies this. At the next hearing, we see a scene where Elle is waiting in line at a water fountain. The pool boy cuts her off and Elle taps her feet impatiently in response. The pool boy turns around and tells her not to “stomp her little last season Prada shoes” at him, which makes Elle think that he must be gay because he knows fashion designers. Eventually, Elle’s observation helps to trick the pool boy into admitting that he has a boyfriend.

In the musical, this scene is changed to a scene where Elle performs her signature move, the bend and snap in front of the pool boy.<sup>87</sup> The move, which involves Elle dropping something on the floor and picking it up with her buttocks towards the pool boy, doesn’t prompt any response from the pool boy. Elle therefore determines that he must be gay. The scene is then transformed into a number called *There! Right There!*<sup>88</sup>

During these scenes, the pool boy is wearing a silk shirt with tiger stripes and a deep V-neck, which shows off his chest. His white pants are fitted and he is wearing pointy shoes. He looks more fashionable than the average male and the tiger stripes and pointy shoes suggest a certain campiness, which might indicate that the man is gay. However, he insists that he is having an affair with the fitness guru, so he could also be a straight male with a more daring fashion sense. However, the lawyers and the crowd at the trial pick his appearance apart in their attempt to prove that the man is gay.

For example, in the first part of the number, Elle names the man’s physique and the fact that he’s well-groomed as an indicator that he must be gay. The others then follow this up by adding that he is wearing perfume, that he has “coiffed and crispy locks” and that he’s wearing silk translucent socks. Here, a connection is being made between gayness and being well-groomed. Elle’s teacher, however, doesn’t immediately want to agree with Elle and questions whether the man is not just European, since European men share the same characteristics as gay males according to him.

[ELLE]  
There! Right there!  
Look at that tanned, well-tended skin  
Look at the killer shape he's in  
Look at that slightly stubbly chin  
Oh, please, he's gay  
Totally gay!

This then leads the crowd to make new connections, such as that they both say “ciao bella” and kiss you on both cheeks. To prove the fitness guru’s innocence, however, it is convenient if the pool boy really is gay. They therefore try to use the man’s clothing as definitive proof that would classify him as “automatically, radically, ironically chronically, certainly, flirtingly, genetically, medically gay” before realizing that that is not enough proof. After going back and forth between

<sup>87</sup> Silvia Apollonio, “Legally Blonde The Musical Gay or European,” Youtube video, 6:44, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pCybcpkm5c>.

<sup>88</sup> “There! Right There!,” Genius, accessed on September 20, 2019, <https://genius.com/Laurence-okeefe-and-nell-benjamin-there-right-there-lyrics>.

gay and European and naming other characteristics such as a waxed chest, pointy shoes and being stylish, they try a different approach. One of the lawyers questions the pool boy. After asking a few rapid-fire questions, he asks him what his boyfriend's name is. The pool boy answers that his boyfriend is named "Carlos" which solves the mystery. He then tries to talk his way out of it by saying that Carlos is just a normal friend, but Carlos is present at the trial and is offended by this. Carlos calls him out on his lies, telling the crowd that the pool boy is both gay and European.

By constantly repeating the idea that a well-groomed appearance is connected to gayness in a musical number, *Legally Blonde: The Musical* reinforces the stereotype that gay males (and Europeans) are vain and that they are always worried about their appearance, a characteristic that is often assigned to women. This is further demonstrated by the pool boy's unwillingness to admit that he's gay, which implies that he is worried what people will think about him.

Additionally, the pool boy is present in the scene, but he is only allowed to speak normally instead of singing. Where in *Mean Girls: The Musical*, Damian sang in an extra dramatic mode to demonstrate his gayness, in this musical, the use of the convention of singing excludes the gay male from the crowd, effectively silencing him. The crowd at the trial is singing about him, but he is not allowed to share his own story in the same manner. The fact that he doesn't get to join the others in the musical convention of singing, sets him apart from the rest of the crowd and marks difference. This facilitates the uncriticized expression of stereotypical ideas about gay males by the ensemble.

