

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: **MAKING MADNESS ON STAGE: AMERICAN
MUSICAL THEATRE SINCE THE AMERICANS
WITH DISABILITIES ACT**

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Performance Studies

Musical theatre, as the United States' only unique theatrical genre to find global influence, is a powerful form of storytelling that began as staged reifications of American ideals. The American musical has been a prime location to explore what it means to be American and how American society reckons with its self-proclaimed status as a "melting pot" where people from diverse cultures and ethnicities come together to form the rich fabric of the nation. Though much scholarship focuses on the American musical as a site to reify American culture and ideals, this dissertation critiques exclusionary American ideologies that have harmed disabled people, mad people, women, and people of color for as long as it has existed. In this project, I argue that passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, which established legal protections for people with disabilities, made physical and mental disability visible and relevant to the narrative action and staging of musical theatre in new ways. Combining my professional skills as a dramaturg with theoretical frameworks from performance studies, disability studies, and women

of color feminisms, I examine *Violet* (1997), *Jane Eyre the Musical* (2000), and *Next to Normal* (2009) as my prime case studies. Through analyzing these case studies, this dissertation reveals an obscured history of how racialized and gendered disability ideologies inflect the narrative and staging of American musical theatre. I term this aesthetic and practical reliance on mad characters *mad dramaturgy*.

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AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

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Dedication

To the mad women who came before me, whose exceptional existence was often met with fatal violence.

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Writing a dissertation can be an isolating experience. Yet, I never felt alone. This is due in large part to the community that held me, uplifted me, and guided me through the long process of pursuing this PhD. I have had the great fortune over the past 5 years to sit in rooms with and learn from some of the most brilliant minds in the country on the topics of theatre and performance. Their influence is immeasurable and threaded throughout this project in both overt and imperceptible ways.

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Introduction

Origins: A Refuge and A Response

Making Madness on Stage: American Musical Theatre Since the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) exemplifies the passion and personal pull I have felt toward musical theatre since 2003 when I worked on my middle school production of *Annie Jr.* To say I was enraptured by the magic of making theatre at that age would be an understatement. But this project is more than simply passion. This dissertation operates on registers that parallel both my own experiences with madness and society's reckoning with the acceptability of openly discussing mental health, with particular attention paid to how musical theatre, as a cultural artifact, navigates staging madness. As I will make clear throughout this dissertation, the American musical is a site of cultural production wherein prevailing ideologies are staged. I take representations of madness as an example of the musical's ability to operate as one such site, responding to and reflecting the society in which it was created.

I'm drawn to study madness and musicals because I am the mad woman I write about. Perhaps that would be reason enough for some to avoid the project altogether, but as someone who sought refuge in the sonic embrace of my favorite musical soundtracks in my darkest days, I am compelled to investigate them. My positionality is imperative here because it is my politics, my lens, and my impetus. I would be remiss to write about mad women and their representations on stage and not be clear with the reader how my own experience with madness informs it.

When I found myself fighting for my life in an intensive outpatient program (IOP) at The Center for Eating Disorders at Sheppard Pratt I turned to theatre to help me cope. At my initial intake appointment, I wore a pink shirt with white writing: *¡No pare sigue sigue!* emblazoned in

the middle.¹ I was a walking billboard for Lin-Manuel Miranda's Broadway hit *In the Heights* (2008) and the musical's major theme: persevering in the face of adversity. The walk to the clinic from Towson University's campus, where I was pursuing my bachelor's degree, was doable, but lengthy. Four nights a week I turned on my bright green iPod mini and plugged in my headphones for thirty minutes of uninterrupted listening while I marched toward three hours of nonstop psychiatric, therapy, and nutrition counseling sessions. "So Much Better," "The Dark I Know Well," and "Defying Gravity" often accompanied me on my journey.² Listening to musicals made me feel less alone, less lost. Such songs carried me to and through my successful completion of the program. Musicals were my soundtrack to a lifesaving journey.

I'm sharing my own history as one that contends with madness to demonstrate that madness, as a concept, and as a lived reality for many, is capacious. Though the symptoms of my disorder no longer rule my life, not a day goes by where I don't acknowledge or connect to the part of my existence that made starvation and body dysphoria a reality. It was all encompassing. Torn between a corporeal body that yearned for sustenance and a mental state that couldn't bear the thought of providing it, I descended into a state of cognitive dissonance—a destructive mad state. That madness resides in me. It always will.

As a practitioner, this project takes a bend toward analyzing what dramaturgs often analyze themselves when thinking about theatre: what makes meaning on the page and on the stage, how, and to what end? My readings of all of what follows are of course informed by my formal training and experience as a dramaturg, but perhaps more saliently, as a mad dramaturg. As an informing, if not wholly present, reality, my experience with madness undergirds my

¹ Roughly translated, the phrase means "Don't stop, keep going!" and is a refrain composer and lyricist Lin-Manuel Miranda uses throughout *In the Heights*.

² Songs featured in the Broadway musicals *Legally Blonde the Musical* (2007), *Spring Awakening* (2006), and *Wicked* (2003) respectively.

relationship to and with popular representations of madness and the methodological formulation of mad dramaturgy I draw out in this dissertation.

This work began in my bones long before it worked itself into my brain. For that, I recall August 2015, when my now-husband-at-the-time-boyfriend and I scored discount tickets to Washington, DC's hottest theatrical event of the summer: *Dear Evan Hansen* at Arena Stage. Hot on the heels of witnessing the genre-altering *Hamilton* (2015) in New York days before, we were excited to see a musical that had all but been pre-approved for a Broadway transfer. We weren't taken with it, though. In fact, I turned to my partner during intermission and noted that the ways in which mental health was being portrayed on stage was detrimental, I felt, to the progress society had made on being more accepting about anxiety and depression. In the musical, Evan is absolved from the lies and harm he causes because, as the musical suggests, he has crippling social anxiety and it is his mental state that caused his unethical behavior according to the narrative, not an opportunistic or morally miscalibrated heart. That Evan received such kind treatment, in my eyes, operated in distinct juxtaposition with musicals I had seen in the past where the main character who experienced madness was a woman, *Next to Normal* (2009) being chief among them. How could two musicals, produced less than a decade apart take such different views of people experiencing madness? And, thus, my ultimate research question was spurred.

Project Overview

This dissertation is a response to the musical theatre histories that give into historically racist and sexist tropes about madness, as I parse out in my literature review later in this introduction. Though representations of madness on stage go as far back as the ancient Greeks,

its use in the American musical rose to prominence in the twentieth century.³ With works such as *Lady in the Dark* (1941), *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964), and *Man of La Mancha* (1965) bookending the “Golden Age” of the American musical, studying these stories encourages audiences “to stop taking things for granted and to start thinking about the assumptions that shape our interests.”⁴ These interests are varied, and I use this dissertation to probe how musicals, with a new societal language about disability after the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990, take up notions of madness as representative of popular ideas about disability and non-normative mental states. The ADA serves as a temporal signpost in my project. I am not analyzing the ADA and what it does to musicals, rather I’m analyzing how musical theatre helps us understand the cultural moment through social conceptions of disability and madness. As such, my project is dramaturgically oriented in that I use close readings, interviews, and historical context to inform the meaning making the American musical does in the mainstream sociocultural milieu.

Musical theatre, as the country’s only unique theatrical genre to find global influence, is a powerful form of storytelling that began as staged reifications of American ideals. American musicals reflect “the historical and cultural character of society” which “voice society’s own sense of its life and values.”⁵ As such, the American musical has been a prime location to explore what it means to be American and how American society reckons with its self-proclaimed status as a “melting pot” where people from diverse cultures and ethnicities come together to form the rich fabric of the nation. Though much scholarship focuses on the American

³ *Medea*, an ancient Greek tragedy by Euripides is variously interpreted as the story of a madwoman who killed her kids for vengeance, out of her own mad state, as a response to patriarchal oppression, or a mix of these circumstances combined.

⁴ Scott McMillin, *The Musical as Drama* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11.

⁵ David F. Walsh and Len Platt, *Musical Theater and American Culture* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), 1.

musical as a site to reify American culture and ideals, I situate my project slightly differently in that the musical, too, holds space for critique about exclusionary American ideals that have harmed mad people, women, and people of color for as long as it has existed. Along this line of thinking the musical then serves as:

[A]n interlocutor in relation to a fragmentation, both positive and negative. It has engaged a variety of new and different forms that often set out to show the rotten teeth in the utopian smile of the American Dream as well as harvesting the social differentiation and disintegration of the American community.⁶

What Walsh and Platt offer here highlights the ways in which the American musical has served as a space to consider what American ideologies and social understandings exist, that are then variously placed on stage and concretized through popular performance, both positive and negative. As an artform that responds to the cultural ideologies of the United States, the musical is a prime site to explore how American ideas of difference are reified while exposing the dark underside of exclusion that subtextually runs beneath the surface of both American society and the genre.

As I outline in my literature review, scholarship on the role of madness in musical theatre is scarce, with musical theatre scholarship in general focusing on works from the twentieth century. Seeing multiple gaps in knowledge here, I focus heavily on musical theatre over the last 30 years, centering my analysis largely on works that premiered after the new millennium. As such, my dissertation has a twofold purpose: 1) To think critically about the representation of madness on stage, and 2) To analyze how theatrical architecture through elements of design, music, directing, and text reify or dismantle madness' historical place as a site of troublesome excess. I do so through a methodological framing of mad dramaturgy, as outlined in the

⁶ Walsh and Platt, 12.

“Methodology” section of this chapter. In brief, mad dramaturgy is an analytic I formulate to understand the material making and narrative operation of madness and its accordant meaning making (im)possibilities. Taking an intersectional approach to this work, two central questions emerge at the heart of this dissertation: how do the theoretical lenses of feminist theory, mad studies, disability studies, and critical race theory help us see madness on stage? What is the consequence of making madness on stage? I’m invested in these questions because I recognize how intertwined discourses about race and disability are, even in the wake of the ADA. The Civil Rights Act and the ADA, two influential civil rights legislations passed in the twentieth century, co-existed and co-mingled as activist struggles.

I explore these research questions by analyzing three musical theatre pieces from the late twentieth century and early twenty-first centuries as case studies: *Violet* (1997), *Jane Eyre the Musical* (2000), and *Next to Normal* (2009). Through my close readings of the production of these musicals, I highlight a key tension at the center of my research: how does the American musical, which relies upon relentless embodiment to make meaning, literally stage a psychosomatic phenomenon and to what end? I argue that this inherent tension often renders mad bodies on stage as victims of their own circumstances—self-created or otherwise—in a way that indicts them in their own unhappiness. This oft-pessimistic view of madness does not account for the liberatory or political possibilities of madness since “[m]adness, after all, is multifarious and ambivalent: potentially a wellspring of inspiration and/or pit of despair.”⁷ As La Marr Jurelle Bruce suggests, scholars of mad studies could choose to celebrate in the spirit of inspiration or drown in the overwhelming despair that so frequently accompanies narratives of madness itself. By providing mad readings of *Violet*, *Jane Eyre the Musical*, and *Next to Normal*,

⁷ La Marr Jurelle Bruce, “Interludes in Madtime: Black Music, Madness, and Metaphysical Syncopation,” *Social Text* 133 (2017): 55.

I investigate how the American musical displays madness in an effort to name and ultimately dismantle both the social and narrative stereotypes that posit madness as an undesirable state of existence. This work is not inherent in the pieces of musical theatre I study, rather mad dramaturgy is an approach I utilize that suggests how musicals might engage in such dismantling. Through my project I argue that creative teams often stage madness in a way that is inherently informed by the historical legacies of hysteria as racist and sexist systems that have come to define it. Mad dramaturgy seeks to name and highlight these structures and interrogate how madness therein serves as an operative narrative construct and material reality in the American musical.

Methodology

Before I begin with my own methodology and subsequent literature review, I want to be clear in how I am defining the term “musical” within my larger project. As the Oxford English Dictionary offers, the term musical is a “play or film in which singing and dancing play an essential part; a musical comedy.”⁸ I take this definition as my jumping off point and hold close to it throughout this project. However, I do want to highlight that the categorization of what makes a piece of theatre a musical is contested by scholars and fans alike. I’m drawn to this definition because while it is rather simple, it encompasses a broad array of performance traditions. In so doing, I acknowledge how musical theatre has changed and developed over time. This allows me to consider the genealogy of musical theatre, as I do in my literature review, while providing a definition that feels representative of the case studies presented in the project. I don’t intend to suggest that musicals are a nebulous genre, rather I call upon the ways in which

⁸ “Musical, n.,” in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/254181>.

musicals, and their position within popular culture, have changed, adapting to the performance traditions and styles of a given time.

Throughout this dissertation, musicals serve as a vehicle within which to consider how madness has been represented on stage. As I parse out in the literature immediately following, madness as a term and academic notion is largely considered under the umbrella of disability studies. However, the term madness has been a fluid one used to indict marginalized people for a range of different behaviors that remain largely legislatively uncoded. The definition of madness in the ADA itself does not interpret madness widely in the same way that it does for physical disability. The ADA defines disability as a “physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.”⁹ Scholars of mad studies have necessarily had to think about madness beyond the confines of the ADA and the academic discipline of disability studies, for neither foreground madness in the same way they do for physical impairment. As such, my own definition of madness in this project responds to the case study at the center of each chapter. In the interim, however, I loosely define madness as a mental state of being beyond a socially defined norm that renders a person socially deviant or excessive. This is my jumping off point. The nuances of madness demand great care and specificity, which I parse out as I analyze selected works. What I do want to formalize here is that regardless of the nuances, my understanding of madness and the accordant definitions I call upon, push up against the historically racist and sexist ideologies attributed to mad people that often render their existence dangerous.

I start from this simple definition because I build upon this notion throughout the project. I’m not interested in providing one solitary and finite definition of madness since the structures

⁹ Department of Justice, *The Americans with Disabilities Act* (Washington, D.C.: Civil Rights Division, Coordination and Review Section, 1990).

that render violence against mad people are complicated themselves. To suggest that madness is or can be performed in one manner—or in an easily definable manner—ignores the complex systems of oppression that impact mad people to this day. You will find that throughout this project, I've taken a great deal of care to mine a definition of madness that follows the theoretical frameworks provided by mad studies but is also most suitable to each case study and is built upon the very notions I've mentioned. The simple nature of my definition here is not me skirting around the literature. Rather, it invokes a deep knowledge of existing research and foregrounds my deployment of methodical, thoughtful, and careful applications throughout. As you'll see in the next three chapters, I outline the definitions of madness that open my analysis to considerations beyond simple categorization.

I take madness as my site for exploring the American musical, because, though scholarship in musical theatre studies possesses the capacity to talk about embodied difference in the artform, few scholars have done so with madness. Donatella Galella offers a new historiographic model for considering the production of musical theatre in her book *America in the Round*. In it, she highlights the history of musical theatre pieces themselves, the sociocultural moment in which they were made, *and* the systemic structures of racism and sexism that inform their receipt.¹⁰ I see Galella's work as influential to my own, for it discusses, in an intersectional manner, embodied difference coupled with the racist and sexist producing structures of American musical theatre in a manner that few other scholars have. In recent years, some musical theatre scholars, such as Samuel Yates, have begun writing in earnest about the

¹⁰ Donatella Galella, *America in the Round: Capital, Race, and Nation at Washington D.C.'s Arena Stage*, Studies in Theatre History and Culture (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2019).

representational currency of disability in the American musical.¹¹ However, few scholars are taking up this intersectional approach with madness and its material possibilities in musical theatre. As such, I see my work operating at an interdisciplinary intersection not often traveled, which requires me to scaffold my work with theoretical foundations found in other disciplines. Namely, in mad studies, La Marr Jurelle Bruce's own interdisciplinary scholarship, comprising varying epistemological modes, praxes, and interpretive techniques informs my activation of madness as and in performance.¹² Similar, too, have feminist scholars such as Alison Kafer offered disability and gender as political modes of meaning making within oppressive ableist social structures.¹³ My engagement with these disciplines allows me to critically think alongside non-normative experiences and their accordant materialization in the American musical—work that has been done more so for other intersectional identities in theatre studies than it has for madness.

In acknowledging the gap in research that my project fills, I turn to methodological approaches that support the historiographic intervention I offer in my case studies. As such, my dissertation engages in distinct, yet complimentary methodological approaches. I wed a genealogical approach to musical theatre viewing it through the disciplinary lens of disability and mad studies while engaging a dramaturgical mode of analysis that illuminates how madness is conveyed on stage. I outline mad dramaturgy as a specific analytic tool to make sense of the narrative import madness holds on stage when taken in tandem with the aesthetic structures that uniquely comprise the American musical. To scaffold my own formulation of mad dramaturgy, I

¹¹ Samuel Yates, "Choreographing Conjoinment: Side Show's Fleshly Fixations and Disability Simulation," *Studies in Musical Theatre* 13, no. 1 (March 1, 2019): 67–78, https://doi.org/10.1386/smt.13.1.67_1.

¹² La Marr Jurelle Bruce, *How to Go Mad Without Losing Your Mind: Madness and Black Radical Creativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

¹³ Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

turn to the work of Foucault before introducing the framework within which my dramaturgical analysis exists. I conclude by naming mad dramaturgy as my own methodological intervention that dovetails from the first two and articulate how it allows me to consider the staging of madness as narrative and aesthetic architectural elements in my case studies.

First, I use the term genealogy to follow what Foucault offered in his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in that it is a particular investigation into those elements which “we tend to feel [are] without history.”¹⁴ Such a genealogy contains elements of everyday life, including gender and sexuality, and as I argue in my dissertation, madness. I acknowledge that the genealogies Foucault identifies—studies of descent or structures of domination—are ones of power. I draw upon the ways in which Foucault’s genealogies focus on contingent turns of history, going through the archive and excavating social institutions and the self to trace how power has evolved. This methodology is critical in my approach to musical theatre histories, as I contend that madness is an underexplored narrative and materialized structure of the musical, and as such I intend to conduct a countermemory—one that accounts for the disavowed structure of madness in the musical. Thus, I call upon Foucault’s work to aid in this historiographic project by situating the representation of madness in musical theatre not as a happenstance occurrence, but rather as a response to the historical turns upon which musical theatre is contingent as a cultural artifact. Put simply, I will use the archive to elucidate a history of cultural production pertaining to musical theatre histories following the model of Foucault.

Though Foucault’s definitions of genealogy and countermemory are helpful here, I want to be clear that Foucault’s theories of madness and society’s responses to it therein are not necessarily the foundations on which my analysis rests. Though a Foucauldian critique of

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Nietzsche* (Oxford University Press, 1978), 139.

psychiatry and the harm such categorization has historically caused greatly informs my own understanding of such discrimination, his work provides a decidedly different orientation of madness in society than my project engages. Foucault's work on madness, while critical to understanding the historical pathologization of madness in society, does not account for the registers of madness as and in performance that my project requires.

The second and the most utilized of the methodologies in my dissertation is dramaturgical analysis. Though dramaturgical analysis as a scholarly pursuit includes script and textual analysis, I engage in it further, citing Michael Chemers' definition of the practice:

[D]ramaturgy refers to the accumulated techniques that all theatrical artists employ to do three things:

1. Determine what the aesthetic architecture of a piece of dramatic literature actually is (analysis)
2. Discover everything needed to transform that inert script into a living piece of theatre (research)
3. Apply that knowledge in a way that makes sense to a living audience at this time in this place (practical application)¹⁵

In using dramaturgical analysis as a framework for theatrical interpretation, I engage in modes of literary analysis, performance theory, and material culture to fully understand and view the theatrical production in all its multiplicity. I engage with Chemers' first aspect of dramaturgy in that I am tracing out a theory of madness as aesthetic and narrative architecture and complicating it with his third point to make claims about how that dramaturgy informs the reception politics of each piece. It is through the analytical tools provided by this framework that I can make the historiographic interventions Foucault calls for in his work on genealogy.

¹⁵ Michael Mark Chemers, *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), 1.

Here then, is where my understanding of Foucault and Chemers' work informs my own formulation I term *mad dramaturgy*. Mad dramaturgy follows mad methodologies practiced in mad studies by embracing the unruly, not-necessarily-linear, varied, and complicated dynamics being mad in a society that prizes normativity entails. Building on work from mad studies, I identify that madness is related to but distinctly different from disability and disability studies. As such, we cannot conceive of disability studies as the sole overarching analytic for madness. They are related but two different frameworks of analysis and thus I argue that disability and madness will take different forms when presented on stage. In creating a definition for mad dramaturgy, I'm most interested in looking at how madness is represented on stage as it is co-articulated with popular notions of disability because it does so in a way that neither field has yet recognized. Musical theatre becomes the prime location to view and analyze this coarticulation because, in a form where relentless embodied is the prime mode of narrative progression, both must be materialized.