[EVERYONE]  
That is the elephant in the room  
Well is it relevant to presume  
That a hottie in that costume  
[VIVIENNE]  
Is automatically, radically  
[CALLAHAN]  
Ironically, chronically  
[ENID]  
Certainly, flirtingly  
[WARNER]  
Genetically, medically  
[EVERYONE]  
Gay, officially gay  
Swishily gay, gay, gay, gay...

### 5.3 The object of longing that *Legally Blonde: The Musical* addresses

Similar to *Heathers* and *Mean Girls*, *Legally Blonde* presents a world full of stereotypes. However, *Legally Blonde* is a story about a girl who breaks free of her stereotype. On the surface, she seems to be the stereotype of the "dumb blonde." She seems to be a superficial woman whose goal in life is to look beautiful and to marry a rich and successful man. However, without adjusting any of the characteristics that would make her seem this way, she exceeds all expectations and graduates from Harvard Law School in the top of her class. The story of *Legally Blonde* thus seems to appeal to a longing to be taken seriously as you are without compromising your own interests or way of living.

If the message that everyone should be taken seriously despite their stereotypical characteristics is the message that *Legally Blonde: The Musical* wishes to communicate, the same must be true for other characters than Elle. However, not every character is as lucky. As I demonstrated previously, the pool boy is reduced to his gay identity by the crowd at the trial. At the start of his scenes, he comes across as a regular man with a daring fashion sense, but during the number *There! Right There!* The crowd at the trial actively reduces him to the gay stereotype by reinforcing the connections between gayness and looking good. He is not really given a chance to speak out during this number and in the end, he is even outed to the public without his consent.

What makes this even worse, is that the spectators are invited to cheer the crowd at the trial on during their investigation of the pool boy's gayness. If they manage to prove that he is gay, that

means that Elle Woods is successful as a lawyer, which is what we're all rooting for in the end. In the process, a negative picture is painted of the pool boy, who seems to stand in the way of Elle's success. Thus, *Legally Blonde: The Musical* makes the pool boy seem a bit villainous. And since he is reduced to his gayness, the musical reinforces the idea that homosexuality is negative or even evil. Combined with its retrotypical presentation of *Legally Blonde*, which doesn't invite critical reflection, *Legally Blonde: The Musical* thus normalizes the gay stereotype and reaffirms problematic ideologies regarding gay males.

## Conclusion

In chapter one of this thesis, I explored nostalgia through the concept of perpetual nostalgia as defined by Lizardi, which explains how contemporary popular media invites spectators to take up a melancholic stance and become past-focused subjects who keep turning back to familiar narratives. The media that are presented to these spectators can best be described as media that employ retrotyping, meaning that they use the positively valued and easily recognizable aspects from an old narrative and ignore the problematic elements of that narrative. This impacts spectators' ability to reflect critically in two ways. Firstly, as Lizardi argues, the melancholic stance that spectators are invited to take up by watching these media makes them incapable of adopting new or different media as their object of longing, meaning that spectators keep repeating old narratives that reaffirm the beliefs that they hold instead of experiencing narratives that could challenge their beliefs. Secondly, as Keightley and Pickering argue, the mnemonic imagination is hindered when the past is represented via retrotyping, which results in spectators being unable to reflect meaningfully on the relationships between the past, present and future. With this hinderance of critical reflection in the spectator and the retrotypical repetition of narratives, media that rely on nostalgia – such as the screen-to-stage musical – maintain certain underlying ideologies.

In chapter two, I therefore focused on the screen-to-stage musical and the translation of conventions that occurs when a film is remade into a musical. With an exploration of some of musical theatre's most prominent conventions, supported by McMillin's theories, I argued that musical theatre conventions often rely on exaggeration. When a film is remade into a musical, this results in the exaggeration of certain aspects of that film. One of the aspects that is frequently exaggerated, is the stereotype. For that reason, I then moved to an examination of stereotypes, paying specific attention to the gay male stereotype.

In chapter three to five, I put the aforementioned theories to use in my analysis of three screen-to-stage musicals. First, I discussed how these musicals evoke a retrotypical form of nostalgia, demonstrating that they present idealized versions of past narratives which can result in the hinderance of critical reflection. Then, I analysed the representation of gay males in these musicals, showing that in all cases, they are represented in a stereotypical manner. Finally, I delved into the object of longing that these musicals represent with their use of nostalgia, which led to a few different conclusions regarding the representation of gay men. *Heathers: The Musical* seemed to represent a longing for a world with less political correctness, where gay men could still be stereotyped and laughed at without people being judged for doing that. *Mean Girls: The Musical*, on the other hand, seemed to use gayness as a way to appeal to spectators who are familiar with the gay males that are present in contemporary popular culture. In the process, however, they only pay attention to the fun aspects that are often associated with gay males without paying attention to the struggles and discrimination they might face as a result of their sexuality. *Legally Blonde: The Musical* seems to appeal to a longing to be taken seriously just as you are, but doesn't use that treatment on their gay male character, who is villainized and reduced to his gayness.

These analyses lead me to the conclusion that screen-to-stage musicals still have much to learn about representing gay males. With their retrotypical presentation of past narratives, these musicals hinder critical reflection and in their representations of gay males, they reinforce stereotypes, maintaining underlying ideologies and beliefs about sexuality that may be held by spectators.

However, nostalgia doesn't have to be bad. Both Lizardi and Keightley and Pickering present ideas about how nostalgia could be progressive. Lizardi argues that the introduction of new or different narratives could lead to meaningful reflections.<sup>89</sup> Keightley and Pickering write that when the past is represented in a less retrotypical manner, the mnemonic imagination can fully function,

---

<sup>89</sup> Lizardi, "Introduction to the Perpetual Individual Nostalgic's Playlist Past," 10.

resulting in the ability to reflect on the past, present and future in order to imagine a better present or future.<sup>90</sup> With regards to screen-to-stage musicals and gay characters, this could mean that in order to use nostalgia in a progressive manner, these musicals should acknowledge the problematic elements of their source material and use their conventions to comment on that element. For example, in *Legally Blonde: The Musical*, when Elle decides that the pool boy must be gay because he doesn't respond to her advances, the crowd at the trial could critique her for her fast conclusion in a funny manner. This would indirectly critique the film and thereby invite reflection on its representation of the pool boy.

Although I had a hard time finding screen-to-stage musicals that use nostalgia in a progressive manner, there are some examples of other musicals that do. A notable example is *Fun Home*, which is a musical based on the graphic novel of the same name by Alison Bechdel. In this musical, a grown up Alison reflects on growing up as the lesbian daughter of a closeted gay father who ends up killing himself. The story moves back and forth between scenes taking place when she was a young girl and when she was in college. The adult version of Alison watches everything from her drawing table and steps in every now and then to explain what was happening or what she was thinking. Although it is essentially a remake, the musical doesn't retype its source material and uses its funny and heartwarming aspects as well as its heartbreaking aspects. Its use of seventies and eighties fashion and its references to television programs of that time may evoke nostalgia, but its story about a gay man who kills himself because he feels like he will never be accepted and a daughter who is an out and proud lesbian raises questions about how good the seventies and eighties really were for gay people. Nostalgia is thus put to use as an invitation to reflect on the past and the present, hopefully resulting in spectators realizing that everyone is equal and no one should be discriminated against.

Still, representation remains a difficult topic and I certainly do not have all the answers. One of the things that I was concerned about during the writing of this thesis, was how to handle the gay male stereotype. As I discussed in chapter two, the discourse on the stereotype is nuanced and a blunt rejection of the stereotype is deemed unconstructive. For my purpose, however, I had to critically analyze it, which put me in a difficult position. I tried to deal with this by trying to be less judgmental of the stereotype in my analysis, but I fear I've still fallen into the trap of condemning the stereotype. However, I also find it important to acknowledge that any and all stereotypes can ultimately lead to discrimination and should therefore be treated carefully. This thesis is therefore based on the belief that we should remain critical of representations of marginalized groups, because I believe that we should always strive to do better, but I also feel like further research is needed on the gay male stereotype and the discourse surrounding it.