To be clear, when I state musical theatre as a genre that requires relentless embodiment, I'm not suggesting that other forms of performance do not. It is inarguable that other forms of theatre, dance, and performance art require embodiment, but the expectations placed on musical theatre performers are extensive. As musical theatre and disability studies scholar Samuel Yates offers, the musical theatre performer is expected to be a "triple threat actor" whose exceptional ability in acting, singing, and movement, situate them as a person whose body is "hypercappable or hypercapacitated."¹⁶ This is a useful frame to investigate the relentless embodiment required of musical theatre because it involves extraordinary able-bodiedness as its baseline performative

¹⁶ Samuel Yates, "Monstrosity in a Pandemic: Hypercapacity, Debility, and Death in 'Repo! The Genetic Opera,'" in *Monsters in Performance: Essays on the Aesthetics of Disqualification*, ed. Michael M. Chemers and Analola Santana (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022).

requirement. Thus, musical theatre, as a genre, expects its performers to exist in continual excellence, always dancing, singing, and acting with an ability that is exceptionally, and expectantly based on genre norms, outstandingly excessive. This expectation has historically excluded the disabled body as an embodied difference expected with musical theatre's narrative frame, with few exceptions. But, if, as Scott McMillin offers, the "crackle of difference" is what makes musical theatre a unique genre, then the crackle of embodied difference is a necessary and often understudied aesthetic fuel for the genre. My work is bridging the gap between disability studies and mad studies by focusing on how psychic difference is an aesthetic manifestation—mad dramaturgy—that leads to a change in the aesthetic architecture of musical theatre.

In practice, mad dramaturgy reconnects the discursive break between disability studies and mad studies. Therefore, studying musicals allows us to understand the intersectional relationship between madness and disability more fully, and the way they intersect with other oppressed identities such as race and gender. To state a definition clearly, mad dramaturgy understands that representations of madness are materialized on stage with different aesthetic architectures including text, design, sound, dance, and direction. These aesthetic forms are traditionally structured around ableism. By paying attention to how madness is materialized on stage, we can see that the architectural structures embedded with madness have narrative import. This work is important because a narrative consideration of how madness is materialized and therefore structures theatrical action opens doors to seeing how ableism functions (or not), perpetuates oppression (or not), and how it reifies or intervenes against intersectional violences.

In my formulation, we cannot gain understanding or access to analysis of these oppressions through a study of anything but madness. Disability will not hold as the sole central analytic because madness, unlike disability, is often invisible in that there are few outright

physical markers to indicate a mad person. Thus, representations of madness on stage are presented through a narrative interpretation that holds incredible weight. The case studies I look at in this project—*Violet*, *Jane Eyre the Musical*, and *Next to Normal*—look different from other musicals where disability is a narrative plot point simply because the madness cannot be physically manifested in the same way. There is no outcast hunchback yearning for belonging and love, like in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (2014), no wheelchair bound child lamenting about his future (*Secret Garden* [1991]), no conjoined twins gawked at for their uniqueness (*Sideshow* [1997]), no facial disfigurement to explain away abusive behavior (*The Phantom of the Opera* [1986]), no young boy unable to escape his harsh and poverty-stricken environment because of his immobile leg (*Newsies* [2012]).

I pay particular attention to drawing out mad dramaturgy here because I know that the method I use—the analytic framework I employ to look at my case studies—determines what I see. Mad dramaturgy centers the marginalized mad characters and interrogates the narrative through a lens of societal dispossession. In essence, instead of viewing mad characters as peripheral or tertiary characters to solely advance the plot, it centers disability and madness as intersectional identities along the lines of race and gender. In using mad dramaturgy to look at *Violet*, *Jane Eyre the Musical*, and *Next to Normal*, I identify an overreliance on madness and its accordant negative stereotypes as narrative tools to signal little more than undesirability and deviancy. By interrogating and upending this notion of madness through a dramaturgical analysis as Chemers definition affords, mad dramaturgy considers madness as one such piece of aesthetic and narrative architecture and imbues meaning on not only the musical, but on American ideologies about mad subjects.

In understanding these musicals with relation to larger societal happenings, I situate the American musical as a site of political potentiality. As such, I'm drawn to explore what can be learned about musicals, gender, and race by better understanding how madness has produced meaning across the genre of musical theatre. Approaching the genre in this fashion, I will use dramaturgical analysis, supported with feminist theory, disability studies, and mad studies to identify how these works operate and how they are situated within larger conversations about race and gender as they relate to madness in the contemporary musical. My project and the methodology contained herein, bridge the gap between scholarship and practice by engaging in the performance of these musicals as research and sites of knowledge production. Using archival recordings and interviews to support the genealogy of these works, the project fulfills the need to both understand how these pieces came into existence and how their performance and reception inform their narrative import.

Literature Review

This project intervenes in musical theatre historiography by situating madness as constitutive of the genre and making recommendations for more equitable representations therein. As such, addressing my research interests requires me to trace out a legacy of madness, and in this literature review, I weave this genealogy by looking at three constitutive histories: musical theatre, disability and mad studies, and Black feminisms. I've chosen these histories because madness is often recounted in history as a specific gendered and/or racialized construct, meeting at the crossroads of disability, gender, and race. I challenge these historiographically constructed narratives by considering how madness operates narratively throughout the American musical.

Musical theatre histories are often told as linear and progressive narratives, presenting the musical as an evolved art form borne out of primitive dramas with music, ultimately culminating in the lauded integrated musical of today. What many of these historiographic constructions do not consider, however, is the relationship of musical theatre to larger analytical frameworks in disciplines such as disability studies and feminist theory. Taking up this work, I propose an alternative historiography to American musical theatre—one that accounts for theoretical frameworks interrogating sites of difference. In operating at this intersection, I explore how representations of madness in the contemporary American musical illuminate conversations about disability in the United States specifically after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 and vice versa.

Musical theatre histories, disability studies, mad studies, and Black feminism foreground this dissertation project, providing theoretical foundations crucial to tracing intersections of race, gender, and disability in the contemporary American musical. To support my own historiographic intervention, I have surveyed trends in musical theatre histories, the models put forth in the field of disability and mad studies, and the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality offered in Black feminism. Recounting the literature of disability and mad studies, I acknowledge the growing field to which I am contributing by citing madness as controlling image, of sorts, and dramaturging possibilities otherwise for gendered, raced, and mad subjects in the American musical. In reviewing the relevant literature of Black feminisms, I provide an overview of intersectionality and its attendant theories of difference, which is a critical contribution to not only feminist theory, but also sociopolitical, cultural, and historical understandings of disability. Dovetailing these three areas of specialization, I acknowledge difference through its embodied, socially constructed, and academically theorized perspectives.

Musical Theatre Histories

Published scholarship on the history of musical theatre abounds, and many such works organize their texts chronologically. Though the exact date in which the musical was founded is contested terrain, certain scholarship dates its creation in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.¹⁷ Some scholars, however, contend that the American musical truly didn't take shape until Rodgers and Hammerstein began their pivotal partnership on the musical *Oklahoma!*, formally introducing the integrated musical as the highest form of musical theatre's artistic harmony (a supposed and contested notion, to be sure).¹⁸ While the re-telling of any history is dependent upon the narrator, rough consistencies maintain throughout published scholarship, which I will largely draw out here.

Though the definition of the musical may be easy to locate, how the American musical, as we contemporarily understand it, came into being is on shakier theoretical ground. Some identify *The Black Crook* (1866) as the beginning of the American musical, but as Ethan Mordden notes, it “wasn't the first anything and wasn't even a musical.”¹⁹ Though *The Black Crook* did not contain many musical numbers, it did introduce elements of dance, speech, song, and spectacle—enough so to be historically considered one starting point for the American musical. Though, another popular contestation is that *The Black Crook* is less of an American musical and more of an opéra bouffe, a late nineteenth century French operetta style known for elements of comedy, satire, parody, and farce.

¹⁷ McMillin, *The Musical as Drama*; Ethan Mordden, *Anything Goes: A History of American Musical Theatre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁸ Here I use the term “integrated musical” to call upon a specific type of musical, one in which all elements of the musical—song, dance, text, music, spectacle, etc.—operate cohesively to drive the narrative forward.

¹⁹ Mordden, *Anything Goes: A History of American Musical Theatre*, 13.

If *The Black Crook* is not cited as the impetus for the formation of the American musical, then the development of the form is often situated within various performance traditions that integrate music, dance, song, and spectacle to further a (even if loosely contrived) narrative. Burlesques, containing music, song, and elaborate costumes often followed a roughly constructed narrative, though the shows themselves became more elaborate as time progressed, with works such as *King Cotton; or, The Exiled Prince* (1862) described as a “...farcical, musical, dramatical burlesque extravaganza in one act, nine scenes, suitable to the times.”²⁰ And, while burlesque shows provided performance opportunities for women, specifically as objects for male consumption, considerations of race, class, and gender are taken up more explicitly in the minstrel shows of the nineteenth century. That does not mean, however, that burlesque troupes did not engage with performances of race, as many female burlesque troupes often employed blackface in their own works.

Put simply, minstrel shows in their first iteration were a “theatrical practice, principally of the urban North, in which white men caricatured blacks for sport and profit.”²¹ Minstrelsy, as a practice, trafficked in race, class, and gender relations, relying upon the commodification of Black bodies and blackness. Those who consumed blackface minstrelsy performances were often white, localized, working class men, who, believing Black people to be inferior to their own race, often delighted in seeing Black Americans portrayed as dumb, ignorant, and less civilized. This ultimately reified the racist ideology of the time period. These performances paired song, dance, text, among other elements, to build upon a history of intense class, racial, national, and gender formation.²² It was in these rowdy theatrical spaces where explicit acknowledgements of race,

²⁰ Ibid., 20.

²¹ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13.

²² Lott, *Love and Theft*, 25.

power, and class were explored, whereby popular culture became a place “where cultures of the dispossessed are routinely commodified—and contested.”²³ This commodification and contestation provided a popular narrative within which to stage critical difference in popular performance. That Black bodies were the product being represented and sold to white spectators highlights the performance medium as a space for dispossession. That is to say, the commodification of Black bodies through blackface minstrelsy provided society with a blueprint on which to position future representations of Black people, and such representations are taken up in earnest in other popular media, such as literature.

While minstrel shows were a literal whitewashing of the Black experience in America based on racial stereotypes, development of Black music, performance, and traditions emerged, forever impacting the landscape of the American musical. The influence of these performance traditions can be seen in the American musical in works such as *Shuffle Along* (1921), *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope* (1971), and *Bring in Da Noise, Bring in Da Funk* (1995), which claim and celebrate Black musical innovations in the theatrical form. Indeed, as the American musical takes shape, so, too, do landmark musical developments, such as jazz and ragtime—cultural juggernauts still unfolding today.²⁴ It is not a coincidence that as Black cultural production via music and theatre is acknowledged by mainstream white audiences in the early 1920s, that a musical such as *Show Boat* (1927), which borrows heavily from Black cultural production, emerges as a pivotal turning point in the canon of American musicals. I do want to acknowledge explicitly that from the era of the reconstruction through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Black musical theatre emerged alongside musicals written by (and largely intended for)

²³ Ibid., 23.

²⁴ Todd R. Decker, *Show Boat: Performing Race in an American Musical* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21.

white audiences. I mention this here to acknowledge that American musical theatre is indebted to the work of Black artists during a time in which popular musicals by white writers were either appropriating Black cultural production, as Irving Berlin does with ragtime in many of his works, or narrativizing the Black experience as Gershwin does in *Porgy & Bess* (1935). Eroll Hill and Jocelyn L. Buckner's work on the Hyers sisters, Paige McGinley's scholarship on Black performance and theatre throughout the twentieth century, and Masi Asare's writing on the relationship between the Broadway belt and blues music, provide in earnest critical conversations at the intersection of race, gender, and performance. Acknowledging the work of such scholars, who cite the influence of Black women, in particular, on the American musical, I turn to *Show Boat* as a specific example of a piece heavily influenced by Black cultural production.

Such pivotal changes in popular culture at the turn of the century foreground the introduction of what is largely considered the most historically consequential piece added to the American musical theatre canon in the last century: *Show Boat* (1927). I mention *Show Boat* here, not only for its uniquely American storyline, which is notable, but because even in its historical context, it capitalizes on Black performance traditions to narrativize white fear of miscegenation. Indeed, scholars have cemented *Show Boat*'s theatrical legacy as a turning point in the canon, given the ways in which it presented the fears and anxieties of white Americans while simultaneously highlighting the very real (and eugenically motivated) consequences of being Black in the United States. Simply put, scholars cite *Show Boat* in musical theatre histories as a critical turning point, with Geoffrey Block boldly stating that "[t]he history of the American

Musical Theatre, quite simply, is divided into two eras—everything before *Show Boat* and everything after *Show Boat*.”²⁵

What *Show Boat* begins in mainstream musical theatre continues into the “Golden Age” of the Broadway musical, ushered in by Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!*. The work, largely considered to be one of the first commercially successful integrated musicals, weaves together plot, character, song, dance, orchestration, and setting as it advances the plot forward. This sameness—the smooth transition between elements that comprise a musical—came to be the standard throughout the Golden Age, signaling a new era for musicals between the late 1940s and early 1960s.²⁶ While such cohesion and integration is lauded as the epitome of the American musical, Scott McMillin argues that the “crackle of difference” felt between each element is what makes the musical “a genre of its own.”²⁷ This difference, though potentially woven together well, provides an incongruity, for the very notion of integration requires an acknowledgement of difference. It is in this incongruity where McMillin notes the theorizing of musical theatre takes place, for “[t]he musical is the illegitimate drama, and now that the illegitimate has taken its place as a major American artistic accomplishment, it deserves some theoretical thinking that holds true to its own history and form.”²⁸ What McMillin offers is an intervention into the space of musical theatre history as he situates the musical as a unique site for theorizing.

The exploration of difference as a narrative device as it relates to musical theatre, outside of what McMillin has offered, has largely been reserved for race and gender, respectively. As

²⁵ Geoffrey Block, *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from Show Boat to Sondheim* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

²⁶ Mordden, *Anything Goes*, 25.

²⁷ McMillin, *The Musical as Drama*, 20.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

Grace Barnes writes in her book, *Her Turn on Stage*, “[d]espite often placing women at the center of a musical, the scripts often subscribe to the theory of women as difference,” which places them in a category of deviancy, overpowering her own story to highlight how much she deviates from the norm.²⁹ Such categorization of women, based on their behaviors and relationship to others, is critical to the American musical, as it shapes every aspect of the musical and is fundamental to the musical’s architecture.³⁰ While it is a broad brush to paint all musicals with relation to gender in a similar light, it is important to note that many such musicals follow a formulaic structure, built on heteronormative relations of sexuality and gender roles, that are deeply intertwined with the changes in women’s roles and activities in US culture writ large.³¹ To change the gender politics of the musical, then, is to similarly change the political meaning of the work itself, which models the type of analysis I offer in my dissertation—changing depictions of madness with shifting times.

Disability Studies and Mad Studies

I now turn to an overview of disability studies and mad studies, its subsequent iterations and alterations, and feminist interventions in the field. I want to state here that while I am thinking about disability studies broadly, the field has several subfields that some scholars do not position entirely under the umbrella of disability. This includes mad studies, which is a discrete offshoot of disability studies itself, attending to notions of cognitive difference—an area I parse out later in this review. The location of this section in my literature review is intentional insofar

²⁹ Grace Barnes, *Her Turn on Stage: The Role of Women in Musical Theatre* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc, 1997), 25.

³⁰ Stacy Wolf, *Changed for Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6.

³¹ Wolf, *Changed for Good*, 19.

that I situate disability studies, and furthermore, the field of mad studies, as the critical link between understanding the popular histories presented in musical theatre as progress narratives and linking it to the incredible breadth of work feminist theorists have put forth on sites of difference as embodied knowledge.

Due to the growing nature of the field, finite definitions of disability studies are malleable: "...disability studies explores the social, cultural, and political dimensions of the concept of disability and what it means to be disabled."³² The theoretical foundations of disability studies insist that there is no neutral or objective position from which to regard the human body and its differences, and the social model of disability positions "normal" as socially constructed.³³ What disability studies offers is a challenge to the social construction of "normal" bodies and how the subsequent identification of an ideal body affects lived difference as a personal and political project. Just as the conceptualization of race, class, and gender shapes the lives of those who are not Black, poor, or female "so the concept of disability regulates the bodies of those who are "normal."³⁴ Disability studies provides the theoretical grounding of disability as a lived experience requiring rigorous analysis. In doing so, disability studies and its subsequent scholarship becomes less about embodied differences and more about the set of social, historical, economic, and cultural processes that regulate and control the way we think about and through the disabled body.

In considering notions of how bodies relate to a socially constructed norm, disability studies historicizes disability within the confines of a nineteenth century liberal ideology, which positions the body as useful only insofar as its productiveness contributes to the capitalist

³² Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin, eds., *Keywords for Disability Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2015). 15.

³³ Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, *Keywords for Disability Studies*, 27.

³⁴ Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995), 22.

system. The field therefore gives way to critical considerations about how such stringent ideas of acceptable embodiment inform what bodies should be or do.³⁵ In acknowledging how bodies “should” act, disability studies provides an analytical framework with which to address how societal expectations enforce systems of exclusion and oppression and challenge the “widespread belief that having an able body and mind determines whether one is a quality human being.”³⁶ In historicizing disability, scholars have had to contend with applying a contemporary categorical term, “disability,” to past instances of non-normative bodies. In so doing, they have addressed various conceptual frameworks of disability throughout history, starting with the medical model of disability.

Historically, scholars first theorized the medical model of disability, which frames atypical bodies and minds as deviant, pathological, and defective. Within this model, the proper approach to disability is to treat the condition and the person with the condition rather than “treating” the social processes and policies that constrict disabled people’s lives.³⁷ The medical model signifies the initial medical and categorical designation of disability as a marked physical difference. As such, scholarship reflects that disability was historically a matter for medical intervention, and that disability studies has moved us toward models of disability that attend to difference as “the product of a disabling social and built environment.”³⁸

Moving beyond the biological orientation of disability that the medical model offers, the social model defined disability relative to the social and built environments, arguing that disabling environments produce disability in bodies and “require interventions at the level of

³⁵ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 6.

³⁶ Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 3-4.

³⁷ Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 22.

³⁸ Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 3.

social justice.”³⁹ While the social model of disability and scholarship on the topic move the field forward by acknowledging the social dimension of disability oppression, it has been critiqued because it continues to treat the disabled body as an object that is acted upon by the world, rather than as a subject that can operate with agency.⁴⁰ A profoundly influential concept, the social model separates “impairment, as physical or mental difference, from disability, the social effects of that difference.”⁴¹ By doing so, the social model of disability provides a clear distinction between the corporeal categorization of disability and the societal impact of the marginalization based on non-normative embodiment. This model emphasizes structural forces producing disability oppression and as such was a powerful activist tool. At the same time, however, scholars such as Kafer have critiqued this model for erasing the actual realities of impairment she claims can be truly and actually disabling, hence her political/relational model, to which I now turn.

Just as scholars have identified race, gender, class, and sexuality as sites for political reimagining, so too, have disability studies scholars taken up this work with disability. As Lennard Davis offers in *Enforcing Normalcy*, “[w]hen we start conceiving of disability as a descriptive term and not as an absolute category, then we can begin to think in theoretical and political ways about this category.”⁴² And, while Davis identified the need for rethinking the political possibilities of disability, Alison Kafer takes up this work in her political/relational model: “the problem of disability no longer resides in the minds or bodies of individuals but in built environments and social patterns that exclude or stigmatize particular kinds of bodies,

³⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁰ Nirmala Erevelles, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Body Politic* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 43.

⁴¹ Ellen Jean Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 21.

⁴² Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*, 48.

minds, and ways of being.”⁴³ Kafer builds on but exceeds the social model of disability, theorizing a political/relational model that locates challenges with disability in inaccessible buildings, discriminatory attitudes, and crucially, ideological systems that attribute normalcy and deviance to particular minds and bodies. As such, it is only through social change and political transformation that the problem of disability can be solved—a far cry from the notions that the medical model of disability offered. The political/relational model of disability makes room for more activist responses, seeing disability as a potential site for collective reimagining. Reimagining in turn is enabled by an emphasis on the contingency of what is considered disabled. It is crucial, too, then, to understand that for Kafer, claiming disability, “while a significant political act, is not only political but also a practice that improves quality of life for disabled people.”⁴⁴ Ultimately, the political/relational model is a theory of complex embodiment—one that values disability as a form of human variation, rather than a medical “problem” to be rectified only through clinical diagnosis and treatment.

Key to charting the sociopolitical contingency of disability in history is a robust theorization of the norms that produce, and subsequently other, disability. As Mitchell and Snyder posit in their book *Narrative Prosthesis*, a normal body “is a theoretical premise from which all bodies must, by definition, fall short.”⁴⁵ This idealized body—the “normal”—generally fails to consider the specific contingencies of bodies functioning within a specific historical context. Such divorcing removes it from time and space, highlighting its artificiality as a construct. I think it important to mention here, however, that even though the construct of an idealized body can be acknowledged as artificially constructed, does not mean that its

⁴³ Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 23.