Another concern of mine had to do with my choice for a single stereotype. Although gay male characters are prominent in screen-to-stage musicals, this thesis has raised questions as to how other characters are represented and if their characteristics are also exaggerated due to musical theatre conventions. From my analyses, I feel like women are often represented stereotypically, but I am also interested to see how non-white characters are represented. Further research is needed to answer these questions.

With an eye to the future, I hope that screen-to-stage musicals start to use their appeal for the better. They could still recreate aesthetics from well-known films and amplify them, but they could use the opportunity to critique, ridicule or reflect on the stereotypes that were a part of the source material, instead of amplifying those too. Of course, it can be argued that entertainment doesn't have to be critical, but retiring old and tired stereotypes is the least screen-to-stage musicals can do to make themselves entertaining for everyone.

---

<sup>90</sup> Keightley and Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination*, 116.

## Bibliography

Apollonio, Silvia. "Legally Blonde The Musical Gay or European." Youtube Video, 6:44.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pCybcpkm5c>.

AZ Lyrics. "My Dead Gay Son." Accessed on September 10, 2019.  
<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/heathersthemusicalcast/mydeadgayson.html>.

BBC News. "Oscars 2019: Kevin Hart quits as host amidst tweet row." Accessed on October 17, 2019.  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-46479017>.

Berg, Charles Ramírez. "Categorizing the Other: Stereotypes and Stereotyping." In *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance*. 13-37. Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002.

Bordwell, David, Kristin Thompson and Jeff Smith. *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education, 2008.

Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.

Decker, Todd. "Race, Ethnicity, Performance." In *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, edited by Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

*Dumbo*. Directed by Tim Burton. Los Angeles: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019.

Dunbar, Zachary. "How do you solve a problem like the chorus? : Hammerstein's *Allegro* and the Reception of the Greek Chorus on Broadway." In *Choruses, Ancient and Modern*, edited by Joshua Billings, Felix Budelmann and Fiona Macintosh, 243-258. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Dyer, Richard. "Seen to be believed: some problems in the representation of gay people as typical." In *The Matter of Images : Essays on Representations*. 19-49. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013.

Genius. "Meet the Plastics." Accessed on September 1, 2019. <https://genius.com/Original-broadway-cast-of-mean-girls-meet-the-plastics-lyrics>.

Genius. "There! Right There!" Accessed on September 20, 2019. <https://genius.com/Laurence-okeefe-and-nell-benjamin-there-right-there-lyrics>.

Genius. "Where Do You Belong?" Accessed on September 12, 2019. <https://genius.com/Original-broadway-cast-of-mean-girls-where-do-you-belong-lyrics>.

Grande, Ariana. "thank-u, next." Youtube Video, 5:30. November 30, 2019.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gl1aHhXnN1k>.

Grossman, Samantha, and Laura Stampler. "It's October 3rd: 19 Ways to Celebrate Mean Girls Day." Time. Accessed on October 10, 2019. <https://time.com/3457797/mean-girls-day-october-3/>.

Hall, Stuart. "The spectacle of the 'other.'" In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans and Sean Nixon. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE in cooperation with Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2013.

Halperin, David M. *How to Be Gay*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012.

*Heathers*. Directed by Michael Lehmann. Atlanta: New World Pictures, 1988.

*Heathers: The Musical*. Kevin Murphy and Laurence O’Keefe. Directed by Andy Fickman. New World Stages, 2014.

Hetrick, Adam. “*Heathers The Musical* Begins Sold-Out L.A. Premiere Engagement Sept. 21.” Playbill. Accessed on October 10, 2019. <http://www.playbill.com/article/heathers-the-musical-begins-sold-out-la-premiere-engagement-sept-21-com-209764>.

Hill, Daniel Delis. *As Seen in Vogue : A Century of American Fashion in Advertising*. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2004.

IMDB. “Box Office.” Accessed on October 4, 2019. [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0377092/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0377092/?ref=fn_al_tt_1).

Insert a username. “girl who move from Africa slime tutorial.” Youtube Video, 2:20:08. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHrHLMxWmDg>.

Keightley, Emily, and Michael Pickering. “Retrotyping and the Marketing of Nostalgia.” In *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*, edited by Katharina Niemeyer, 83-94. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Keightley, Emily, and Michael Pickering. *The Mnemonic Imagination : Remembering As Creative Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Laird, Paul. “Musical Styles and Song Conventions.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, edited by Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris and Stacy Wolf. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

*Legally Blonde*. Directed by Robert Luketic. Beverly Hills: MGM Distribution Co., 2001.

*Legally Blonde: The Musical*. Nell Benjamin, Laurence O’Keefe and Heather Hach. Directed by Jerry Mitchell. Palace Theatre, 2007.

Lexico. “Nostalgia.” Accessed August 28, 2019, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/nostalgia>.

LlyfrgellMerched2511. “Dead gay son – Heathers the Musical.” Youtube Video, 4:27. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWtZsnds46w>.

McMillin, Scott. *The Musical as Drama*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006.

*Mean Girls*. Directed by Mark Waters. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 2004.

*Mean Girls: The Musical*. Nell Benjamin, Tina Fey and Jeff Richmond. Directed by Casey Nicholaw. August Wilson Theatre, 2018.

Montanaro, Domenico. “Warning To Democrats: Most Americans Against U.S. Getting More Politically Correct.” NPR. Accessed on October 12, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/19/677346260/warning-to-democrats-most-americans-against-u-s-getting-more-politically-correct?t=1570199014122>.

Niemeyer, Katharina. *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Osatinski, Amy S. "Ghosts in the Machine: Digital Technology and Screen-to-Stage Musicals." In *iBroadway*, edited by Jessica Hillman – McCord, 73-91. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Pai, Tanya. "Legally Blonde is a feminist romance between a woman and her own best self." Vox. Accessed on October 10, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/2016/7/13/12160462/legally-blonde-feminist-romance>.

Rose, Steve. "The legacy of Heathers 30 years on: 'Donald Trump is like a big Heather.'" The Guardian. Accessed on October 10, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/aug/04/michael-lehmann-on-the-legacy-of-heathers-cult-teen-film>.

Schwartz, Ben. "Heathers Got Old and So Did You." Book & Film Globe. Accessed on October 16, 2019. <https://bookandfilmglobe.com/film/heathers-got-old-so-did-you/>.

Taylor, Millie, and Dominic Symonds. *Studying Musical Theatre : Theory and Practice*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Vanity Fair. "Friends Will Stay on Netflix Throughout 2019 – But There's a Catch." Accessed October 13, 2019. <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2018/12/friends-staying-on-netflix-through-2019>.

Wolf, Stacy. "Gender and Sexuality." In *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, edited by Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.



## Appendix A: “My Dead Gay Son” song lyrics<sup>91</sup>

[RAM'S DAD:]

You wait just a minute, Paul! It is ignorant, hateful talk like yours that makes this world a place our boys could not live in!

They were not dirty!  
They were not wrong!  
They were two lonely verses  
In the Lord's great song!

[KURT'S DAD:]

Our boys were pansies, Bill!

[RAM'S DAD:]

Yes!  
My boy's a homosexual  
And that don't scare me none...  
I want the world to know...  
I love my dead gay son!

I've been thinking. Praying. Reading some magazines. And it's time we opened our eyes!

Well, the good Lord made the universe  
The Lord created man  
And I believe it's all a part of his gigantic plan  
I know God has a reason  
For each mountain and each flower  
And why he chose to let our boys get busy in the shower!  
They were not dirty..  
They were not fruits!  
They were just two stray laces in the Lord's big boots  
Well, I never cared for homos much until I reared me one

[RAM'S DAD & CONGREGATION:]

But now I've learned to love...

[RAM'S DAD:]

I love my dead gay son!

[CONGREGATION:]

He loves his son  
He loves his son  
His dead gay son!