⁴⁴ Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 11.

⁴⁵ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 7.

construction does not have deep consequences on the disabled body considered in relation. Indeed, scholars argue that it is solely in the creation of the normal, that disability becomes a category at all, and one that highlights difference as deviance.⁴⁶

Difference in physical and cognitive function, of course, is not the only difference from “normal” experienced by people with disabilities. Indeed, race and disability are “two significant categories of difference that shape the social, and have often been conceptualized as analogous to each other.”⁴⁷ Disability has been often described as being “like race” and race as being “like disability” in the attempts to shift the experience of disability from the space of the individual to “a broader social recognition of disabled people as members of a political minority.”⁴⁸ As historian Dan Wilson and others have shown, people’s experiences with disability were consistently and continuously marked by many forces, including, but not limited to, class, race, gender, age, and place, all of which affected the options available to them.⁴⁹ This intersection—that of multiple intersecting marginalizing identities—offers a way to consider disability as a categorical imperative in collective reimagining. Leading the way in this reimagining are those scholars who work at the intersections of critical race and disability, mad and/or crip studies, including Nirmala Erevelles, La Marr Jurelle Bruce, Lennard Davis, and Therí A. Pickens, among others.

It is unsurprising to me that many of the scholars who look toward the intersections of race and disability are some of the foremost scholars in the subfield of mad studies. Mad Studies, as a discipline:

⁴⁶ Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 16.

⁴⁷ Nirmala Erevelles, “Race” in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin, eds., (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 412.

⁴⁸ Erevelles in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, 412.

⁴⁹ Susan Burch and Michael A. Rembis, eds., *Disability Histories* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 2.

...incorporates all that is critical of psychiatry from a radical socially progressive foundation in which the medical model is dispensed with as biologically reductionist whilst alternative forms of helping people experiencing mental anguish are based on humanitarian, holistic perspectives where people are not reduced to symptoms but understood within the social and economic context of the society in which they live.⁵⁰

Perhaps put in more simple terms, mad studies is a field of scholarship, theory, and activism about the lived experiences, history, cultures, and politics about people who may identify as Mad, mentally ill, psychiatric survivors, consumers, service users, patients, neurodiverse, and disabled. It rejects a biomedical approach to the domain widely known as ‘mental illness’ or ‘mental health’ and substitutes instead a framework of madness. Mad studies, as I mentioned earlier, has an evolving relationship with disability studies, though it is increasingly finding footing alongside, instead of solely underneath, the larger theoretical notion of disability. Mad studies seeks to move beyond notions of simple psychiatry and mental health, and instead highlight the intersecting realities that madness holds in relation to identities that include race, class, sexuality, culture, gender, age, disability, faith and belief.⁵¹

Many scholars of mad studies highlight the double marginalization of madness and race, which foregrounds conversations about intersectionality and its place in madness narratives. Throughout this dissertation, I parse out these intersectionalities, using musical theatre as one way to interrogate society’s pathologization of madness. Though race and gender are less studied areas of intersectional analysis with regard to madness, they build upon the theoretical frameworks provided by a cross-section of feminist theory and disability studies.

A slightly more established field of intersectional analysis exists, wherein there are many scholars who have taken up the theoretical intersections of gender and disability. As Kim Q. Hall

⁵⁰ Robert Menzies, B A LeFrançois, and Geoffrey Raume, eds., “Introducing Mad Studies,” in *Mad Matters* (Toronto, Canada: Canadian Scholars Press, 2013), 2.

⁵¹ Peter Beresford and Jasna Russo, “Supporting the Sustainability of Mad Studies and Preventing Its Co-Option,” *Disability & Society* 31, no. 2 (February 7, 2016): 270–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2016.1145380>.

succinctly states in the opening of her book, *Feminist Disability Studies*, “[j]ust as disability studies shows how disability is irreducible to bodily impairment, feminist theory shows how gender is irreducible to biological sex.”⁵² This succinct, yet imperative, statement by Hall identifies feminist theory as a critical building block to disability studies. Indeed, feminism and critical race studies have been central to the field of disability studies, for much of the disability rights movement used the templates of the feminist movement and civil rights movements that came before as blueprints to enact change. Born out of this intersection, feminist disability studies can “suggest an avenue for critique of reductive biological understandings of both gender and disability.”⁵³ In fact, scholars have noted that the issues disability studies needs to address in earnest have long been discussed in feminist theory.⁵⁴ This is not to say that feminist theory can be transferred wholly and intact over to the field of disability studies, but it is to suggest that feminist theory can offer profound insights, methods, and perspectives that would deepen disability studies, and strengthen our understanding of how these multiple systems intertwine, redefine, and mutually constitute one another.

It is here where I’d like to note that much existing scholarship on feminist disability studies is situated within feminist theory that is largely written from a lens that still centers whiteness. While notions of womanhood were pathologized as inferior to maleness, historically, blackness has been further pathologized outside the norms of white womanhood, which illustrates Kafer’s insistence on understanding the term of disability contingently with intersectional lenses to see how disability can make manifest operations of power. For example, the work of Therí A Pickens, in her book *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* provides a notable

⁵² Kim Q. Hall, *Feminist Disability Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 14.

⁵³ Hall, *Feminist Disability Studies*, 18.

⁵⁴ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,” *NWSA Journal* 14, no. 3, (2002): 31.

intervention in the field of disability and mad studies citing the intersection of blackness and femininity as crucial to theorizing. As such, it is the informing premise of feminist disability theory that disability, like femaleness, is not a natural state of corporeal inferiority, inadequacy, or excess. Rather, disability is a culturally and socially crafted narrative of embodiment. Put differently, feminist theory's insistence on politicizing the corporeal experience of bodies and challenging the category of woman are the exact methods that should be used to examine disability and madness.

Black Feminisms

Concepts such as intersectionality and oppression so frequently applied within Black feminism provide a foundation for the analysis in my project. Broadly, Black feminism formally dates back to the Combahee River Collective's field-altering manifesto in 1977. When I cite the Combahee River Collective Statement's manifesto as field-altering I want to make clear for whom that statement applies. Black women's lived experience at the intersection of race and gender foregrounds the theories laid out in the statement; it was white women, whose embodied experience did not sit within the unique matrices of oppression and whose work within the feminist movement did not include such considerations for women of color, for whom the manifesto was likely most revelatory. The statement is incredibly influential for many reasons, chief among them is the ways in which it made space for Black feminism within academia and the institutionalization of thought as a response to the Combahee River Collective's work. I also want to acknowledge that Black feminism is a vast field, and while I'm unable to touch on each piece in the canon here, I've cited works that are among the most influential and most critical to the analysis and methods I model in my project. In collating this literature review, I cite theorists

who have defined feminism, move onward to discuss intersectionality and its critique of feminist theory, and end with a brief overview of feminist theory and performance.

Feminist theory has long identified as many things—an interdisciplinary inquiry, a self-conscious cultural critique, and an interrogation of multiply interpellated subjects.⁵⁵ But, it is feminist theory's work to identify how the gendered interpellated subject operates in relation to the dominant, patriarchal system. Specifically defined, patriarchy is "the system which elevates men to positions of power through the notion of the *pater*, or father, placing men in an economic and social executive position within the family unit, the marketplace and the state."⁵⁶ Defining patriarchy indicated early (white) feminism's essentialist view of gender as the only marginalizing identity, or rather, the only marginalizing identity worth advocacy and organization. Woman of color feminisms, and specifically Black feminism, identifies how representational systems intersect to produce and sustain acquired identities, including systems of gender, race, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, and class as they mutually produce, inflect, and contradict one another.⁵⁷ Coupled with multiracial and South Asian feminisms, feminist critiques offered by women of color make clear that feminists are in a position to reevaluate not just the representational interstices of identity, but also their own earlier presuppositions about feminism.⁵⁸

Black feminist thought provides a breadth of scholarship situating, specifically, the location of Black women within the field's theorizations. Arising from the exclusion of Black women from consideration in the Civil Rights Movement on the basis of gender, and the second

⁵⁵ Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, & Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), 341.

⁵⁶ Sue-Ellen Case and Elaine Aston, *Feminism and Theatre* (Basingtoke, England: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 75.

⁵⁷ Davis, *Women, Race, & Class*, 341.

⁵⁸ Ania Loomba and Ritty A. Lukose, *South Asian Feminisms: Contemporary Interventions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 17.

wave feminist movement on the basis of race, and building upon the work put forth by the Combahee River Collective, Black feminists have theorized the impact of both race and gender in feminist and racial liberation movements. Indeed, it is Black feminist theorists who often cite the power of difference not as a location for domination by society, but rather a source of social empowerment and reconstruction.⁵⁹ In her seminal work, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” Kimberlé Crenshaw cites the failure of feminism to interrogate racism and its accordant implications: “...resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women.”⁶⁰

The critical intervention in Crenshaw’s work is the concept of intersectionality, which refers to forms of intersecting oppressions. Such intersections remind us that societal oppression and marginalization cannot be reduced to one foundational type, and these oppressions work together to produce unrelenting injustice. Patrica Hill Collins, alongside Sirma Bilge, argue in their work *Intersectionality*, that intersectionality can be drawn up as an analytic tool to grapple with the complex discriminations that women of color face.⁶¹ Using intersectionality as an analytical lens highlights the multiplicity of individual identities and how the varying combinations of such identities differently position each individual. Simply put, “[i]ntersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experience.”⁶² Intersectionality, as a way to engage with difference, is

⁵⁹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1242.

⁶⁰ Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” 1252.

⁶¹ Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Newark: Polity Press, 2016), 14.

⁶² Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 45.

crucial to my dissertation project, for it provides an analytical lens with which to view the constructions of race, gender, disability, and madness as complex embodied experiences.

To simply state that intersectionality and women of color feminisms focus only on difference as it relates to oppression would be an essentialist reading. Indeed, the very notion of intersectionality requires scholars to challenge all socially constructed identity categories used to create oppression and domination. Audre Lorde cites the need to challenge such socially constructed categorizations by not only appropriating “the master’s tools” but also by challenging the social system as a whole in the hopes of generative change, acknowledging that difference can be a catalyst for radical connection. Activating difference as a critical theoretical position, Black feminisms see difference as “a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic.”⁶³ As Patricia Hill-Collins offers in *Black Feminist Thought*, Black feminism is not monolithic, but rather creates alliances across class, and can link experience within the very identity categories of race and gender. This difference, for Black feminist theory and scholars, considers race to be a crucial site for theorizing, acknowledging that race matters for everyone, even those to whom the dominant society privileges by way of their race. Specifically, whiteness, too, must be reconceptualized because of its impact on multiple definitions within the categorizations of race, gender, and class.⁶⁴ These sites of difference, as posited by feminist scholars, are essential to a radical rethinking of the ontological constructions of identity. Challenging the very construction of identity is necessary in order to reformulate the politics of representation that open up new avenues of thought within feminist

⁶³ Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 2.

⁶⁴ Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thorton Dill, “Theorizing Difference from Multiracial Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 22, no. 2 (1996): 330.

theory.⁶⁵ Scholars such as Charlotte Canning and Sue Ellen Case have taken up the work of reading identity through feminist performances and representations of women on stage through an intersectional analytic lens and Patricia Hill-Collins takes up similar scholarship vis a vis the controlling images of Black womanhood that dominate the media. These controlling images, which use stereotypes of Black women to make “racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be normal, natural, and inevitable parts of everyday life,” situate them as constantly othered and oppressed.⁶⁶

Intersectionality, as an analytical framework, often finds itself a welcome addition into fields that already see theory and practice as interconnected, and theatre and performance studies is no exception. It may be no surprise, then, that many Black feminist scholars are concerned with representations in art and popular media, as:

[t]here is a direct and abiding connection between the maintenance of white supremacist patriarchy in this society and the institutionalization via mass media of specific images, representations of race, of blackness that support and maintain the oppression, exploitation, and overall domination of all black people.⁶⁷

My project explores musical theatre as one such tool to interrogate these representations and complicate them with the ideologies presented in Black feminism.

Chapter Structure and Summary

Thus far, this introduction has outlined the existing literature and I’ve identified gaps in knowledge that my project will fill. To fill these gaps in knowledge, I’ve written three chapters which each contain one case study that illustrates how madness operates in the contemporary

⁶⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 43.

⁶⁶ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 69.

⁶⁷ bell hooks, *Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 17.

American musical. In chapter one, “(Un)Marked Madness,” I explore the 1997 musical *Violet*. The musical tells the story of a woman whose debilitating facial scar impedes her daily life and mental health. The scar itself, however, is not present and the actress portraying the titular character has no apparent physical deformities. In this chapter, I explore the narrative consequences of that decision, and I argue that by foregoing a physical disability, the musical positions Violet as a mad woman whose impairment is psychological. The musical, set in the segregated south, similarly positions disability and race as analogous isolating experiences—a notion I take up and upend given the historical discrepancies between how disabled women and people of color were and still are treated. I similarly interrogate industry practices of ableist conforming and race conscious casting as it occurs in this musical to further interrogate popular comparisons between disability and race. *Violet* is the earliest of my case studies and the first musical to be produced that centers disability and madness after the passage of the ADA. Throughout the chapter, I use *Violet* to illuminate gaps in the ADA’s language about madness and argue that *Violet* falls into a categorization of musical theatre that I term the *madness musical*. Madness musicals use madness as a narrative structure to communicate meaning about the character that ultimately illuminates society’s relationship with mad people. Though *Violet* is just one early example of this, my chapter traces a sociocultural response to the ADA through the lens of musical theatre.

In the second chapter “Madness Made Manifest,” I dig deeper into the intersections of race and madness through *Jane Eyre the Musical*. There is an inherent tension in the musical that I explore given that Bertha Mason, a mad biracial woman locked away in the attic of Edward Rochester’s mansion, is canonically understood to be mixed race, yet the creators of the theatrical work cast her as a white woman. This is one example of how the musical goes to great

lengths to disavow Bertha of her own personhood, and I provide close readings of the text, music, and design elements that further support such dehumanization. In so doing, I uncover how the aesthetic architecture of the piece highlights madness as a central plot point that follows a long genealogy of pinning women of color as excessive, troublesome, and dangerous beings, generally and to the benefit of white femininity. Complete with interviews from the original creative team, this chapter focuses on how specific artistic decisions make meaning in ways that are consequential to the narrative and presuppose racist and sexist ideologies about mad women.

In “Mad Mourning Mothers,” I explore how mad femininity and maternity are used to engage eugenic lines of thinking that suppose madness is a genetically inherited trait. In this chapter, I focus on Diana Goodman, the matriarch at the center of the story, and her relationship with her daughter who, as the narrative suggests, is all but guaranteed to become mad just like her mom. The musical does so by literally staging Diana’s mad hallucinations, designing the set to reify her overbearing presence, and positioning her as a deviant being who dares to challenge a patriarchal structure designed to keep her oppressed under the purview of men. In essence, the musical engages in what, on the surface, appears to be a progressive conversation about the state of mad women in a twenty-first century United States, but instead produces a reductive narrative that is in line with eugenic ideologies about supposed unavoidable genetic contamination.

In closing this project, I turn to my experience as a theatre practitioner and arts administrator to think differently about how madness in theatre can be represented. I offer a brief practical policy manifesto before formally concluding my findings. Throughout the body chapters, I model a mixture of theory and practice to activate mad dramaturgy and highlight its use in the American musical. I offer this manifesto to think about how the producing structures of American theatre often reify these reductive tellings of mad existence. Acknowledging that all

my case studies center on mad women, I've offered a short Coda as well, wherein I touch briefly on musicals that center on mad men and how my formulation of mad dramaturgy might serve an interrogation of musicals. It's a relatively practical conclusion to a theoretical project, in a sense, in that it is both a blueprint for what could be a future workshop on activating mad dramaturgy in the rehearsal and production process and an overview of how practice and theory necessarily operate alongside one another. The use of the word Coda to describe my final section is intentional. I view this section as a Coda, much as the term exists in music, because it signals a place I hope to return to when re-examining this project after my graduate studies have concluded.

Conclusion

The American musical has long been a site of cultural production that responds to the country's most pressing sociocultural and sociopolitical happenings. An explicit interrogation about how madness fits into these considerations is long overdue. As such, my project fills a gap in existing research by identifying how madness has historically been portrayed, how it falls in line or challenges societal expectations of madness, and how madness is literally staged. By exploring three musicals in particular, this dissertation illuminates how the aesthetic architecture of the American musical responds to and makes meaning about madness in the United States, specifically as it intersects with race and gender. I utilize my knowledge in the practice of dramaturgy to name mad dramaturgy as a theoretical site to explore how such musicals, viewed through an intersectional lens that includes disability and madness, operate as prime modes of meaning making in a genre that is uniquely American.

Chapter 1: (Un)Marked Madness in *Violet*

In the back corner of a bus station in Tennessee, three travelers play a card game to pass the time. Gathered around a silver diner table, their movements are marked by the sound of their cotton clothing rubbing against the vinyl upholstery. Violet, a young woman with auburn hair is dressed in a loose, neutral dress, wrapped in a cardigan. She is keeping pace in the card game with the young men who accompany her. Violet is conventionally attractive: thin, tall, and white with movements quick and smooth like a dancer. Both Monty and Flick, her male compatriots, are similarly trim and fit. Dressed in khaki military service uniforms from the 1960's, they are boisterous and playful. Monty's jawline protrudes, well-defined, under his white skin. His brown coiffed hair is complemented by his late-in-the-day five o'clock shadow. Flick, clean-shaven with hair trimmed close to the scalp, looks on with warm brown eyes. His thick expressive eyebrows stand out against his smooth, even, Black skin.



Joshua Henry as Flick (l), Sutton Foster as Violet (c), and Colin Donnell (r) as Monty in Roundabout Theatre Company's 2014 production of *Violet*.

This tableau, first introduced in the second scene of Jeanine Tesori and Brian Crawley's 1997 musical *Violet* is variously restaged throughout the show. *Violet*, set in the effectively still-segregated US South in the height of the civil rights era, tells the story of a physically disfigured woman who sets out on a cross-country bus trip in search of a televangelist whom she believes will be able to cure her facial difference. Ultimately, and potentially expectantly, *Violet* is not cured by the televangelist, and must contend with the finality of her disability. I analyze *Violet* because the show explicitly centers around a physical disability while highlighting the perceived hysterical lengths a woman will go to rid herself of her physical marker of difference.

On the surface, *Violet* is a musical about the fatefully intersecting journey of three people seeking purpose and belonging. The production photo above might similarly have the audience consider that the musical is simply about different groups of people finding community amongst one another. The show does center around themes of both learning to live with difference and to live across differences amongst various populations. Throughout the musical, Violet's struggle to overcome her facial disfigurement sends her on a journey of self-acceptance narratively operating in tandem to Flick's. Flick, only recently able to serve in the armed forces alongside his white colleague Monty, navigates the intense racism he faces as he travels through the Southern US. What lies underneath these themes, however, is a much more complicated representation of disability, race, madness, and gender. The musical relies on notions of disability and race as analogous, socially isolating experiences. However, the image above represents the paradox of the dramaturgical equivalence between disability and race as demonstrated in the show: the debilitating facial scar that impacts Violet—the central motor of the musical's narrative action—is not physically represented, while Flick's race is equally essential to the story and is visibly salient. Tracing out these intersectional dynamics can tell us

about how these multifaceted oppressions work in a post-Americans with Disabilities Act United States.

In this chapter, I analyze the decision to not manifest Violet's scar as dramaturgically significant, and as a decision that sheds light on how race and disability structure American musicals in the wake of the ADA. I contend that the invisibilization of Violet's scar can construct her disability as a psychological barrier to overcome, rather than a physical impediment. In the musical, disability is discursively constructed as a form of female hysteria or *madness*. Put simply, I see a paradox in *Violet*'s construction in that it uses disability as a frame to analyze Civil Rights Era race relations without requiring disability to be staged as real or consequential in the same way as race. This paradox perpetuates harm by erasing the nuanced lived realities of both disability and race and undercuts the desired thematic harmony between them as equivalent experiences. It reveals the menace of comparison. Both the disability rights and the civil rights movements were built upon coalitional frameworks for mobilization. By situating race and disability as comparative (and not coalitional or intersectional) experiences, the musical highlights how white supremacy and ableism structure musical theatre. In *Violet*, both disability and race are obstacles to be overcome, situating them as less desirable lived realities— notions that reify racist and ableist structures in society writ large.

Originally premiering in 1997, seven short years after the passage of the ADA, I view *Violet* as one of the first *madness musicals*—a term I use to define shows wherein madness is dramaturgically consequential. By centering madness as dramaturgically significant, I mean that madness has a central narrative thrust that actively informs all other elements that comprise musical theatre: song, dance, text, music, design, etc. In essence, they engage a mad dramaturgical framework. Though disabled people had received some legal protections prior to

the passage of the ADA, it was not until 1990 that the ADA gave disabled people civil rights, thereby recognizing them (theoretically) as equal under the law, and deserving of protections.⁶⁸ By naming madness musicals in relation to the ADA, I'm not drawing a causal link, but rather am pointing toward an epistemic shift that signifies a movement in social understandings of disability and madness.

I take *Violet* as a case study to explore how madness, disability, and race work narratively to situate difference as a hysterical proposition in a world that prizes normativity. Unpacking *Violet* reveals how notions of femininity, madness, and blackness play out after the passage of a document (the ADA) that does not explicitly address these intersections with disability, but as I argue, deeply impacts them all. Following this, I activate my analysis of *Violet* to consider how it demonstrates a political incoherence that lacks an intersectional analysis of race, gender, and disability, yet relies upon these identifiers to signal insurmountable difference.

In naming the madness musical, I use musical theatre, and specifically *Violet*, as a lens to view how the ADA fails to offer full consideration or legal protection for madness in the way it does for physical disability. In other words, *Violet* enables us to think about instead how madness is conceptualized in a world where disability is a legally protected identity category. And, because so much of *Violet*'s narrative is intertwined with considerations of race, we can pose important questions about what it means that the ADA's structure and format is built upon the framework of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Indeed, Titles I, II, and III of the ADA parallel language and structure outlined in the Civil Rights Act.⁶⁹ I explore *Violet*'s dramaturgical deployment of disability, madness, and race to make an argument for how the ADA ushered in

⁶⁸ Department of Justice, *The Americans with Disabilities Act*.

⁶⁹ Robert D. Dinerstein, "The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990: Progeny of the Civil Rights Act of 1964," *Human Rights* 31, no. 3 (2004): 10.

an era of thinking about disability and race alongside one another, rather than intersectionally. By looking at the ADA through the lens of musical theatre, it ultimately allows me to think about and question the ideologies of representation, including the practices of casting, in the American musical and *Violet*, specifically. I utilize my framework of mad dramaturgy throughout to investigate *Violet* because it articulates that madness is represented on stage within different aesthetic architectures including design, direction, casting, text, and movement. In this chapter, I center mad dramaturgy in my analytical framework because it provides the foundation for me to question the function of madness in *Violet*. Throughout, it serves as both a methodological site of inquiry and an analytic tool to explore how *Violet* is an early example of the madness musical.

What is the Madness Musical?

The madness musical is a categorization of musical theatre that I defined to identify musicals that use madness as an operative dramaturgical construct as opposed to strictly a stereotype to identify a character's moral misgivings. They are musicals that employ mad dramaturgy. Mad dramaturgy understands that representations of madness are presented on stage with different aesthetic architectures including text, design, sound, dance, and direction. This analytical framework is helpful when taken in tandem with how disability has been utilized in narratives throughout time.

Disability has historically served as a marker of immorality and deviancy, as scholars David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder have made clear through their theory of narrative prosthesis. Narrative prosthesis refers to both the prevalence of disability representation and the myriad meanings ascribed to it.⁷⁰ Mitchell and Snyder's analysis lives primarily within literary

⁷⁰ Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, 4.

studies, though they also investigate how dramatic literature serves up disability as a repressed deviation from cultural imperatives of normativity, with disabled populations suffering the consequences of representational association with deviance and recalcitrant corporeal difference.⁷¹ In essence, the theory of narrative prosthesis highlights how disability has been variously used to prop up narratives, using it as a marker for deviancy and immorality. From Ophelia's death on account of her mad state in *Hamlet*, to the "crazy" townspeople in *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964), American musical theatre often similarly follows in the tropes that reify discriminatory stereotypes of mad and disabled people.

Though it may seem as though I'm conflating disability and madness as interchangeable lines of study, I'm compelled here to briefly detail prevailing ideologies in disability studies and how I consider madness in tandem. The inherent tension between these two fields underlies the narrative tension in *Violet*. Disability studies is an interdisciplinary field dating from the mid-1980s that invites scholars to think about disability not as an isolated, individual medical pathology but instead as a key defining social category on a par with race, class, and gender.⁷² Pushing up against the medical model of disability, the field does not treat disability as disease, simply hoping to cure it, but rather it acknowledges that disabled people positively contribute values to society, though they face unique states of social oppression.⁷³ The field largely situates disablement in physical difference, with one of its key assumptions being that "there is no neutral or objective position from which to regard the human body and its differences."⁷⁴ This positioning of disability studies dovetails into mad studies, whose preoccupation is less with the

⁷¹ Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 9.

⁷² Catherine J. Kudlick, "Disability History: Why We Need Another 'Other,'" *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 3 (June 1, 2003): 763–93, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/108.3.763>.

⁷³ Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 4.

⁷⁴ Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, *Keywords for Disability Studies*, 27.

physical representation of difference and more so the psychosomatic tension that exists beyond notions of normativity.⁷⁵

Mad studies, as a discipline, seeks to challenge dominant understandings of ‘mental illness,’ rejecting the notion that the medical model of psychiatry is an accurate interpretation of human mental and emotional states. It provides an apt foundation for this work as it recognizes that “[o]n the one hand, madness is a floating signifier and dynamic social construction that evades stable definition. On the other hand, or maybe in the same hand, madness is a lived reality that demands sustained attention.”⁷⁶ I define madness here as any cognitive difference from the societally prescribed norm that imbues possibility, both liberatory and restrictive. Madness, in my formulation, operates within and against the historical notions of hysteria that worked to punish women and people of color for behaving in ways that challenged the patriarchal social order.⁷⁷ As mad studies scholar LaMarr Jurelle Bruce cites, “[m]ad methodology seeks, follows, and rides the unruly movements of madness. It reads and hears *idioms of madness*: those purported rants, raves, rambles, outbursts, mumbles, stammers, slurs, gibberish sounds and unseemly silences that defy the grammars of Reason.”⁷⁸ I build upon and work from a mad methodology by attending to the dramaturgical consequences of idioms of madness as they materialize on stage. Essentially, I add to the mad studies discourse by analyzing the material staging of madness. I do this work because, unlike disability studies, mad studies focuses less on physical impairment and more on the invisible world of cognitive impairment. However, the

⁷⁵ Peter Beresford, “‘Mad’, Mad Studies and Advancing Inclusive Resistance,” *Disability & Society* 35, no. 8 (September 13, 2020): 1337–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2019.1692168>.

⁷⁶ La Marr Jurelle Bruce, *How to Go Mad Without Losing Your Mind: Madness and Black Radical Creativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 6.

⁷⁷ Sabine Arnaud, *On Hysteria: The Invention of a Medical Category Between 1670 and 1820* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 11.

⁷⁸ Bruce, *How to Go Mad Without Losing Your Mind*, 9.

genre of musical theatre demands relentless embodiment, requiring madness to be materialized because the structure of theatrical action in performance requires dramatic action to be shown. Thus, musicals present a privileged place for analyzing madness because it materializes it in specific ways that reveal ideologies of madness, both implicit and explicit.

Though both disability studies and mad studies attune to difference from the socially prescribed normate, mad studies folds in considerations of cognitive difference as a site for political potentiality. And, while disability studies offers us a way to consider Violet's disfigurement as a non-normative embodied difference, it does not fully account for the ways in which madness complicates (and complements) Violet's lived experience on account of her disability.⁷⁹ What I'm arguing is that, when excavating further down into the theoretical bedrock, madness, coupled with the narrative position the writers place Violet in by not showing her disability, require a more critical eye toward madness' possibilities. By understanding the precarious relationship between disability and madness in the musical this work illuminates how disability and madness function (or don't) in the US.

I define these fields here, including my formulation of the madness musical, to interrogate it as a narrative structure constitutive of the genre, and analyze its application to *Violet*. Madness musicals use madness to advance the narrative, whether that is in the text or the mise en scene. In citing mise en scene as a site of exploration for representations of madness, I call upon dramaturgy as both a methodological site of inquiry and an analytical tool, since

⁷⁹ Studies have quantified the impact of disability on mental health, often highlighting that people with disabilities are more likely than others to experience financial hardship, social stigma, and low social support, which have generally been linked with poor mental health outcomes. Such studies include "The Mental Health of Young People with Disabilities" in *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* (Honey, et.al., 2009), "Mental Health Following Acquisition of Disability in Adulthood" in *PLoS ONE* (Kavanagh, et.al., 2015), "Social Relationships, Mental Health and Wellbeing in Physical Disability: A Systemic Review" in *BMC Public Health* (Tough, et.al., 2017), and "Mental Health Trajectories in Disability" in *Disability and Health Journal* (Kariuki, et.al., 2011).

“musical theater cannot be understood unless the sum of its various parts...are examined.”⁸⁰ As such, the madness musical is a concept and I use it to analyze how madness is conceived, materialized, and represented in performance. Dramaturgy is many things, chief among them is a way to analyze text. The term dramaturgy, largely credited to German dramatist and art critic Gotthold Ephraim Lessing from his late 18th century work, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (*Hamburg Dramaturgy*), loosely offers that dramaturgy is the study of dramatic composition and the representation of the main elements of drama on the stage.⁸¹ This short and vague definition opens up considerations of analysis that fall beyond the text, as many scholars today offer in their own work that theorizes dramaturgy.⁸² Importantly, though, dramaturgy encompasses elements of theatre beyond the text that work to imbue narrative meaning. Often, this includes the aesthetic structure of the musical as brought to life through design, choreography, staging, and music. These elements, whether audience members realize it or not, make meaning within the production, and thus audience reception. If dramaturgy can be defined as dramatic composition, then I must consider all pieces of production that compose meaning on stage—utilizing madness as a narrative and material structuring technique is an example of one such element.

Other scholars have similarly thought about critical difference as structuring narrative elements in theatre. A dramaturgical framework viewed through the lens of embodied difference—gender, race, ability, and body size among them—changes the narrative import of

⁸⁰ Judith Sebesta and Jessica Sternfeld, “‘I’ll Cover You’: An Interdisciplinary Duet on *RENT* and Collaborative Musical Theater Historiography,” in *Theater Historiography: Critical Interventions*, ed. Henry Bial and Scott Magelssen (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 270.

⁸¹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, trans. Victor Lange (New York: Dover Publications, 1962).

⁸² See: *The Art of Dramaturgy* by Anne Cattaneo (2021), *The Art of Active Dramaturgy* by Lenora Inez Brown (2010), and *The Process of Dramaturgy: A Handbook* by Scott R. Irelan, Anne Fletcher, and Julie Felise Dubiner (2010).

differences contained therein, as I argue happens with madness in *Violet*. Carrie Sandahl highlights that a dramaturgical framework informed by disability doesn't necessarily reject the metaphorical narrative use of disability altogether, but that it could create fresh metaphors that are more closely aligned with the lived reality of disabled people.⁸³ A feminist dramaturgical framework can help create a gendered gaze which may suggest textual and theatrical opportunities for expressions of collective feminist ideology and the ever-shifting organization of relationships within it.⁸⁴ Informed by the unique experiences of people of color, a racially informed dramaturgical practice may "see the theater industry as a key cultural site for reproduction of race, performing visions of possibility alongside reinscriptions of hegemonic ideologies, making and unmaking structural hierarchies."⁸⁵ In theory, these different approaches can establish new models of theatre that will lead to more diversity in modes of storytelling, as well as interrogating whose stories are told, including which bodies are cast to tell those stories—a central critique in Jennifer-Scott Mobley's formulation of Fat Dramaturgy and one I take up in my own analysis of *Violet*.⁸⁶ Though other scholars have considered how various identity categories have informed the narrative structure of theatre, none have done so with madness. In essence, this chapter fills that gap and shows how madness is a central narrative and subsequently materialized tool in musicals that has been heretofore overlooked.

⁸³ Carrie Sandahl, "Why Disability Identity Matters: From Dramaturgy to Casting in John Belluso's *Pyretown*," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 28, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2008): 225–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930701754481>.

⁸⁴ Laura Hope and Philippa Kelly, "Feminist Dramaturgy: Notes from No-(Wo)Man's Land," *Theatre Topics* 24, no. 3 (2014): 225–37, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tt.2014.0033>.

⁸⁵ Dorinne K. Kondo, *Worldmaking: Race, Performance, and the Work of Creativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 12.

⁸⁶ Jennifer-Scott Mobley, "Toward a Fat Dramaturgy: Activism, Theory, Practice," *Fat Studies* 8, no. 3 (September 2, 2019): 213–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21604851.2019.1558710>.

Lady in the Dark (1941) is an interesting case study to consider here in that the entire narrative centers around the main character's cognitive difference. On the surface it seems as though it would be an early example of the madness musical, however, the musical isn't structured by the action of madness. Rather, the musical follows a narrative structure informed by a medical model of psychoanalytic progression that pathologizes madness in search of a cure. The musical highlights a medical model which reveals an imbrication of sexism, that ultimately results in Liza, the main character, finding her "cure" in a heterosexual romantic relationship. By examining *Lady in the Dark* I highlight how differently madness was previously used as a structuring narrative element to draw conclusions about its use in *Violet*.

Lady in the Dark with music by Kurt Weill, lyrics by Ira Gershwin, and book by Moss Hart tells the story of Liza Elliott, the unhappy female editor of a fictional fashion magazine who undergoes psychoanalysis. Much of the musical takes place directly in the office of Dr. Brooks', Liza's psychologist, as he administers care for her through her intense panic attacks. Uniquely structured like a play with music as opposed to an integrated book, the arresting score arrives in extended interludes that dramatize Liza's dreams. Ultimately, it is the memory of a haunting childhood song that she has been unable to recall that sets Liza free. Though the musical narratively discusses Liza's madness, it is only used as a prop to create an interesting scenario for a traditional romantic storyline which ends in marriage, as so many storylines often do in musical theatre.⁸⁷ Liza's madness is interchangeable with any other physical or cognitive difference because they would similarly furnish the 'from broken to healed' progress she exhibits. Further, it is a clinical ailment that is only "cured" through finding a romantic male life partner.

⁸⁷ See: Rodger and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*, Frank Loesser's *Guys and Dolls*, and Cole Porter's *Anything Goes*, among many others as examples of musical theatre that end in marriages.

In *Lady in the Dark*, the narrative throughline is organized more around Liza's quest for romantic fulfillment and less about her struggle to work through her diagnosed mental illnesses, as musical theatre scholars Raymond Knapp and Zelda Knapp highlight:

Despite the ways that *Lady in the Dark* challenges the genre—in its unconventional deployment of music, its serious engagement with psychoanalysis, its depiction of a strong woman as a business executive—it remains at heart utterly conventional, not least in how it builds gender-based 'problems' into its main characters, ready to be resolved through the 'marriage trope'. Although Liza's problems connect to unresolved issues with her parents, the problems that matter to the show qua musical centre on her capacity for heterosexual romance.⁸⁸

As Knapp and Knapp make clear, Liza's relationship to her madness is always in service to the narrative plot that leads to her own romantic fulfillment. Many of the aesthetic choices of the musical work to reify Liza as a woman whose attractiveness wanes on account of her madness, only fully becoming a desirable woman to the traditionally defined masculine suitor when her cognitive state is righted according to medical diagnosis.

For much of the early portion of the musical, Liza is reclined on a chaise in Dr. Brooks' office—an oft-seen tableau that has marked psychoanalytical treatment in popular culture for decades. When she is reclined in Dr. Brooks' office, she is plainly dressed, often in neutral hues to designate her as a serious businesswoman. Accompanied by warm light washes, she has simple and subtle accessories. Liza is not “too much” in terms of appearance, though she is “too much” in almost every other aspect: she is a successful businesswoman whose occupation makes her too masculine; she is a mad woman whose treatment suggests she is excessive in psychosomatic ways that are similarly socially unacceptable. These choices use disability and

⁸⁸ Raymond Knapp and Zelda Knapp, “Musicals and the Envoicing of Mental Illness and Madness: From *Lady in the Dark* to *Man of La Mancha* (and Beyond),” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies* 4, no. 2 (2019): 215.

madness as narrative prosthesis to weaponize misogyny and sexism to encourage Liza to conform to patriarchal expectations of femininity.



Victoria Clark as Liza Elliott in the MasterVoices production of *Lady in the Dark*; New York City Center Encores!, 2019. Photo by Mike Gerard.

As Liza, dressed primly and without makeup, stretches out on Dr. Brooks' couch in an opening scene, she hears the melody of a children's song ("My Ship") that has been haunting her. Suddenly, we are swept up in what appears to be Liza's fever dream—or "Glamor Dream" as is posited in the script—complete with her office mates dressed in tuxedos fawning upon her. The dream progresses and Liza imagines herself as a celebrity pushing away paparazzi and even receiving an official US stamp in her likeness.

Liza's dream sequences serve as a psychological escape from reality and disconnect her lived experience from the madness she psychosomatically experiences. Liza is distant from her madness on stage in that the literal staging of her mental state takes on a fantastical presence so elaborately crafted that it is unmistakably implausible. Madness here serves as an excuse for a musical number, propping up the structure of the play, but not the narrative action that informs Liza's journey. This makes Liza's madness feel like a removable portion of her existence. Liza's mad state is something that afflicts her and informs her dream sequences but has little

consequence in her everyday life. Though she suffers from panic attacks, the musical takes great care to suggest that she is still a competent and efficient magazine editor, despite her mental state. As such, the aesthetic architecture of the musical, as rendered through costume and lighting, goes to great lengths to visually differentiate Liza “the person” from Liza “the mad woman.” There are almost two musicals happening at once and the narrative elements featured in each support Liza’s distance from her own madness. That is to say, the narrative structure of madness that renders Liza’s dream sequences so lavish, are not present in and are distinctly different from those in Liza’s “everyday” life. Thus, *Lady in the Dark* is not a madness musical, so much as it is a psychoanalysis musical that uses madness as a prop to move Liza toward the heterosexual coupling that frequently concludes musical theatre. This does not fit into the framing of the madness musical because, in opposition to my construction of the term, madness in *Lady in the Dark* serves as a plot point for Liza to gain a romantic partner, rather than an organizing principle for Liza’s existence on stage.

Violet, in contrast, uses Violet’s disability (and accordant madness as a result) to structure the narrative action of the play: it motivates what she does to get what she wants, and the musical reflects that in the cohesive structure of the show itself. By that, I mean that *Violet* uses mad dramaturgy in its storytelling, as I’ll lay out in the next section. *Violet* organizes the entire structure of the musical around disability, signaling that it permeates everything about the character, including, and most importantly, the actions the character takes.

Violet and Dramaturgical Materialization Through Absence

I take *Violet* as my primary case study here, and my first example of a madness musical. I want to be clear that I am not suggesting that *Violet* is the first musical to center madness but that it is a case study for the discursive term I defined to highlight a cultural shift. Based on Doris

Betts' 1969 novel *The Ugliest Pilgrim*, the musical was developed over the course of three years, with an initial reading at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center—the country's "preeminent organization dedicated to development of new works and new voices for the stage."⁸⁹

I start my study by focusing specifically on Violet's scar that allegedly marks her disfigurement and thus, disability. In the original 1997 production and the 2014 Broadway revival starring Sutton Foster, the titular character exhibits no external signs of disfigurement. There is no visible scar or mark on her face where she often suggests there is one. I'm interested in interrogating both Violet's corporeal existence and her mad state because investigating the social causes and construction of mad identity while overlooking the material conditions of the body has limited political scope.⁹⁰ Such a multimodal analysis is critical to understanding how disability and madness inform one another and the social constructions that impact Violet's reception as a mad woman.

As a woman with a physical difference, Violet is allegedly marked by her disability first and foremost. The attributes applied to her therein are a result of the social and historical structures that mark physical difference as decidedly non-normative. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson posits, this notion of disability mirrors and operates in tandem with femininity: "[i]f the male gaze makes the normative female a sexual spectacle, then the state sculpts the disabled subject into a grotesque spectacle. The stare is the gaze intensified, framing her body as an icon of deviance."⁹¹ I take up Garland-Thomson's theorizing here and activate it in my analysis because the narrative often positions Violet as a woman whose deviant body precludes her from

⁸⁹ "About," Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, accessed December 27, 2022, <https://www.theoneill.org/about>.

⁹⁰ Hall, *Feminist Disability Studies*, 17.

⁹¹ Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 26.

romantic consideration. This operates in tension with casting decisions that place traditionally attractive able-bodied women in the starring role.