---

<sup>91</sup> “My Dead Gay Son,” AZ Lyrics, accessed on September 10, 2019, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/heathersthemusicalcast/mydeadgayson.html>.

[RAM'S DAD:]

Now, I say my boy's in heaven!  
And he's tanning by the pool  
The cherubim walk with him and him, and Jesus says it's cool!  
They don't have crime or hatred, there's no bigotry or cursin'..  
Just friendly fellows dressed up like their fav'rite Village Person!  
They were not dirty..

[CONGREGATION:]

No, no!

[RAM'S DAD:]

They just had flair!

[CONGREGATION:]

Whoa!

[RAM'S DAD:]

They were two bright red ribbons in the Lord's long hair  
Well, I used to see a homo and go reachin' for my gun

[RAM'S DAD & CONGREGATION:]

But now I've learned to love...

[RAM'S DAD:]

And furthermore!  
These boys were brave as hell!  
These boys, they knew damn well!  
Those folks would judge 'em, they were desperate to be free!  
They took a rebel stance, stripped to their underpants!  
Paul, I can't believe that you  
Still refuse to get a clue  
After all that we been through..

I'm talkin' you and me!

In the summer of '83!

[KURT'S DAD:]

That was one hell of a fishing trip

[CONGREGATION:]

Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa  
Whoa, whoa, whoa!  
They were not dirty..  
Whoa!  
And not perverse..  
No, no!

They were just two stray rhinestones  
On the Lord's big purse!

[BOTH DADS:]  
Our job is now continuing the work that they begun!

[CONGREGATION:]  
'Cause now we love, love, love!  
We love your dead..

[RAM'S DAD:]  
They're up there disco dancing to the thump of angel wings!

[KURT'S DAD:]  
They grab a mate...

[RAM'S DAD:]  
And roller skate..

[BOTH DADS:]  
While Judy Garland sings!

[RAM'S DAD:]  
They live a playful afterlife that's fancy-free and reckless!

[KURT'S DAD:]  
They swing upon the pearly gates..

[BOTH DADS & CONGREGATION:]  
And wear a pearly necklace!

[CONGREGATION:]  
Whoo!

[BOTH DADS:]  
They were not dirty!

[CONGREGATION:]  
No!

[BOTH DADS & CONGREGATION:]  
They were good men!  
And now they're happy bear cubs in the Lord's big den!

[BOTH DADS:]  
Go forth and love each other now  
Like our boys would have done

[ALL:]

We'll teach the world to love...

[BOTH DADS:]

I love my dead gay son!

My son! My son!

[CONGREGATION:]

Not half bad, your dead gay son!

Wish I had your dead gay son!

Thank you, dad, for your...

[BOTH DADS & CONGREGATION:]

Dead! Gay! Son!

## Appendix B: “Where Do You Belong?” song lyrics<sup>92</sup>

[DAMIAN]

My momma used to tell me:

'Baby girl, don't ever eat lunch on the john.'

[JANIS, spoken]

Your mother called you “baby girl”?

[DAMIAN, spoken]

Singing, ha ha ha ha.

(sung)

So what if all the ducklings think you're ugly?

It's because they've never seen a swan

It takes all kinds of people who need people

So find people you can bear

We'll find your group, your herd, your flock

Come take a walk and answer my small questionnaire

Which I'll sing to you

Ahhhh ahhhh

Where do you belong?

Where do you belong?

Where do you belong?

Where do you belong?

You'll be judged on sight

And made to fit

So find a clique and stick with it

Say, where do you belong?

(spoken)

Let's take a walk around the cafeteria, shall we? I'll show you the world as I see it:

(sung)

Varsity jocks and JV jocks

Will throw you in a locker if you say "Hello"

The rich stoners hate the gangster whites

Though they're all smoking the same oregano

Here's the sexually active band geeks

I got two words for you

'Embouchure' and 'Ew'

---

<sup>92</sup> “Where Do You Belong?” Genius, accessed on September 12, 2019, <https://genius.com/Original-broadway-cast-of-mean-girls-where-do-you-belong-lyrics>.