In this case study, I read the dramaturgical choice to exclude Violet's disfigurement as an indictment toward her mad state, forcing me to theoretically activate the hazy boundaries between disability and madness in the interest of narrative clarity. One thing is clear, though, which is that Violet's disfigurement is an important part of her story even if it isn't physically represented, as it is integral to the description of her character in the opening of the libretto: "VIOLET— A young North Carolina woman who was scarred in a childhood accident. She is stubborn and prickly, but filled with equal parts hope and obsession that she may heal and be made beautiful. Age: 20-35."⁹² Indeed, Violet exhibits that obsession in the opening number, wherein she makes her way through the bus station wishing for her late mother's spirit to watch over her on her journey to heal her face:

Be an angel mama, help to save me
Make the Lord restore the face you gave me
And I will praise His grace
Rain or shine
When you see a brand new face⁹³

This decision—to not actually represent her disfigurement that impacts her life—is critical to the narrative in that it opens up considerations about her disability as less of a physical barrier and more of a mental one. By not showing Violet's disfigurement, the audience is unable to physically see her disability, thus potentially placing it as a psychological mental struggle that drives Violet's actions. This sets up a tricky narrative needle to theoretically thread: Violet is *narratively* set up as a disabled character but is *dramaturgically* situated as a mad one.

⁹² Brian Crawley and Janine Tesori, *Violet* (New York: Music Theatre International, 2014), 4.

⁹³ Crawley and Tesori, *Violet*, 9.

Violet is obsessed with her physical difference, which the audience does not see, yet consumes her life and leads her down a path seeking miracles from a televangelist—itself a mad notion, indeed. In essence, disability drives the narrative action of *Violet*, but the disability itself is invisibilized and therefore rendered as madness. As such, Violet’s madness drives the musical. The madness is the dramaturgical result of how the piece chooses to handle the issue of disability by ignoring it, which is paradigmatic of the stigma Violet receives and is madness-making. The structure of making madness mirrors the narrative themes surrounding disability and madness. This narrative import is thus represented in the aesthetic architecture of the show using text, song, and design. It is mad dramaturgy in action.

Throughout the script, Violet’s scar is frequently compared to physical disabilities, suggesting that the preacher, through the power of Jesus, can make “a dumb man speak/a lame man run.”⁹⁴ Additionally through context in the script, it is suggested that her scar is so debilitating that “[d]octor’s didn’t help her. Operations didn’t help her.”⁹⁵ By placing Violet’s scar in direct contrast to other physical disabilities that receive social and medical intervention, the writers suggest Violet’s scar fits squarely within the medical model of disability. I want to be clear here that I don’t think for a disability to be rendered “real” that it must be immediately visible to the public. But I do want to highlight the lengths the writers go to in order to situate Violet as physically disabled before ultimately choosing to not show the scar, giving way to considerations about Violet’s very mental state in response.

It is not only the decision to not physically manifest Violet’s scar that dramaturgically situates her as a hysterical being. The ways in which the narrative unfolds about how she

⁹⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

received the scar signals disability's continual intrusion onto Violet's outwardly facing normative experience. The musical itself engages in nonlinear storytelling, a mode that is certainly non-normative according to Western Aristotelian narrative structure.⁹⁶ The relatively forward tracing narrative of the musical—Violet taking a trip to Oklahoma to see the televangelist whom she believes will cure her disfigurement—is interrupted with scenes from Violet's childhood. In these vignettes from Violet's adolescence, the audience learns that both Violet's mother and father have passed away, her father more recently. At certain moments throughout the musical, the vignettes follow some version of the following refrain:

FATHER: (Offstage) Violet, watch out!
*Young Vi straightens, her mouth open wide, terrified by something we can't see. Violet stiffens.*⁹⁷

These sonic intrusions are an ephemeral manifestation of disability into Violet's sense of normalcy. I read the decision to incisively interrupt the stage action aurally as a symbol for the role disability plays in Violet's own life: she was not born disabled, but rather found herself abruptly disfigured on account of a horrific accident. Through these scenes, the events surrounding Violet's scar are centered, but fall just short of fully materializing the moment of the accident. Violet shares that the scar is due to a "wayward hatchet" which lost its blade and struck her in the face. One vignette details the moments directly before the accident, and another the events after, in which the audience sees Violet's father carrying her after having been struck. I read this material exclusion in two ways: for one, it is an effective narrative tool to allow the audience to fill in the pieces of Violet's accident in a way that may be more emotionally jarring than if it were literally staged. And two, it divorces Violet's disfigurement from her embodied

⁹⁶ Aristotle's *Poetics* is not the only benchmark with which to measure dramaturgical truisms, but I highlight here that *Violet*'s narrative tool of vignettes challenges the linear progression of exposition that Aristotle argued as essential for proper storytelling.

⁹⁷ Crawley and Tesori, *Violet*, 7.

reality and raises the possibility that her accident and its accordant consequences are a result of Violet's traumatized hysterical cognitive state and not because her scar is so obtrusive to her everyday life.

From the first moments of the show (and throughout) the audience is never made to narratively question that Violet does, indeed, have a scar, with ensemble characters reacting to it, as a waiter in the bus station does loudly enough for all to hear: "Two things. One, alls we got is chicken. That is some scar! Wanna see mine?"⁹⁸ To be clear, I don't intend to suggest that the musical makes it seem as though Violet is making up her disability, but rather I highlight how the exclusion of manifesting her disability opens the door for her to be read as a mad and hysterical woman overreacting to a disability that is so inconsequential so as to not be displayed at all. This is remarkable because of the great lengths the writers employ to fold her scar into almost every aspect of the show, as is evident in some of Violet's first lyrics: "A battered nose, a pimpled chin/Uneven eyes to take it in."⁹⁹ Of course, this wouldn't be the first time in the American musical where a woman was deemed hysterical in relation to the circumstances that are externally deemed inconsequential while they are life altering for the woman character. Musicals such as *Next to Normal*, *Light in the Piazza* (2005), and *Spring Awakening* (2007) are just a few examples of this phenomenon, but the roster runs deep. The minimizing of Violet's scar participates as a dramaturgical gaslighting, of sorts, which removes the experience of physical disablement rendering it as madness instead. Ultimately, this plays into historical notions of hysteria as a woman's affliction when they fail to meet normative expectations of femininity.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 7.

These narrative practices minimize and collapse the experiences of historically excluded populations, including women, disabled people, and people of color, which is a distinct departure from theories of multiculturalism circulating at the time of the musical's production.

Multiculturalism, in theory, is the way a society chooses to deal with the coexistence of people of different cultures, races and ethnicities. It was a response to the fact that “lopsided representations of American society normalized whiteness by making other racial groups (and by extension cultures invisible).”¹⁰⁰ The term is often used as a descriptive to characterize the fact of diversity in a society, but in what follows, the focus is on multiculturalism as a normative ideal in the context of Western liberal democratic societies. I highlight multiculturalism here because it opens up considerations of how race and disability are shown as similarly isolating social experiences in *Violet*, and it foregrounds conversations about casting practices in the musical I take up in this section.

By not displaying Violet's scar, the musical engages in a ableist conforming casting ethos. By ableist conforming casting, I mean that an able-bodied actor was cast in a role wherein the lived reality of disablement is critical to the character's journey. Taking part in ableist conforming casting reifies societal anxieties around bearing witness to the lived realities of disabled people, as Marianne DiQuattro offers:

In the performing arts, the normal body is inscribed with various positive meanings, in large part because the abnormal or disfigured body has carried negative inscriptions within the narrative itself...audiences can relax [during curtain call], knowing that we are not witnessing the actual pain and struggle of real disabled human being.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Brandi Wilkins Catanese, *The Problem of the Color(Blind): Racial Transgression and the Politics of Black Performance*, 1 online resource. vols., Theater--Theory/Text/Performance (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10621303>, 6.

¹⁰¹ Marianne DiQuattro, “Playing Deaf and Dumb: Disability and the Contemporary Theatre,” in *Discourses on Nations and Identities*, ed. Syrovay Daniel, 1 online resource (IX, 603 pages) vols., Volume 3 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110642018>, 462.

What DiQuattro points out here is directly in line with my own analysis about *Violet* and casting an attractive able-bodied actor: when a production engages in ableist conforming casting audience members don't have to contend with the reality of a disfigured feminine subject if the disability itself is wholly unmaterialized. It saves that audience from confronting their own discomfort or preconceptions about viewing the socially spectacularized disabled subject on stage. As such, the practice of ableist conforming casting in *Violet* brings up questions about not only what the disabled body signifies within the narrative, but also how the absence of an actual disabled body on the stage signifies. *Violet* does so through the absenting of Violet's physical disability, which gives way to consider how it operates as an indictment of her potential mad state.

By focusing on Violet's physical appearance and the manifestation (or lack thereof) of her scar, the writers ignore the narrative consequences which stage Violet as a mad woman. The audience must rely upon Violet and those around her to suggest how disfiguring her scar truly is. At various points in the musical, people shy away from interacting with Violet or impulsively react to her heinous scar outright before they have a chance to adhere to social conventions that deem such behaviors impolite. The ableist conforming approach to the show is undermined by an ensemble that clearly sees and notices Violet's scar, treating her as disabled nonetheless:

BUS DRIVER: Get your tickets ready. This is the Memphis bus, by way of Johnson City, Kingsport, Knoxville, Nashville, and a buncha towns no bigger'n this one. Tickets, please.

The Driver squints at Violet. As she hands him her ticket, she drops a book. Violet is too involved with her bags to get it, so the old lady behind her helpfully picks it up. The Old Lady is on Violet's good side.

OLD LADY: (*Giddly and quickly*) "The Baltimore Catechism." A Catholic, in these parts?

VIOLET: No, ma'am.

OLD LADY: How you read it I don't know, with the margins so full of writing!

VIOLET: (*Snatches the book away*) It was my Mama's.

BUS DRIVER: Move along, m...

Sees the scar and says, involuntarily:

Oooh. Miss.¹⁰²

Because Violet's scar is not displayed on stage, it is unclear to what extent these incidents are truly occurring: is Violet projecting responses to her own personhood that are more extreme than they truly are? Such ambiguity makes it so that the emotional responses Violet has to her scar are "in her head" thus situating her as a mad woman unable to work through her mental anguish on account of her physical difference. This is the tricky narrative threading in action: the audience is left to internally question the mental state of Violet because they are unable to see the extent of her supposedly physically debilitating scar, while the musical restlessly insists it is only her physical disfigurement to which people respond.

In analyzing Violet's physical appearance I'm particularly struck by how productions of the musical choose to position Violet and her accordant womanhood. Notably, it is not only prosthetic makeup she is missing to mark her physical disability, but absent, also, is any cosmetic makeup at all—a marked deviation from the standards of theatrical performance in which actors of all genders often apply makeup to define their basic facial features. I read the exclusion of makeup as an implicit link between disability and narratives of traditional attractiveness— notions that often work to situate white femininity as universal and prized. Of the 2014 Broadway revival, Marylin Stasio writes in *Variety*:

[Lead actress Sutton] Foster doesn't have to wear icky latex makeup because the scar is left to the imagination, but she doesn't get to wear any prettifying makeup, either, and her

¹⁰² Crawley and Tesori, *Violet*, 8.

gorgeous gams are well-hidden in the rag-bag costume supplied by costumer Clint Ramos. That alone signifies deep commitment from a star of her caliber.¹⁰³

Stasio's comments here are a direct indictment of how popular notions of disability in the United States, which are inarguably informed by the ADA, often effectively narratively preclude a woman from both being attractive *and* disabled, as I read in my own analyses here. The evidence seen throughout *Violet*'s own production history supports this: in the two major New York productions, the role of Violet is portrayed by a traditionally attractive white woman. Both Lauren Ward, who helmed the titular role in the inaugural 1997 production, and Sutton Foster, star of the 2014 Broadway show, are tall and thin with long auburn hair and not a physical disfigurement in sight. I read this casting as a reification of society's obsession with white femininity as universally prized. In a role meant for an "ugly" disfigured woman, two traditionally attractive, tall, thin women were cast. This is an ableist conforming casting ethos.

I want to briefly note here that I did attempt to reach multiple members of the production team for both the 1997 Playwrights Horizons production and the 2014 Roundabout Theatre production to no avail. I approached the archivist at Roundabout Theatre Company, Tiffany Nixon, for information on casting decisions and documentation and received the following response: "Casting records are generally considered confidential and are embargoed for 15 years following the run" of the show.¹⁰⁴ As a result, my analysis of the show and its casting practices are built upon viewing archival recordings held at Roundabout Theatre and the New York Public Library, interviews cast and creative team members have given in the press and other outlets, as well as notes provided by the writers in the libretto.

¹⁰³ Marilyn Stasio, "Broadway Review: 'Violet' Starring Sutton Foster - Variety," accessed March 28, 2022, <https://variety.com/2014/legit/reviews/broadway-review-violet-starring-sutton-foster-1201160056/>.

¹⁰⁴ Email with the author, January 3, 2023.



Left photo: Michael Park (l) as Monty and Lauren Ward (r) as Violet in the 1997 production of *Violet*.
 Right photo: Sutton Foster (l) and Annie Golden (r) in Roundabout Theatre Company's 2014 Broadway production of *Violet*.

By casting conventionally attractive women, the show suggests that disabled people are “just like us,” though this decision actually serves to disavow the desexualization of disabled people and amplifies misogynistic undertones that underpin ableism. The audience is to believe that these women are made unattractive through the physical disability they cannot see, but the musical fails short of materializing that, ensuring that white beauty remains intact and on display. The choice to cast the musical in this way precludes Violet from being seen as a woman worthy of romantic intimacy because she is disabled, and as I argue, mad. Though we obviously know that being disabled and attractive are not mutually exclusive, that this trope is reified through musical theatre begs a critical question at the center of this project: how does musical theatre reflect the realities of social language about madness and how does (or does not) musical theatre reify madness in a similar vein?

The narrative decision to not show Violet's scar was a deliberate choice by the writers themselves. In the afterword to the libretto, book writer Brian Crawley points out the logistical theatrical challenges posed by showing Violet's scar. Chief among his concerns are the vignette scenes and the time it would take to apply, remove, and re-apply the scar prosthetic throughout the show to adhere to the reality of having a disfigurement such as Violet's. At no point in their

writings about this decision is it acknowledged that they could have cast an actor with a non-normative facial difference, which is a telling exclusion in a musical that engages in ableist conforming casting that alters the narrative import of disability itself. Secondary, though, is Crawley's consideration of how closely the audience might follow Violet's own mental state after her visit to the televangelist in Oklahoma. After she visits the pastor, and until she is seen by others, Violet truly believes her scar has been healed and that she is "beautiful." In Crawley's words:

[U]sing a cosmetic scar in the piece we've written isn't feasible... Violet believes herself to be healed in Tulsa, in the second act, and isn't disabused of the idea until she sees Monty at Fort Smith. If she wears a scar for the whole act, the audience will be impatient during the entire scene preceding the finale, knowing that whatever she herself might think there is no possibility that she's been healed. But if she's taken off her usual scar temporarily Monty has to come up with a clever way to sneak it back onto her face.¹⁰⁵

This practical concern laid out by the writers does not consider how this decision impacts Violet's womanhood, and by extension, how it positions her as a mad woman.

This dichotomous narrative relationship points to a strained link between disability and madness. Disability is present, but not materially consequential, as Crawley suggests when he states that a scar prosthetic would be too difficult to work with—an argument not dissimilar from oft-repeated refrains in the industry about why disabled performers are cast less often than their able-bodied counterparts. In essence, these choices obfuscate disability (and conflate it with madness) by leaving Violet's physical disability up to the audience's and actors' imaginations and by casting a conventionally attractive and able-bodied woman in the titular role.

In Crawley and Tesori's narrative formulation here, madness becomes an invisible but driving through-line, one that parallels the functions of both ableist conforming and colorblind

¹⁰⁵ Crawley and Tesori, *Violet*, 93.

casting. Colorblind casting is a practice where actors are (in theory) cast without regard to their race. This has historically operated to place Black performers on stage in roles that have traditionally been portrayed by white actors. August Wilson in his seminal speech “The Ground on Which I Stand” highlights how colorblind casting is a poor solution to a deeply harmful systemic problem:

For a black actor to stand on the stage as part of a social milieu that has denied him his gods, his culture, his humanity, his mores, his ideas of himself and the world he lives in is to be in league with a thousand nay-sayers who wish to corrupt the vigor and spirit of his heart...[t]o cast us in the role of mimics is to deny us our own competence...[t]he idea of colorblind casting is the same idea of assimilation that black Americans have been rejecting for the past 380 years.¹⁰⁶

In his essay, Wilson highlights how colorblind casting responds to multiculturalism’s calls for more diversity without being critically attuned to the ways in which such calls might shoehorn Black performers into roles, rather than allowing them space to create their own work that may more closely relate to their lived experiences. More succinctly, Brandi Wilkins Catanese suggests that colorblind casting is “the rough equivalent of affirmative action for the world of performance” that “crudely put, gets underrepresented minorities onstage.”¹⁰⁷ Though disability and race are two distinctly different, yet often intersecting sites of oppression, I see the theories and points made by both Wilson and Catanese as integral to my analysis on *Violet*. The ableist conforming casting ethos I discussed earlier dovetails from the critiques of colorblind casting because they both place actors in roles whose conception of embodied difference is distinctly different from their own.

By engaging in this ableist conforming ethos, the musical disavows Violet’s lived experience of disability and makes it seem inconsequential. It operates in contrast to the color

¹⁰⁶ August Wilson, “The Ground on Which I Stand,” *Callaloo* 20, no. 3 (1997): 498-99.

¹⁰⁷ Catanese, *The Problem of the Color(Blind)*, 10.

conscious casting employed for Flick, the Black soldier, whose path literally and figuratively crosses with Violet's. Color conscious casting, as opposed to the "blind" castings discussed thus far, may, too, put Black performers in roles traditionally held by white performers. But, in color conscious casting such decisions have been made intentionally and with attention paid to how race informs the character within the narrative.

Though my notion of ableist conforming casting is drawn from the practice of colorblind casting, its material effects are slightly different. I see ableist conforming casting operating as the inverse of colorblind casting. Whereas colorblind casting puts bodies of color on stage to increase representation, ableist conforming casting uses able-bodied actors to portray disabled characters. *Violet* is certainly not the only theatrical piece to engage in ableist conforming casting. Indeed, recent Broadway productions of *The Elephant Man*, *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, *Richard III*, and *Wicked* cast able-bodied actors in lead roles where disability greatly informs the narrative. Instead of increasing representation of disabled performers on stage, ableist conforming casting seeks to promote a seemingly progressive pro-disability stance by disavowing and dematerializing disability. This idea of "not seeing disability" mirrors the idea of "not seeing color" that underpins colorblind casting in practice. In essence, ableist conforming casting is a similar, but distinctly different practice that ultimately reifies the artform's preference for able bodied actors, as Siebers succinctly outlines:

...the disabled body is both a spectacle and the occasion for many powerful emotions, and yet the disabled body, despite its obvious theatrical effects, is not viewed as an aesthetic resource for the theater. Rather, it is labeled as an obstacle, an aesthetic disruption, whose presence on the stage grinds to a halt the conceit of theatrical representation.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Tobin Siebers, "In/Visible: Disability on the Stage," in *Body Aesthetics*, ed. Sherri Irvin (Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198716778.003.0009>.

Sieber's notion here points to *why* Violet's scar is not visibly manifested—it would cause distraction in the otherwise pristine mimetic representation that theatre often requires. What I'm interested in is *how* this decision highlights the harm of not representing Violet's disability, which I see as operating in two distinct ways. The first way it is working is through the choice not to show Violet's scar. The second thing at play is the concept of ableist conforming casting, in that disabled people aren't cast in roles because their physical bodies are considered a narrative distraction. I view these as two problematic approaches that are both related to politics of representation that undergird the Americans with Disabilities Act and the theories of multiculturalism that came to be in the 1990s.

Violet was an early adopter of what is now termed color-conscious casting. Color conscious casting serves as a response to colorblind casting in that it takes race as central to informing the character, their journey, and their reception within the work. The practice concretizes the reality that race is interpreted by the audience and impacts the character, even if race is not a central narrative driver of the character's storyline. It acknowledges that “not seeing race” is not possible in an artform that requires embodiment from its performers front and center. So, while *Violet* engages in a ableist conforming casting ethos by giving Violet the space to be distanced from the realities of her disfigurement, the musical's narrative of overcoming difference relies on Flick's blackness as a central narrative arc. As is evidenced from the 1997 casting call listed in *Backstage*, Flick's race is pivotal to his story and subsequent relationship with Violet over her own embodied difference: “Flick: Lead, Male, 20-29. A soldier traveling with his friend Monty. Good naturing, kind, and appealing. Drawn to Violet and connects with

her over their shared feelings of being different; strong actor-singer, baritone/tenor.

Black/African descent.”¹⁰⁹

Thus far, I’ve highlighted how ableist conforming casting enacts a mad dramaturgical framework within *Violet*. However, as I mentioned earlier, the musical goes to great lengths to demonstrate how disability and race are analogous isolating experiences. Yet, the musical doesn’t present a disabled body whereas Flick is cast as a Black man, showing a character on stage who cannot be divorced from his race. As Violet’s story progresses, she makes her cross-country journey, wherein she meets two servicemen: Monty and Flick. They are on their way to Fort Smith, Arkansas where they will be stationed prior to deployment. Both dressed head to toe in khaki service uniforms, it is clear they are members of the military. Monty is a white, fit paratrooper with lush brown hair and a chiseled jaw. Flick, a Black man with shaved hair close to the scalp and a similarly trim physique, welcomes her into the fold, playing card games with her and Monty at a bus stop in Kingsport, Tennessee. Initially, Monty and Flick are taken aback by Violet’s poker skills—a trait she honed on the farm with her father since few people wanted to hang out with her on account of her disfigurement. Both Monty and Flick eventually warm to Violet as a competitor. The three quickly become friends, accompanying one another throughout their respective journeys.

Though Monty and Violet have a friendly energy with one another, I focus on her relationship with Flick, as it traffics in popular conversations about the intersections (or perceived lack of intersection) of race and disability in the United States. Specifically, they reverberate with notions about disability and race as analogical. As Angela Frederick and Dara Shifrer offer in their work on the intersections of race and disability, “the ‘disability is like race’

¹⁰⁹ “Musical: ‘Violet,’” Backstage, accessed January 2, 2023.

analogy became the dominant narrative through which activists and critical scholars understood disability inequality and made claims to civil rights.”¹¹⁰ This results in a disability essentialism of sorts that assumes disability discrimination is a monolithic experience that is divorced from other forms of oppression.¹¹¹ Though more scholarship is being published that addresses the intersection of race and disability as co-constitutive forms of oppression, much of the existent scholarship in the United States has failed to adequately address intersectionality, focusing primarily on single-axis explanations of structural inequity.¹¹² These considerations are activated in *Violet* because of Flick’s position as a Black man when placed against Violet’s unmaterialized experience as disabled woman.

Both (supposedly) marked by physical difference—Flick by the color of his skin in the effectively still segregated Southern United States and Violet by her scar—they create an immediate bond with intense romantic subtext bubbling underneath. As the bus meets its initial terminus in Nashville, Tennessee, Flick brings Monty and Violet to an all-Black boarding house to rest before their new bus routes take them away from each other. After a night of drunken revelry, Flick and Violet almost sleep together before he shies away. Monty, in his stead, ends up in Violet’s bed after reading her mother’s notes written throughout the Catechism book—a sensitive and triggering object for Violet whose preoccupation with her own femininity is tied up in the idea of her own mother’s beauty who had the “choice of any boy in the 5 counties.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Anglea Frederick and Dara Shifrer, “Race and Disability: From Analogy to Intersectionality,” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 5, no. 2 (April 2019): 200–214, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649218783480>, 203.

¹¹¹ Frederick and Shifrer, “Race and Disability,” 203.

¹¹² Subini Ancy Annamma, Beth A. Ferri, and David J. Connor, “Disability Critical Race Theory: Exploring the Intersectional Lineage, Emergence, and Potential Futures of DisCrit in Education,” *Review of Research in Education* 42, no. 1 (March 1, 2018): 47, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X18759041>.

¹¹³ Crawley and Tesori, *Violet*, 28.

I parse out Violet's relationship with both Monty and Flick because it highlights popular discourses within disability studies about its intersections with other sites of embodied difference. When the audience first meets Monty, he's the skeptic to Violet's boundless optimism about the healing powers of the televangelist. He warns her that she shouldn't get her hopes up and that she will never be able to escape her physical disfigurement. Monty's treatment of Violet is always rather surface level, interpolating her disabled body as a discardable item for male consumption. Monty's treatment of Violet lays bare the ways in which disabled women are often situated as fascinating figures due to their disability, but unworthy of long-term intimacy deserving of the nuance and dimension their existence can offer. The interactions between Monty and Violet foreground her eventual connection with Flick. They provide a template for Violet's interactions with men and the relationship between her, her disability, and her femininity. By analyzing Violet's interactions with Monty, it illuminates the decidedly different attitude she exhibits toward Flick and the identities that "other" them in a country still rife with prejudice against them both. I specifically use a feminist disability studies lens to make sense of how Violet's (un)marked body is read in the social context Monty applies.

Flick, upset that Violet slept with Monty because of his feelings for her, admits that Monty only sees her as "a piece of ass, and an easy one at that."¹¹⁴ According to Monty, it is Violet's disability and her accordant self-proclaimed low self-esteem that provides easy access to Violet as a sexual object. The discarding of Violet by Monty as a woman worthy of long-term love and intimacy reifies Violet as a woman undeserving of social consideration because she is disabled. Her (alleged) physical disfigurement precludes her from romantic consideration with Monty—a character who symbolizes white, cis, heteronormative desire—and the ultimate

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 57.

perpetrator of the male gaze that feminist disability scholars like Rosemarie Garland-Thomson and Kim Q. Hall might have us consider. This is undermined, however, by the ableist conforming casting in that both Lauren Ward and Sutton Foster embody a traditional beauty standard that might very well have been desired by Monty in his pursuit of sexual intimacy.

In contrast to Monty, Flick is interested in Violet's personhood beyond her disability, though he is often thwarted as a serious romantic contender because of his race, as he laments in the musical number "Promise Me":

I've been waiting, for a lifetime
For someone simply
To look and see me
The way I see you¹¹⁵

Here Flick yearns for someone who experiences physical difference in a similar vein to him—a reality thwarted through the dichotomy of ableist conforming and color conscious casting employed in the musical. Though, like Violet, the dialogue in the show is relentless in reminding us about Flick's plight as a Black man traveling through a geographical area that has largely been hesitant to welcome anyone of color among their ranks. Flick's race is so obtrusive to the people he encounters on his journey through the Southern US that they comment on the "inappropriateness" of being seen with a white woman, as a mechanic in Memphis highlights:

MECHANIC: Hey boy. What do all them stripes make you, a buck sergeant? A staff sergeant? What.

FLICK: We don't want no trouble mister.

MECHANIC: Because they don't make you jack shit in Tennessee.

FLICK: Mister if you wanna walk outta here without help you better start walking right now.

MECHANIC: Rufus, you believe this boy?

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 62.

Rufus appears, cleaning his fingernails with his knife.

RUFUS: He's all duded up, ain't he.

MECHANIC: I guess he figures, long as he's got the uniform, he's entitled to one of our girls, right? No matter what she looks like.¹¹⁶

Unlike Violet's disability, which is mentioned often in dialogue but ultimately unmaterialized on stage, Flick cannot avoid neither the narrative discussion nor embodied reality of his race. The narrative insistence that disability and race are similarly isolating experiences foregrounds the eventual romantic connection between Flick and Violet, though not until after Violet reveals the differences in their social realities.

Throughout the show, both Monty and Flick try to temper Violet's expectations of the pastor's alleged miracle working capabilities in Oklahoma. While she believes that she will be healed based on what she's seen on TV, Monty and Flick are less convinced. Flick, in a moment of exasperation, tries to show Violet how far-fetched a cure to her scar would be, and likens it to someone being able to change their race:

VIOLET: Let the Lord give *me* a cough, so long as I'm healed of my looks while I'm still young enough to—

Just when he was getting his laughter under control, Flick starts off again.
I don't know what you think is so funny.

MONTY: We don't think it's funny.

VIOLET: How come you're both laughing at me then?

MONTY: I'm not laughing.

FLICK: Listen. I'll take on that scar, and a game leg besides, if your Preacher makes me a warrant officer.

Flick winks. Both Monty and Flick start to laugh at the idea.

VIOLET: Don't be ridiculous.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 41-42.

FLICK: Okay. How 'bout we just swap faces clean and simple.

VIOLET: But what do I want with colored skin? No offense, but I want people to think that I'm pretty.

But Flick is offended, and he gets up and goes to the back to the bus bathroom.
Well, you said you'd swap it off! What's wrong if I don't want it any more'n you?¹¹⁷

Here *Violet* conflates disability stigma and blackness as both outside the bounds of "pretty." At the same time, Flick implies that disability and whiteness are preferable to blackness, and Violet's comment ultimately degrades both disability and race. Yet only one of these characters is cast in a way that allows for the material realities to be altered. Violet, as portrayed by an able-bodied actress, gets to literally sidestep the materialization of disability (though it produces Violet's madness in the process) while Flick does not. Put simply, the show holds true to the nuances of race as depicted in the story and reifies that by casting an actor who aligns with Flick's intended race. In contrast, however, the show does not do the same for Violet, casting able-bodied, traditionally attractive white women as a disfigured character. This is a tension that results in mixed messages about the lived realities of embodied difference.

Violet's rejection of Flick's blackness highlights the friction between her own disability and madness. Her belief that a cure for her scar will be found in the healing hands of a televangelist concretizes the extent of her mad state at the expense of a corporeal reality laid bare in front of her. Violet, when confronted by Flick about the outsize reality of the pastor's healing powers still chooses to believe. She is willing to go to extreme (perhaps even hysterical) lengths to rid herself of a disability the audience cannot even see. This is made even more salient by the casting in the show. If Violet were portrayed by an actor with a facial disfigurement, then perhaps her racist remark could be viewed in the eyes of the audience as a woman coping with

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 23-24.

the inevitable confines of her disability. In that case, her madness would potentially become less about trying to figure out if her disability is real or not and more about her living through the oppression based on the stigma of her disfigurement. Her comments would certainly still indicate the overt racism she states here, but the physical marker of difference that the narrative suggests is what links Violet and Flick in their journeys would be tangible instead of imagined. This dichotomy reveals how the logic of casting an able-bodied actress and not displaying the accordant scar, effectively employing ableist conforming casting, undercuts the race conscious casting implemented in the show.

The absencing of physical disability and delegitimizing Violet's hysteria not only reifies Violet's madness but gives way to considerations of racial madness that Flick experiences in its wake. Following Harry Elam's writing on the term, racial madness is a maddening experience caused by the strict demarcations and maddening circumstances people of color experience: their inclusion and exclusion, and the ruptures and loss societal constructions of race supply.¹¹⁸ These often result from symbolic or real confrontations with white power structures, which Flick most certainly runs into time and time again.¹¹⁹ Not only is Flick's race an unavoidable truism of his lived experience, but he is reminded at every turn how the color of his skin precludes him from being accepted as an equal citizen, though he serves alongside and in the same manner as Monty, his white compatriot. In essence, Flick's racial madness is a product of the racial dynamics of his time, made more salient by the casting decisions of the show.

I read this section, and all the other comparisons suggested about race and disability throughout the script as an explicit materialization of race as something that is tangible and

¹¹⁸ Harry J. Jr. Elam, "August Wilson, Doubling, Madness, and Modern African-American Drama," *Modern Drama* 43, no. 4 (2000): 613, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mdr.2000.0085>.

¹¹⁹ Elam, "August Wilson," 616.

supported by the dramaturgical decisions of the creative team. The same can't be said, however, for the role of Violet. This presents a narrative consideration here: in a musical that compares the lived experience of oppression by racialized and disabled characters as similar, or at the very least parallel to one another in terms of embodied difference, why doesn't that play out in the dramaturgically consequential space of casting or design? As Nirmala Erevelles points out, the narrative of *Violet* follows popular notions that race and disability are sites of embodied difference that have been used to highlight both their similar marginalized position while simultaneously disavowing the unique oppressions they present within a society built upon white supremacist structures that prize white, normative, able-bodiedness as standard. She states that conceiving of:

disability and “race” as interchangeable tropes in order to foreground the ubiquity of oppression, the categories of race/ethnicity and disability might be better invoked to demonstrate how they constitute one another through social, political, economic, and cultural practices that have kept seemingly different groups of people in strikingly similar marginalized positions.¹²⁰

This conception is useful for my work on *Violet* because it calls for a structural analysis of oppression. In theatre, we can interrogate such structural analysis through the dramaturgy of the work and see how the musical obfuscates it through the absence of disability, thus creating a space to consider Violet's mental state in response. The musical leans into the cultural practices Erevelles outlines here in that it highlights race and disability as different groups of people who are similarly marginalized. Disability and race serve different purposes in the show, though a truly intersectional analysis of both would identify them as interrelated struggles based on a society that deems non-normative bodies inferior. Disability serves as a foil to a beauty taken from Violet and as a psychological weight that influences her own self-worth. Race, on the other

¹²⁰ Nirmala Erevelles, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Body Politic* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 218.

hand, provides a narrative function insofar that it suggests Flick, too, knows what it's like to be excluded. On the surface, the musical may be making a progressive point about how disability and race are identities that isolate people, but the lack of intersectionality ignores the structural matrices of oppression that reify white, able bodiedness as desirable.

So, too, does the casting (and the dramaturgical confines of the show itself) foreclose any intersectional possibilities of existence. Because the role of Violet is so often portrayed by a white, able-bodied, conventionally attractive woman, the show ultimately upends its own suggestion about disability and race. Because Flick is cast as a Black man and Violet an able-bodied non-disfigured woman, the show posits that race is unavoidable or indelible and disability remains unmarked. The use of color conscious casting *avant la lettre* and ableist conforming casting ignores the political potentiality of both. As Alison Kafer posits, “To eliminate disability is to eliminate the possibility of discovering alternative ways of being in the world, to foreclose the possibility of recognizing and valuing our interdependence.”¹²¹ I take up Kafer's theorizing here and complicate it by considering the interdependence between Violet and Flick.

In the world of *Violet*, you are decidedly non-normative if you are a person of color or disabled, and the musical dare not suggest you could be both. Literally the musical's dialogue makes it so that it cannot be cast with Violet as Black actor and Flick as a disabled one. The lack of intersectional imagination here is fascinating. Even though the ADA owes much of its structure and success to the Civil Rights Movement, it still follows a blueprint drafted by the Civil Rights Movement that itself lacked intersectionality. So, while the racial politics of the show might seem on point, the dramaturgical decisions around disability and madness undermine the show's message on race—a notion potentially unsurprising when race and disability

¹²¹ Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 84.

advocacy groups have historically demonstrated a lack of fully intersectional ideology themselves. The dramaturgy of the musical thus lacks an understanding about intersecting identities oppressed by mainstream society. By acknowledging blackness as real and tangible through casting a Black man as Flick the audience is meant to see race as an inevitable oppressed identity. In contrast, the musical sidesteps displaying Violet's disability allowing the audience to avoid the unpleasant reality that anyone can become disabled at any time while simultaneously creating a space where her madness drives (and potentially excuses) her perceived hysterical behavior.

In this way, the show demonstrates an incoherent logic between disability and race, which points toward a larger national ideology about difference. The paradoxical messages about disability and race in the musical confirms that they are both used as narrative tools to identify non-normative characters. However, in *Violet*'s case, the musical only positions one person as truly "different" from the assumed white able bodied normative experience since Violet is portrayed by an able-bodied actress. This ableist conforming casting decision results in a mad dramaturgy that allows madness to stand in for able bodied white supremacy by making Flick the only person to fall beyond the confines of white beauty that the musical centers as a prized and coveted reality.

Race is an oppressive category of difference that white people largely escape by virtue of their white privilege, while disability is a position that people are born into or find themselves reckoning with, deserving of pity. People often avoid the reality that they live on the precipice of disability, existing only one accident away from life-changing disfigurement, or by not acknowledging the corporeal consequences of aging. In essence, the lack of intersectionality in *Violet* often reifies oppressive schemes that seek to categorize difference in a way that is tangible

and nameable to the white patriarchal social order. In *Violet*, only one character is truly (un)marked. Violet escapes the spectacularized gaze from the audience that her disability might demand, yet Flick cannot receive the same treatment on account of his blackness. In naming this phenomenon, I'm writing about the failure of the ADA's politics as they are manifested through *Violet's* narrative.

The Mad Dramaturg at Work

Throughout this chapter, I've engaged in a dramaturgical analysis that portends madness' materialization on stage by absenting a physical marker of disability. Throughout, I have not fully articulated the liberatory possibilities of mad dramaturgy, which I want to think through here. As I've argued, in *Violet*, the occlusion of Violet's scar is not a choice that can be aligned with solely disability or with madness positivity, because it comes from an ableist paradigm. Such a paradigm is indicated by the casting of an able-bodied and conventionally attractive white woman. However, there's a world in which such absence precedes a liberation from corporeal stigma that afflicts Violet and her subsequent personal journey to healing. In thinking about the spectator's view of Violet, in a very practical sense, I find myself asking how an audience member who cannot see Violet's scar because it is absent, could gain access to it otherwise. Could a mad dramaturgical approach to the lighting, perhaps, offer another way to materialize her scar? *Violet* begins to explore these ephemeral manifestations through the vignette scenes in which sonic markers signal the moments before and after the disfiguring incident, but fall short of exploring how the scar is made manifest in those moments.

If I were called upon to dramaturg this show, utilizing mad dramaturgy as a practice and an analytic, I might find a liberatory reading of Violet's scar through casting, first and foremost. By casting an actor who uses a wheelchair or other mobility device the piece might be able to

engage in a reading of disability that does not solely rest on her scar, thus removing the possibility for its absence to be read as a potential reason for her madness. A move such as this could also open up conversations about the ways in which disability was treated and read during the height of a civil rights movement that would lay the groundwork for disability rights activists in the following decades. A liberatory mad dramaturgical framework could open space for Violet's obsession with the faith healer to be read within a context that engages both her embodied difference (as materialized in any number of ways) alongside the perceived hysterical lengths she engages in to be "healed" by the pastor in Oklahoma.

A liberatory mad dramaturgical approach to a musical such as *Violet* does not necessarily require a reworking of the content itself. Rather, it is attuned to how ableist conforming casting and design choices undermine the liberatory possibilities of the show itself. It welcomes possibilities otherwise that challenge not only our conceptualizations of madness and disability writ large, but how such existence can be materialized, and most importantly actualized as normal states of being, in a genre that so often requires its performers to demonstrate their hypercapacity as able bodied beings.

Why Madness Musicals, Why Violet?: A Conclusion

I explore notions of the Madness Musical, and *Violet*'s place within this subcanon because it challenges which characters have historically been deemed mad on stage and forces me to reckon with the messy boundaries that surround popular notions of madness and disability. Additionally, it requires me to contend with the legacy of the ADA and the entanglement between disability rights activism and the Civil Rights Movement. In essence, I've used *Violet* and *Violet* to identify the madness musical as a tradition with a genealogical precursor in the ADA. In my formulation, madness doesn't always mean a character must be mad with a capital

“M,” but rather that madness can be materialized on stage through tangible and ephemeral elements such as costume, lights, sound, text, music, and movement or the absence therein. *Violet* provides an interesting dichotomy between disability representation and the materialization of madness. It is in the tension between the two that I find the concept of the madness musical most helpful. I complicate the representation of disability and its relation to race as the casting of *Violet* makes one unavoidably present, while the other is eschewed and keeps white femininity central and intact.

In discussing the dichotomy between disability on stage and race I identify another tension inherent in my formulation of the madness musical: madness has historically been viewed as an affliction wherein the mad person had to be removed from public life and society. Musical theatre upends this historical notion by literally staging (very much in the public arena) madness as integral to narrative trajectories. How musical theatre stages madness is of incredible consequence since popular performance can often reify or break long-held perceptions of personhood and being. In this way, *Violet*, as the first musical that falls under my categorizations here, teaches us something about the dramaturgical possibilities of musical theatre and its relationship to madness. It doesn't solely live as an affliction a character on stage experiences. It can also be a materialized reality because of dramaturgical decisions that live on in the gendered and racialized legacies of madness that subtextually and subconsciously permeate society.

Chapter 2: Madness Made Manifest: Ephemeral Dramaturgies in *Jane Eyre the Musical*

Based on the 1847 novel by Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre the Musical*, with book by John Caird, featuring music and lyrics by Paul Gordon, opened on Broadway in December 2000 after five years of development. *Jane Eyre the Musical* tells the story of an orphaned girl who takes a position at Thornfield Hall as governess to the young ward of the absent master, Edward Rochester. As Jane grows to love Rochester, she learns of his dark secret—he has been hiding his mad mixed-race wife, Bertha Mason, in the attic. With out-of-town tryouts in Wichita, Kansas; Toronto, Ontario; and San Diego, California; the musical ultimately had a short life on Broadway, lasting 36 previews and 209 performances. It opened to mixed reviews with *The Toronto Sun* citing that “[t]hey take us through the tale, but fail to take us inside it.”¹²² Though the show had a short run by Broadway standards, it was lauded for its technical elements which were filled with an operatic score, lush stage aesthetics, complimented by a dark costume and lighting palette.

The design elements of the musical work to cement Bertha’s position as the mad woman in the attic and her dichotomous place as “monster” to Jane’s “angel”—a convention that operates as a narrative tool to drive forward the plot.¹²³ Functionally, Bertha in *Jane Eyre the Musical* is literally locked away in an attic, a space mainly suggested through ephemeral design techniques such as lighting and sound. In this chapter, I consider the materialization of madness on stage to draw conclusions about how the staging of psychic phenomena informs the narrative structure of the musical. In doing so, I am naming a paradox in which performance and design

¹²² “Jane Eyre: The Reviews Are In,” Playbill, December 6, 1996, <http://www.playbill.com/article/jane-eyre-the-reviews-are-in-com-68989>.