And if you like blowing and fingering

[SEXUALLY ACTIVE BAND GEEKS]

This is the group for you!

[DAMIAN, spoken]

Back me up, show choir!

[SHOW CHOIR]

Ah, ah, ah, ah

[DAMIAN]

Cady, where do you belong

Where do you belong?

[STUDENTS scat.]

[DAMIAN]

We all get a box, that's where we go

It's stifling but at least you know

So, where do you belong?

[STUDENTS scat.]

[DAMIAN]

There's girls that eat their feelings

And girls that don't eat

I like eating birthday cake around them

Makes them crazy

[STUDENTS]

Debate team

And dance team

They like to compete

[DAMIAN]

And if they don't win

Their parents ground them

[CADY, spoken]

Who's that?

[DAMIAN]

Darling, that's the mathletes

[CADY, spoken]

Cool!

[DAMIAN, sung]

Joining them is social suicide

[DAMIAN, STUDENTS]

It's all college applications  
And Doctor Who quotations

[DAMIAN]

They wear their awkwardness with stubborn pride

(spoken)

This is my dance break.

[DAMIAN & STUDENTS]

Where do you belong?  
Where do you belong?  
Where do you belong?  
Where do you belong?

[DAMIAN]

You'll be judged on sight, voted in or out  
'Cause that's what high school's all about

[STUDENTS]

Where do you belong?

[DAMIAN]

But who is at this table?  
Why, it's Janis!

[JANIS]

And Damian too!

[STUDENTS]

Oooh!

[DAMIAN & JANIS]

We're not exactly joiners  
But we'll be good friends to you  
And our friendship means you can skip the—

[JANIS]

Geeks and the freaks and the peaking too soon

[DAMIAN]

The strivers and survivors just waiting for June  
The Junior achievers

[JANIS]  
The Christian believers

[DAMIAN]  
The tall, glowering wallflowers

[DAMIAN & JANIS]  
Fending off skeevers

Forget this fuss  
And solve it thus  
Just come to lunch  
And sit with us

[CADY, spoken]  
Okay!

[JANIS]  
Yay!  
Sit with us!

[DAMIAN]  
Here's where you belong!  
Here's where you—

[DAMIAN & JANIS]  
Belong!

[STUDENTS]  
Here's where you belong!  
Here's where you belong!  
Here's where you belong!  
Here's where you belong!

[DAMIAN]  
You need protection with pizzazz  
And helping hands

[STUDENTS]  
That also jazz!

[DAMIAN (JANIS)]  
Stay here where you belong (Here's where you belong)

[DAMIAN & JANIS]  
Stay here

[CADY]



Okay, I'm stayin'!

[STUDENTS]

Yes, here's where you belong!

[DAMIAN & JANIS]

Hey Cady, this is where you fit

Hey Cady, this is where you sit

[STUDENTS]

Here's where you belong!

## Appendix C: “There! Right There!” song lyrics<sup>93</sup>

[ELLE]

There! Right there!  
Look at that tanned, well tended skin  
Look at the killer shape he's in  
Look at that slightly stubbly chin  
Oh, please, he's gay  
Totally gay!

[CALLAHAN]

I'm not about to celebrate  
Every trait could indicate  
A totally straight expatriate  
That guy's not gay  
I say not gay

[CALLAHAN, ELLE, WARNER, VIVIENNE, BROOKE AND ENID]

That is the elephant in the room  
Well, is it relevant to assume  
That a man who wears perfume  
Is automatically, radically fae?

[EMMETT]

But look at his coiffed and crispy locks

[ELLE]

Look at his silk translucent socks

[CALLAHAN]

There's the eternal paradox  
Look what we're seein'

[VIVIENNE]

What are we seein'?

[CALLAHAN]

Is he gay?

[ELLE]

Of course he's gay!

[CALLAHAN]

Or European?

---

<sup>93</sup> “There! Right There!,” Genius, accessed on September 20, 2019, <https://genius.com/Laurence-okeefe-and-nell-benjamin-there-right-there-lyrics>.

[CALLAHAN, ELLE, WARNER, VIVIENNE, BROOKE AND ENID]

Ohhhh

Gay or European?

It's hard to guarantee

Is he gay or European?

[WARNER]

Well, hey, don't look at me!

[VIVIENNE]

You see they bring their boys up different

In those charming foreign ports

They play peculiar sports

[CALLAHAN, ELLE, WARNER, VIVIENNE, BROOKE AND ENID]

In shiny shirts and tiny shorts

Gay or foreign fella?

The answer could take weeks

They both say things like "Ciao, Bella"

While they kiss you on both cheeks

[ELLE]

Oh, please

[CALLAHAN, ELLE, WARNER, VIVIENNE, BROOKE AND ENID]

Gay or European?

So many shades of gray

[WARNER]

Depending on the time of day

The French go either way

[CALLAHAN, ELLE, WARNER, VIVIENNE, BROOKE AND ENID]

Is he gay or European, or--?

[ENID]

There, right there!

Look at that condescending smirk

Seen it on every guy at work

That is a metro, hetero jerk

That guy's not gay, I say, no way

[CALLAHAN, ELLE, WARNER, VIVIENNE, BROOKE AND ENID]

That is the elephant in the room

Well is it relevant to presume

That a hottie in that costume

[VIVIENNE]

Is automatically, radically

[CALLAHAN]

Ironically, chronically

[ENID]

Certainly, flirtingly

[WARNER]

Genetically, medically

[CALLAHAN, ELLE, WARNER, VIVIENNE, BROOKE AND ENID]

Gay, officially gay

Swishily gay, gay, gay, gay...

Damn it!

Gay or European?

[CALLAHAN]

So stylish and relaxed

[CALLAHAN, ELLE, WARNER, VIVIENNE, BROOKE AND ENID]

Is he gay or European?

[CALLAHAN]

I think his chest is waxed

[VIVIENNE]

But they bring their boys up different there

It's culturally diverse

It's not a fashion curse

[CALLAHAN, ELLE, WARNER, VIVIENNE, BROOKE AND ENID]

If he wears a kilt or bears a purse

Gay or just exotic?

I still can't crack the code

[BROOKE]

Yeah, his accent is hypnotic

But his shoes are pointy toed

[CALLAHAN, ELLE, WARNER, VIVIENNE, BROOKE AND ENID]

Huh

Gay or European?

So many shades of gray

[JUDGE]

But if he turns out straight

I'm free at eight on Saturday

[CALLAHAN, ELLE, WARNER, VIVIENNE, BROOKE AND ENID]

Is he gay or European?

Gay or European?

Gay or Euro--

[EMMETT]

Wait a minute

Give me a chance to crack this guy

I have an idea I'd like to try

[CALLAHAN]

The floor is yours

[EMMETT]

So, Mr Argitakos

This alleged affair with Ms. Wyndham has been going on for...?

[NIKOS]

Two years

[EMMETT]

And your first name again is...?

[NIKOS]

Nikos

[EMMETT]

And your boyfriend's name is...?

[NIKOS]

Carlos

I-I, sorry!

I misunderstand!

You say "boyfriend"

I thought you say "best friend"

Carlos is my best friend

[CARLOS]

You bastard!

You lying bastard!

That's it, I no cover for you no more!

Peoples, I have a big announcement

This man is gay AND European

[ENSEMBLE]

Whoa!

[CARLOS]

And neither is disgrace  
You gotta stop your bein'  
A completely closet case  
It's me, not her he's seein'  
No matter what he say  
I swear he never, ever, ever swing the other way  
You are so gay, you big parfait  
You flaming one man cabaret

[NIKOS]

I'm straight!

[CARLOS]

You were not yesterday  
So if I may, I'm proud to say  
He's gay

[ENSEMBLE]

And European!

[CARLOS]

He's gay

[ENSEMBLE]

And European!

[CARLOS]

He's gay

[ENSEMBLE]

And European  
And gay

[NIKOS]

Fine, okay, I'm gay

[CARLOS/ENSEMBLE]

Hooray!