¹²³ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1898), 471.

choices shape madness and present it as a state of nonbeing. Put simply, I interrogate how the presentation of the seeable and palpable works to create the impression of nonbeing—that which is dismissible or relegated to the margins of valuation. I follow Fanon’s theories about nonbeing and complicate it through a mad studies lens to demonstrate how nonbeing is produced by performance.

What this chapter attends to is how the staging of Bertha Mason operates in contrast to others on stage to place her madness as a narrative plot point that affords Jane Eyre a fully realized life at the expense of Bertha’s. This constitutes and defines Jane as a protagonist and, by extension, her white femininity as the moral center of the story. Bertha, somewhat ambiguously racialized in the novel, but historically understood as a mixed-race woman, provides a contrast to Jane’s “plainness.”¹²⁴ The daughter of a white European settler in the West Indies, Bertha is described as Creole—a common moniker in the late nineteenth century for a person of mixed-race ancestry.¹²⁵ Scholars debate about Bertha’s race with some reading the ambiguity of it in Brontë’s novel as a signifier of her potential to pass as white. Gayatri Spivak argues that such ambiguity confirms Bertha as a “white Jamaican Creole,” further situating her as a “native” who has lived through the intense colonization of the West Indies by British forces.¹²⁶ Turning to the

¹²⁴ Jen Cadwallader argues in “‘Formed for Labour, Not for Love’: Plain Jane and the Limits of Female Beauty,” that Jane’s plainness is a social critique that seeks to undermine the conflation of beauty with virtue. Bertha, before her descent into madness is described as beautiful, a descriptor never afforded to Jane herself.

¹²⁵ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 442 and 445; As Delle points out in “The Material and Cognitive Dimensions of Creolization in Nineteenth-Century Jamaica,” the term “creole” started out in the 16th century to describe “members of society—both black and white—born in, native to, and committed to living in Jamaica.” However, by the mid-1800s the term came to signify people on the island of mixed-race ancestry, generally with one white European parent and the other a native Black Jamaican.

¹²⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” *Critical Inquiry*, 1985, 243–61, <https://doi.org/10.1086/448328>, 252; According to Pradnya Bhawar in “Bertha Mason ‘The Mad Woman in the Attic’: A Subaltern Voice,” even if Bertha was a white Jamaican Creole, she would have been seen as “alien.” In the 18th and 19th centuries, many European writers in the West Indies associated Creoles, regardless of race, with the native Caribbean population as a way of distancing

source text, however, reveals a more explicit discussion of Bertha's race. Though she may never be specifically named as a mixed-race woman, in the novel Rochester suggests that Bertha's parents wanted her to marry him, because he was of a "good race," implying that they do not share the same one.¹²⁷ (Rochester is canonically described as a white Englishman).¹²⁸ There are also references to her "dark" hair, "discoloured" and "black" face, suggesting her appearance is notable due to its difference from the complexions of Jane and Rochester.¹²⁹ Scholars, too, recognize the possibilities in interpreting Brontë's character and acknowledge that both physical and social circumstances could result in marking an other, as Patricia McKee points out:

...none of these descriptions quite assigns Bertha a biological blackness. But they assign her grades of cultural, emotional, and intellectual development deemed primitive on Victorian scales of civilization; and all of these conditions are attached, within Victorian racial discourse, to biological darkness.¹³⁰

In light of the racial ambiguity, I read the implications of Brontë's portrayal of Bertha as racialized notions that situate her as unstable, dangerous and threatening—a distinct stereotype that permeates the musical adaptation and its accordant dramaturgies.

The dichotomy between Jane's fully realized life and Bertha's constricted existence is not just a trope but an integral dramaturgical technique. Dramaturgical techniques, in the sense I use them, attend to the dramatic composition itself, as well as the aesthetic representation of the elements of drama on stage. As such, they encompass varying aesthetic and textual choices that inherently inform character reception on stage that imbue narrative significance on the plot. In

them from "civilized" Europeans. This was particularly the case for Creole women, who were often depicted as self-willed, decadent, and untrustworthy—the very essence of Rochester's description of Bertha throughout both the novel and musical adaptation.

¹²⁷ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 465.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 309.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 432 and 434.

¹³⁰ Patricia McKee, "Racial Strategies in *Jane Eyre*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 37, no. 1 (2009): 67–83, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150309090056>.

the interest of clarity, however, I want to outline some parameters for dramaturgical techniques as I apply them to *Jane Eyre the Musical*. I argue that the dramaturgical techniques utilized in *Jane Eyre the Musical*, and specifically the ephemeral aspects of design, frame and shape madness. This reading of *Jane Eyre the Musical* is deeply informed by mad dramaturgy insofar that madness has narrative import that unavoidably informs its constructed materialized reality on stage. As such, these choices are an account of power. Looking at Bertha's position within the piece, I argue that madness—as a raced and gendered construct—has a history within musical theatre and *Jane Eyre the Musical* is but one example of how madness is presented in performance.

I cite Bertha specifically because she is positioned within the narrative as a racialized woman whose existence falls well within the trope of the mad Black woman that I draw out and name here. Borne from stereotypes of excessive and uncontrollable Black women, the angry Black woman trope is a derivative of the Sapphire trope that permeated popular performance within antebellum America.¹³¹ Of the controlling images Patricia Hill Collins identifies in her seminal work *Black Feminist Thought*, the Sapphire trope is perhaps most salient in considering Bertha Mason's position within the story.¹³² As scholar Bettina Judd highlights the Sapphire is:

...the backlit image and sound of the angry Black woman stereotype... She is: constructed through the system of knowledge that is dependent on the idea of the human through difference/sameness, [the] Sapphire produces a paradox by which Black women's knowledge and feeling is sequestered into chaotic impulse rather than controlled reason.¹³³

¹³¹ Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks* (New York: The Continuum International, 2003), 132.

¹³² Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 69.

¹³³ Bettina Judd, "Sapphire as Praxis: Toward a Methodology of Anger," *Feminist Studies* 45, no. 1 (2019): 180.

The angry Black woman trope, in line with that of the Sapphire, identifies her as non-normative in her behavior—always on edge and ready to overreact in fantastic excess. The trope of the angry Black woman is a white patriarchal critique of her rage. It is not simply just about the expression of her rage being inappropriate, it's about it being unjustifiable to the white social order, rendering it inappropriate in the eyes of the self-proclaimed elite. Any inequities historically experienced by Black women are not deemed as such, thus a reaction to them is declared out of order. The social barometer for reason or rationale for Black women is not given the same due as it is for white women, and certainly not the same that is given for white men.

To avoid a theoretical slippage between the mad Black woman trope and the angry Black woman trope, I want to clarify how I see each here. The mad Black woman is socially seen as mad (as in “crazy”), whether she pathologically is or not. It is the racist social structures that situate Black women as already “too much” that push her into a categorization of madness once her cognitive state is deemed to be non-normative. Perhaps she is pathologically mad, and her view of reality is obscured; perhaps not. The mad Black woman trope is less about an accurate clinical attribution of madness than it is an indictment of her position within a society that considers pathologization (and all the consequences such pathologization holds) the sole marker of mental wellness. The angry Black woman trope, while closely related, is different in that her perceived excess—her “anger”—is borne out of an all-too-clear understanding of reality and the ways in which she is always already seen as an angry, troublesome presence according to a white patriarchal social order. Her anger may be considered inappropriate, and she may be socially relegated on account of it, but it does not rise to the space of naming it a psychological disorder. Though the consequences of being named an angry Black woman and a mad Black woman under

the white supremacist ideology that undergirds American society may very well share the same, potentially fatal, consequences.

Harry Elam's discussion of racial madness, which is a social critique about the maddening circumstances that racism creates, is integral to my naming of the mad Black woman trope for notions of madness mobilize racism and sexism to produce different life and death outcomes for women of color on stage—as it certainly does in *Jane Eyre the Musical*.¹³⁴ Bridging the gap, Elam's notion of racial madness and its critique of society offers a theoretical foreground to subsequent individual madness (that may or may not pass through anger). It is the marriage of racial madness—the social maddening circumstances—coupled with the pathologization of a Black woman as mad that places her within the trope of the mad Black woman. She isn't just angry. She is indicted on her anger and/or socially deemed excessive behavior, pathologized, and subsequently relegated to the margins of society on account of both.

Complicating the historical trope of the angry Black woman with madness is imperative, for ascriptions of rationality and irrationality are neither neutral nor innocent. What matters is often less about what is done than the person it is done to or by—a central argument I bring forward in considering how the musical's ephemeral elements impact Bertha Mason's personhood. I define the mad Black woman trope within the frame of madness' racialized history using mad as both an indication of her mental state, and her affective response to the social maddening circumstances that categorize her as dangerously non-normative and mentally unwell.

¹³⁴ Elam, "August Wilson, Doubling, Madness, and Modern African-American Drama," 613.

I extrapolate this trope and apply it to Bertha since the novel describes her “swelled black face” and “blackened inflation of the lineaments.”¹³⁵ In essence, the mad Black woman trope is one where the narrative situates a Black woman as mad (or in this case, a mixed-race woman given her proximity to blackness) through her non-normative behavior, acknowledging that the lens with which such behavior is viewed is restrictively a white, able-bodied, heteronormative one. Though I read Bertha’s madness as both a site for oppression and liberation, I acknowledge that the trope of the mad Black woman operates within a patriarchal structure that confines her madness as a threatening deviance from normativity—a deviancy that positions her as an undesirable romantic partner and a dangerous menace to society.

I parse out how madness is perceived and communicated on stage even though it is, largely, a psychosomatic phenomenon, and its transmission to the audience moves it beyond a simple narrative trope and into a dramaturgical paradox with material consequences. By citing dramaturgy as a methodology, I identify it as “the accumulated techniques that all theatrical artists employ” to “[d]etermine what the aesthetic architecture of the piece of dramatic literature actually is.”¹³⁶ Taking into account this definition of dramaturgy, I consider how madness and race contribute to the aesthetic architecture to build the narrative and material realities of the musical—critical notions I take into account in my formulation of mad dramaturgy. Mad dramaturgy is a useful methodology here, for it focuses on the narrative consideration of how madness is materialized and therefore structures theatrical action. It opens doors to see how ableism functions, perpetuates harmful oppression, and how it bolsters intersectional violence. It is essential for me to highlight this methodology because it allows me to interrogate how

¹³⁵ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 432 and 434.

¹³⁶ Chemers, *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy*, 2.

madness in *Jane Eyre the Musical* is relentlessly communicated through ephemeral design choices. Paradoxically, in the musical, madness is almost always indicated through shadow or an absence which, I argue, is used to disavow Bertha of her personhood on account of her mad state. Put simply, *Jane Eyre the Musical* conveys madness through ephemeral design choices, but deemphasizes Bertha's personhood through divorcing these elements from Bertha herself, leaving her to be interpolated as a mad woman who does little more than wreak havoc on Jane's journey to her own happy ending. This, in turn, operates to separate Bertha's body from her mind, narratively removing any agency and humanity she holds.

In laying out my methodology here, I acknowledge that dramaturgy exists beyond textual analysis and any comprehensive dramaturgical reading of the theatrical production must include consideration of design, direction, choreography, music, and staging. As such, I consider various elements of the design to illuminate the consequences present in *Jane Eyre the Musical*. First, I look at how space is used, or conversely not used, to situate Bertha Mason within the narrative. Specifically, I analyze the space of the attic as a site of dispossession, which is highlighted by the design choice to not stage it as fully as other areas of the set are. Using Frantz Fanon as a central interlocutor, I see his theories about colonization, and specifically the "zone of nonbeing" as applicable to the design choices employed throughout the musical. I then turn to how the ephemeral design elements of lighting and sound are used to privilege certain characters while disavowing others, namely Bertha Mason. By analyzing the sound of Bertha's maniacal laughter and the shadows in which she is cast, I further argue that this results in her disavowal from narrative consideration. Finally, I explore how the staging and casting of certain bodies changes the consequences for Bertha Mason as the mad character and how this continues a specific

performance tradition that advances white supremacist notions of white femininity as desirable and universal.

I use mad studies as a lens through which to analyze *Jane Eyre the Musical* because it deemphasizes embodiment as its central analytic, while acknowledging that it is an important consideration in how mad bodies are interpolated. This notion makes mad studies the prime lens with which to think through my research here since *Jane Eyre the Musical* attempts to deemphasize Bertha's embodiment, but as I argue, is unable to since Bertha's ultimate disavowal is predicated on her material presence—the paradox that runs throughout. I want to acknowledge here that madness is not a monolithic term or experience, as LaMarr Jurelle Bruce offers in one of his four definitions of madness.¹³⁷ It can occur as phenomenal madness, which is “a severe unwieldiness or chaos of the mind—producing fundamental crises of perception, emotion, meaning, and self-hood—as experience in the consciousness of the “mad” subject.”¹³⁸ I pair Bruce's definition of phenomenal madness with his consideration of psychosocial alterity which is a “radical divergence from the ‘normal’ within a given psychosocial context.”¹³⁹

I deploy phenomenal madness and psychosocial alterity here because they acknowledge both the internal and external perceptions of madness. In phenomenal madness, Bruce's notions of interiority remind me of Bertha's plight as an incarcerated madwoman in the attic, highlighted by both her actions in the musical and the ephemeral design techniques used to foreclose her personhood. With psychosocial alterity, I acknowledge that the Victorian era English society in which Bertha must contend produces her non-normative state as deviance and savagery.

¹³⁷ Bruce offers that “madness entails four overlapping entities in the modern and postmodern West[:]” phenomenal madness, clinical madness, madness as anger, and psychosocial alterity.

¹³⁸ La Marr Jurelle Bruce, “‘The People Inside My Head, Too’: Madness, Black Womanhood, and the Radical Performance of Lauryn Hill,” *African American Review* 45, no. 3 (2012): 372.

¹³⁹ Bruce, “The People Inside My Head, Too,” 372.

Madness, too, can be read as a troublesome excess that is often pathologized as a “psychopathic, or severely neurotic disorder (as diagnosed or misdiagnosed by clinicians),” a notion I use to explore the implications of staging madness that is historically informed by sexist and racist social structures.¹⁴⁰ I don’t cite various definitions of madness to provide a comprehensive overview of the semantics available, but rather to acknowledge that madness itself is a fluid concept that elides precise categorization.

Madness in the Attic

In Gilbert and Gubar’s book *The Madwoman in the Attic*, they contend that the mythologization of feminine rage is far more dangerous than the old literary trope of repressed female sexuality.¹⁴¹ Both feminine rage and repressed female sexuality have been used in literature and popular culture to highlight how excess femininity is viewed as dangerous to the patriarchal social order. Specifically, feminine rage and its historical link to notions of female hysteria are deemed most dangerous because of socially constructed non-normativity that challenged Victorian era ideals of womanhood, and thus the family structure on which the patriarchy so often relies.¹⁴² Seen as a pivotal text in feminist literary criticism, what Gilbert and Gubar’s work does not account for is the intersections of race and gender that, though widely experienced, would not be coined explicitly until Kimberlé Crenshaw’s pivotal essay in 1989.¹⁴³ Bertha Mason, quite literally written as the mad racialized woman in the attic, places her well within a long genealogy of historicizing Black bodies as excessive, unreasonable, and mad. And

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (Yale University Press, 2000), 387.

¹⁴² Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 387.

¹⁴³ Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” 1247.

while Gilbert and Gubar analyze Brontë's novel, I build upon their work to look at Caird and Gordon's musical adaptation. Gilbert and Gubar do discuss Bertha explicitly but position her solely as the symbol for Jane's dark subconscious, rather than as a fully realized character with her own agency and story. They highlight Bertha's position in the attic as a symbol for Jane's oppression throughout her life, failing to discuss Bertha's personhood or race. As such, I argue that the narrative of the mad Black woman and all the historical implications it holds—a notion that Gilbert and Gubar do not take up in their theorization of Bertha, but one I find critical to the story's arc—is reified through the narrative structure of *Jane Eyre the Musical*. My consideration of this allows me to think about how the staging, design, and movement live within and are informed by the gendered and raced notions of hysteria that have long worked to oppress women and, in particular, women of color.

In order to interpret the narrative consequences of materializing madness on stage, I turn to specific design elements foregrounded by the notion that the Broadway production of *Jane Eyre the Musical* was lauded as “a significant advancement in scenic design.”¹⁴⁴ For much of the musical, scenes set in most portions of Thornfield Hall are intricate; black scrim was adorned with detailed and layered projections indicating various locations—cemeteries, schools, drawing rooms, kitchens, and parlors. Utilizing a carousel, rather than a standard horizontal fly system, the technical elements of the musical were intense:

...whereas scenery typically arrives onstage vertically or horizontally, the carousel allows for many more unorthodox angles. In the scene in which Jane Eyre's school friend dies, for example, the bed revolves on stage, and a window descends from the carousel and rotates with lights from the carousel already shining through it—all at the same time rather than in sequence.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Robin Progrebin, “Behind the Scenes... and Above,” *New York Times*, November 17, 2000, sec. E1, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/11/17/movies/behind-the-scenes-and-above.html>.

¹⁴⁵ Progrebin, “Behind the Scenes...and Above.”

These quotes, direct from the scenic designer himself, indicate the complexity of staging *Jane Eyre the Musical* and the possibilities available to the designers through incredible technological advancement. How fully realized each design element was communicates the importance of the space itself. That is to say, the level of detail and materialization present in the stage design greatly informs the audience about the people and events that take place within the walls of Thornfield Hall.

My analysis here is based on the 2000 Broadway production of *Jane Eyre the Musical*. I focus my attention on this iteration because of its critical acclaim as a well-designed work and because it remains the most commercially available production of the show to date. While I did not see the production on Broadway in-person, I viewed the archival recording available through the New York Public Library's Theatre on Film and Tape Archive in July 2021.¹⁴⁶ The filmed production follows the published libretto and as such, I treat it as the source text for future productions and as a guidepost for the interpretation of the writer's intention through text, song, design, and movement. The musical, of course, has had a life after its Broadway premiere, but most productions post-2000 are at colleges and high schools across the country.¹⁴⁷ What follows here is a close reading of the elements presented in the Broadway production, informed by the libretto and interviews with the creative team. I now turn to a thick description of the musical so that I may identify specific design choices associated with this particular artistic team.

¹⁴⁶ Because of various union restrictions, a researcher may only view a recording of a production once through the New York Public Library's Theatre on Film and Tape Archive, regardless of its significance to their research, making multiple viewings impossible.

¹⁴⁷ I was only able to locate a handful of LORT Equity productions (Cleveland Musical Theatre's 2018 production being the most prominent) beyond its initial run, while over 30 high school, college, and non-equity community productions have taken place during the same time period. During the 2018 Cleveland Musical Theatre production, Caird and Gordon worked with the company to revise their sprawling score into a "chamber" version with 20 fewer actors and featuring only 36 of the original 50 songs. *Jane Eyre* as a non-musical stage adaptation of Brontë's novel appears far more frequently, with various playwrights publishing their own version of the story.

Set on a sparsely filled stage, *Jane Eyre the Musical* is designed in dark and subdued hues. The show opens on an empty stage with Jane Eyre dressed in a full black Victorian era dress, while Young Jane Eyre, dressed in white, kneels beside the headstone of her deceased friend. For the first thirty minutes of the production, Jane narrates Young Jane's experience, highlighting her mistreatment at the orphanage. Throughout her time at the orphanage, Young Jane finds refuge in the attic, where she retreats to read books and escapes the taunting of others. Monochromatic in palette, the attic is Young Jane's first sense of space where she is nestled between the dusty joists of a gabled roof reading a book, illuminated by streaks of yellow light that enter through a wooden window stage left. Her taunting cousin pops up through the trapdoor center stage now and again to remind her of her orphan status, as she leans up against blankets and crates covering items in storage. Even in Young Jane's stowed away sanctuary, the design elements are rich.

At various points in Jane's narration of her own life, the stage becomes a fully materialized classroom, complete with a chalkboard and rows of benches, and an outdoor respite with a tree so meticulously crafted that Young Jane can climb upon it and rest within its branches. I read the initial sparseness of the stage as intentional, for it mirrors Jane's bleak beginnings while it simultaneously creates a blank slate on which intricate and ornate set pieces fly in and out from the aforementioned carousel. The machinations of the set are impressive, "sort of dance-like," as the carousel in the rafters is mirrored by turntables on the floor that seamlessly brings smaller pieces of furniture on and off stage.¹⁴⁸ As Jane's life progresses, so, too, does the set design of the musical. By the time Jane becomes a governess at Thornfield Hall,

¹⁴⁸ Scott Schwartz (co-director), Zoom interview with author, June 27, 2022.

the locations are not so much indicated as they are made incredibly obvious through their fully realized design.



Jane Eyre the Musical on Broadway in 2000. Young Jane (c) is reprimanded in front of her fellow orphans by Mr. Brocklehurst (r).

As Jane arrives at Thornfield Hall, she meets the staff who take her through the house. The parlor, where much of the show's narrative action takes place, is fully designed from the first moments the audience is invited within its walls. A wainscot clad wall, with a rich wood detail along the chair rail, sits upstage of the tea table lavishly decorated with an embroidered tablecloth and plushly upholstered chairs. An amber light, complete with textured glass gobo, pours through the oversized window upstage, drowning Jane and the similarly monochromatically costumed staff in warm, but simple, hues. As the room is filled with handsomely dressed party guests who have come to experience the evening's festivities at Thornfield Hall, the turntable on the stage brings in stone busts on pedestals, couches, tables, and topiaries, while the scrim upstage expands to include more windows and framed portraits of the Rochester clan. The extravagance of the house is attested by a party guest in the musical number "Finer Things":

You have such exquisite taste
Chinese Chippendale
Walls swathed in festoons of silk
Such ornate detail¹⁴⁹

The blank slate that was the stage earlier in the musical becomes at various points, an incredibly detailed parlor, drawing room, bedroom, and garden so realistically portrayed as to be believably livable by Jane and company. Most notably, however, the set, with all its incredibly designed elements, does not fully stage the one space of Thornfield Hall that may well hold the most narratively consequential secret—the attic.

The attic space, as Bertha's forced living area, is often only suggested and is rarely seen. The audience knows of the attic's existence early in the musical only because Mrs. Fairfax, the head staff member at the mansion and Jane's personal welcoming committee, mentions it on Jane's tour of Thornfield Hall, citing that it is "Grace Poole's living quarters" and nothing more. Grace Poole, an actual staff member of the residence, quickly becomes the scapegoat for Bertha's mad behavior, being accused of drunken revelry and deviousness when Bertha escapes from her confined living quarters and sets Rochester's bed aflame in the middle of the night. Rochester, as the owner of the estate, actively works to keep its secrets inside its walls, giving the staff direct orders that "[t]he shutters stay shut while the master is away."¹⁵⁰

Shuttered from view, too, is the attic space in which Bertha is confined. The audience is only witness to the physically manifested attic space once, and it is brief. Cast in shadow, the attic space features almost no furniture—a notable deprivation that is a distinct departure from the rest of the house. With just a basic wooden chair sitting in the corner of the room, Bertha is shadowed from view. The only light streams through an unseen window in the distance. Streaks

¹⁴⁹ John Caird and Paul Gordon, *Jane Eyre the Musical* (New York: Music Theatre International, 2000), 72.

¹⁵⁰ Caird and Gordon, *Jane Eyre the Musical*, 51.

of blue and white suggest that at night the moon provides the only consistent form of illumination. This is only the second time the audience sees Bertha, but she appears similarly in both experiences. Referred to early in the libretto as simply “The Figure,” Bertha is wearing the same costume as when she set Rochester’s bed aflame earlier in the musical: “The FIGURE of a WOMAN carrying a candle appears...[p]assing through the ENSEMBLE she...is dressed in layers of ragged white, and veiled so we cannot see her face.”¹⁵¹ The veiled appearance of Bertha in the musical is a distinct departure from the novel’s source text. In Brontë’s work, Bertha is not veiled until she breaks into Jane’s room on the eve of Jane’s wedding to Rochester and tears Jane’s veil in anger, taking it with her. I mention this difference to highlight how the costume design here is a decision that keeps Bertha’s appearance diffused in ways that are distinctly unique to the musical. The white veil obscures Bertha’s features with hints of shadowy blue that seem to indicate her melancholic state, as it is the color most often used in the lighting design to ephemerally flesh out her scenes.

Similarly in this scene, when Jane enters the attic to learn of Rochester’s dark secret, she is greeted by a disturbing vision of Bertha: “From the dark recesses of the attic, a FIGURE moves backwards and forwards, sometimes pacing, sometimes on all fours, growling and snatching the air like a wild animal. This is BERTHA MASON.”¹⁵² Bertha, named explicitly for the first time over three quarters of the way through the libretto, is visibly unkempt. Curled up into a ball, the audience is only able to see portions of her hair, which appears to be unbrushed and matted. Whatever the audience can make out of Bertha’s physical existence is quickly subdued when she lashes out at those who have come into her space. She is forcefully tied to a

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Caird and Gordon, *Jane Eyre the Musical*, 106.

chair, and in the process attempts to bite at Rochester's throat. Seemingly frustrated with her behavior, Rochester and Grace Poole, who has actually been Bertha's caretaker the entire time, pull out a flask and force Bertha to drink a liquid that quickly neutralizes her, though she still "watches ROCHESTER through hooded eyelids."¹⁵³

I read this staging—the shadows, the veiled face, the unintelligible speech, the basic furnishings—as an explicit exclusion of Bertha from the narrative on account of her madness. In a musical where the set design is a critical component, the decision to not fully realize the attic imbues dramaturgical importance that disavows Bertha from her own personhood. The design choices that accompany its staging (or lack thereof) in *Jane Eyre the Musical* highlights her position as an "other," always present, but rarely seen. The lighting design works most clearly to suggest this. She's almost always in light so dim or shadowed that the audience cannot quite make out exactly who she is or what she looks like. This suggests she is a force less worthy of being seen than others. Not only is Bertha's personhood obscured from literal view for much of the musical, but she is also so deeply disavowed that she does not receive a name in the libretto until her penultimate scene—a narrative technique the novel takes up as well. Indeed, the aesthetic elements of the musical are designed in such a way that it is impossible to make out the contours of Bertha as a person, including her basic appearance.

There is an inherent tension in the adaptation of the source text into a musical form here that I want to call out: in Brontë's novel it is alluded that Bertha is a mixed-race woman, which is central to the narrative of the story itself. Yet, in the musical adaptation, the audience is unable to glean any information about the actress' appearance, including her race, because she is visually obscured through the use of lighting, direction, and costuming. As such, I read her

¹⁵³ Ibid.

characterization on stage within the canonical context of the novel—a notion that I take up and complicate in the next section of this chapter. Acknowledging this and turning back to the aesthetics of the musical, I see the attic, and all its accordant design elements, as a physical manifestation of and a site to explore how madness is a dramaturgical structure rendered visible through design and how notions of anti-blackness in narratives on stage are disguised under the historically racist and sexist ideas of madness therein.

Take, for instance, the contrast between Bertha's attic space and Jane's attic space. This dichotomy was a deliberate choice made by the writers of the musical as they state in the foreword to the libretto:

In the novel the child Jane is punished by being locked in the 'red room' where her uncle died. In our version we have put her up in the attic, hiding her from her abusers in the house below. Our purpose here is to draw a clear parallel between young Jane at the start of her life and mad Bertha Mason at the end of hers, so that the meeting between them on the morning of the aborted marriage to Rochester can illuminate both of their fates and draw attention to one of the central themes of the story—secrets and the lies secrets create.¹⁵⁴

As Caird and Gordon further make clear, they view the home as a metaphor for human life wherein the attic is “the mind where all of the memories and secrets reside.”¹⁵⁵ Referring to the attic as the space where Rochester hides the “awful reality of a life blighted by madness,” Caird and Gordon, perhaps inadvertently, reify the racist notions of madness that permeate not only the musical, but of hysteria and the mad Black woman trope I parsed out earlier.¹⁵⁶ This is made manifest in the aforementioned design elements of the musical, but I want to lay them out explicitly here.

¹⁵⁴ Caird and Gordon, *Jane Eyre the Musical*, vii.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Bertha's living quarters are not fully materialized, with the only piece of furniture—a chair—serving a functional purpose (namely that of further containing her mad behavior when she is tied to it). And, while Jane's attic space similarly has no furniture, she is surrounded by comforts not afforded to Bertha. Bertha's space is consistently infiltrated by her caretakers and Rochester, and when she can break free from its confines, she is punished and relegated again to the dark, shadowy space, forcing to live her life away from others for fear of her madness being made visible. In contrast, when Jane retreats from her attic, it is by choice where she is then free to join the other girls at the orphanage for their daily routine.

It is hard for me to ignore how the treatment of the attic operates differently for the two women: the pious white woman finds comfort in being alone and it becomes an endearing quality indicative of her plainness, while the canonically understood mixed-race woman is admonished and violently subdued for daring to experience life beyond the attic walls. I read this dichotomy as a prime example of the consequences of such decisions. By mirroring Jane and Bertha vis a vis their respective attic space, the musical gives Jane space while taking it away from Bertha—literally. This mirroring, I argue, is a physical materialization of Bertha's removed agency and reifies a codified set of dramaturgies that concretize racist tropes that situate her as someone who is too dangerous to let out of the attic because of her perceived danger to society on account of her race, her femininity, and her mad state.

Bertha, as a mixed-race character, exists at the intersection of her race and her womanhood, which are both complicated by the mad state in which she exists. I read Bertha's race alongside her mad state because these two sites of identity have long been considered in tandem to oppress people of color, using disability to irrationally explain away racist treatment

on behalf of society.¹⁵⁷ As Therí A. Pickens points out, the relationship between race and disability can be analyzed alongside one another readily:

...disability takes on concrete and metaphorical meanings such that disability can symbolize something other than disability while still being about disability. In so doing, disability metaphors therefore allow us to explore the historical and material connections between disability and other social systems of privilege and oppression.¹⁵⁸

What Pickens points out here is the ways in which we can trouble monolithic representations of disability and interrogate them as co-constitutive representations of other oppressed identities.

This theory is activated in *Jane Eyre the Musical*. By way of her appearance, Bertha is read as both not white enough to receive the honorifics Jane does, while her Blackness (perhaps not even visibly legible) makes her an exciting and tantalizing object for white male consumption. My reading here pushes Bertha's physical existence into an unstable categorization on account of both her race and her madness. She is neither a person whose contours are well known to the audience (with Jane in the novel referring to her as a "clothed hyena") nor is she a stable presence with Thornfield Hall, giving her existence an in-betweenness that is hard to quantify, yet permeates the narrative deeply.¹⁵⁹

Bertha's liminality places her within Fanon's theorized "zone of non-being" insofar that she can be read as Black enough to be oppressed by the anti-Black world in which she lives, which the other characters use to dehumanize, infantilize, and exclude her. For Fanon, racism is based on a global hierarchy measured along the "line of the human."¹⁶⁰ This line, artificially created because of capitalist, Western, and Christian-centric ideology, separates humanity into those that are above the line, in the zone of being, and those that fall below into the zone of non-

¹⁵⁷ Josh Lukin, "Disability and Blackness" in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed., Lennard J. Davis, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 311.

¹⁵⁸ Therí A. Pickens, *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

¹⁵⁹ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 447.

¹⁶⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 2.

being. Those that fall below the line, according to Fanon, are treated as sub-human, and do not have their humanity socially recognized.

I see in Fanon's theorizing an opportunity to build upon his work and complicate it with scholarship from disability and mad studies writ large. Just as Fanon offers, artificial lines demarcating social worth impact those who fall beyond the prescribed norm—a notion disability and mad studies scholars have taken up in earnest. Disability, like Fanon theorizes about race, is “about the twin processes of discrimination and prejudice.”¹⁶¹ These practices result in a socially created “line of the subhuman” that mirrors Fanon's own zone of non-being. Such demarcations, designed to exclude and demote populations of humans to less-than-desirable positions in society, remain “firmly rooted in personal tragedy theory” in which people of color and disabled people are victims of their own unavoidable circumstance, rather than subjected to intense bigotry and ableism from society.¹⁶² While Fanon theorized the zone of non-being to analyze racism and colonial relations, I couple it here with ideas of madness since Bertha's treatment as a mad woman is informed by both and is made evident in the design choices throughout the musical.

Take again the juxtaposition between Bertha and Jane's attic space: Jane's space is her own zone of being as she occupies it alone and on her own terms, whereas Bertha's space is liminal and ignored—anyone could live there and there is nothing present to indicate that is it occupied by Bertha. More specifically, Bertha's attic is no place at all. It is aesthetically pronounced by an absence of material markers that shape and define other characters and their story arcs. I use Fanon here to better understand how dramaturgy is doing the making of raced

¹⁶¹ Tom Shakespeare and Nicholas Watson, “The Body Line Controversy: A New Direction for Disability Studies?”

¹⁶² Michael Oliver and Colin Barnes, *The New Politics of Disablement* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 11.

madness through material realities, while I also show how raced madness is communicated through performance. As such, I now turn to the more ephemeral aspect of sound as another element used for Bertha's disavowal, as it is not only the physical space that is materialized and then subsequently used to disavow Bertha's personhood throughout the musical.

As Jane is taking the initial tour of Thornfield Hall and learns that the top floor of the residence is off limits, a disembodied maniacal laughter fills the stage, much louder than any of the other sound effects played previously (a motif borrowed directly from the book itself). In the musical's libretto, Caird and Gordan initially describe this as a "strange, mirthless laughter that echoes through the upper gallery" before it devolves into laughter that is "repeated, hollow, barking and sardonic."¹⁶³ This, obvious to those familiar with the novel, is the ominous laughter of Bertha Mason. Bertha's remarkably acousmatic existence allows the audience to interpolate the mad body from which it emanates because her laughter is heard before she is seen.¹⁶⁴ While this technique heightens the dramatic stakes of the laughter, it communicates a divorced relationship to Bertha herself, which ultimately works to situate her as an ethereal force, rather than a person deserving of full consideration. Accompanied by a darker lighting shift, Bertha's presence is always situated as a somewhat otherworldly experience. These design elements—high decibel laughter coupled with the lighting shift—place Bertha as a menacing and omnipresent character, though her madness precludes her from even being fully present on stage.

The laughter works to further place Bertha in a zone of nonbeing, seemingly removing her from her body and initially presenting her through only her aural existence—a motif that continues until Bertha's death. Indeed, the audience hears this maniacal laughter twice before

¹⁶³ Caird and Gordon, *Jane Eyre the Musical*, 31.

¹⁶⁴ I follow the definition of acousmatic as offered by writer and composer Michel Chiron, in that it is a sound one hears without seeing its originating cause.

they ever see Bertha on stage. Or, rather, who we come to learn is Bertha. Up until the naming of her as Rochester's wife, she is just an ominous figure with little narrative consideration, "kind of ghost-like occasionally float[ing] through the show."¹⁶⁵ This practice—unfolding Bertha's narrative significance through specific materialization—highlights the very paradox I analyze in interpreting this piece by reading the ephemeral element of sound as a means to identify how madness is rendered in performance and how that materialization is used to ultimately signal Bertha's nonbeing on account of her madness. In short, I contend that for Bertha to be disavowed from her personhood, the musical must first materialize and position her as a character within the narrative. *Jane Eyre the Musical* does so through brief interactions between Bertha and other members of the house, and largely without presenting her full body when doing so. For Bertha's ultimate absence to be remarkable, the audience must first acknowledge that her presence is impactful to the other characters. The observation I make here is central to my considerations about materializing madness on stage: Bertha's narrative arc relies on her madness, which in turn relies on the design aesthetics to communicate her madness within Thornfield Hall.

I would be remiss to discuss a musical with little mention of the aural soundscape of the musical numbers themselves. Caird and Gordon use the composition of the musical numbers to sonically signify the difference between Jane and Bertha, often placing different timbres—the characteristic tone of an instrument or voice—in direct sequence to highlight the juxtaposition between alleged normativity and madness. Early in the musical, before Jane leaves to be governess of Thornfield Hall, she dreams about her escape from the orphanage in which she has been relegated:

I look out through the graveyard
A silhouetted swallow flies

¹⁶⁵ Scott Schwartz, Zoom interview with author, June 27, 2022.

He flies to distant countries
I lose him just behind a cloud
I yearn to be that swallow
And go where I am not allowed

Over mountains, over oceans
Heaven take me away
For I long for my liberty
For sweet liberty I pray¹⁶⁶

In “Sweet Liberty” Jane sings over sweeping tones of warm strings and grandiose piano arpeggios, complete with metallic percussion and woodwinds swelling to a climax wherein the chorus underscores her song with rich harmonies. Jane’s song concludes and immediately, without any intermittent dialogue, the chorus changes tone and posture, slowly lining up at the downstage edge of the proscenium to sing “The Secrets of the House.” Reminiscent of a Gregorian chant, lacking melody and flourish, they sing of the “Long forgotten shadows/Fragments of memories awakened and stirred.”¹⁶⁷

I read this transition as an explicit sonic intrusion of Bertha’s existence in a production that will aesthetically work to foreclose possibilities to her own personhood. The hopefulness in Jane’s lyrics, coupled with a rich underscoring of the full orchestra further highlights Jane as someone who deserves to be in the zone of being. Sonically, she receives full orchestral treatment, where Bertha receives virtually none. Not dissimilar from Bertha’s placeholder in the libretto as “The Figure,” she does not receive the good fortune of a first-person narrative, the way Jane does, as is exemplified in “The Secrets of the House,” even though her existence is a significant narrative plot point. As such, the soundscape of the musical works to place Bertha in

¹⁶⁶ Caird and Gordon, *Jane Eyre the Musical*, 21-22.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

a zone of nonbeing, not allowing Bertha to take part in one of the major elements that uniquely comprise the American musical—namely that of singing supported by orchestrations.

The only moment in which Bertha vocalizes more than “sardonic” laughter is in the finale of Act I. “Sirens,” an unrequited love song between Jane and Rochester, details how they separately bemoan their thus far unrealized mutual attraction. At the end of the musical number, as Jane and Rochester sing overlapping melodies, “The Figure” joins them with a distant series of “aahs” that last until the end of the song:

ROCHESTER	THE FIGURE	JANE
She calls to me	Ah!	Heal his pain
She calls to me	Ah!	Calm his sea
	Aaaah!	And let him sail on
		Gentler waters to me ¹⁶⁸

As the song concludes, Jane, Rochester, and “The Figure” are held for a moment in eerie stillness as the lights fade around them. In this moment, Bertha vocalizes for the first time giving her a small place in the musical landscape of the production. However, even in the moments when Bertha is seen on stage in a critical component of the musical—the Act I musical finale—she is positioned upstage in shadows, subsumed yet again by Rochester, Jane, and their budding affection.

As is made clear through the design elements, up until this point in the musical, Bertha’s existence is often suggested and obscured, painting a picture of who is below the white lace veil rather than explicitly naming it. The musical falls short in showing us Bertha as more than a menace, placing her and her living quarters in the zone of nonbeing unworthy of social consideration as Fanon theorizes. I analyze all these elements in order to identify how Bertha’s nonbeing is produced on stage through the consequential decisions of the design. Bertha is

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 77.

introduced as a narrative force—one we are to understand is a character with significant impact on plot and structure—but she is simultaneously and consistently placed in the zone of nonbeing on account of aesthetic design choices. As a result, Bertha is produced as a person in the zone of nonbeing because the musical outlines her personhood just long enough to begin closing off the possibilities of her existence. This is my critical observation: design and direction result in consequences that are essential for the forward movement of the narrative that both create personhood and simultaneously disavow it within the same technologies. By naming it here in *Jane Eyre the Musical*, I illuminate how it operates in this production and how it informs my reading of Bertha Mason and her accordant madness on stage.

Take, for example, how Bertha meets her mortal end within the musical. Having been faced with the reality of Rochester's legal wife, Jane departs Thornfield Hall feeling betrayed. In a similarly affective state, Bertha, after learning of Rochester's plan to marry Jane, rampages through the house, ultimately setting it ablaze before throwing herself off the roof. Here the staging of the musical moves beyond using design to materialize madness and its corporeal state and into literally staging the consequences of Bertha's madness on account of Rochester's betrayal. Cast in shadow with red light highlighting her from either side, Bertha runs through the house, her exact actions indiscernible in the dim illumination. Even in her moments of greatest agency—when she is acting upon her emotions in a way that she has not yet been able to do—her body is obscured in shadow so intense it is difficult to locate her within the mansion's walls.

It is not until Bertha climbs to the top of the manor that she is fully materialized as an embodied being, even though it is short lived. Draped from head to toe in the same white lace fabric the audience has seen before, Bertha throws herself off the top of Thornfield Hall and into the raging flames below. The staging of this number grants Bertha her fully embodied self, if

only briefly. As she thrusts herself off the building, she begins falling in slow motion, obviously held up by a rigging system designed to control the speed in which the actress plummets into the mix of hazy reds below. As Bertha flails slowly, the floor of the stage is lit in glowing red and amber hues, with a design that makes it appear as though the flames are growing rapidly, maddeningly enveloping her fully clothed body. The projected walls which previously flanked Bertha and suggested Thornfield Hall's interior are slowly pulled away, physically removing the only steadfast consistency in her life. The stage becomes an empty slate, with only flames to suggest her final resting place. Bertha's white veiled body is so abstract in its descent that it becomes one with the blaze. The audience is unable to tell where Bertha's body begins and the lapping flames end. The scene quickly cuts to black before we are reunited with Jane, daydreaming about the future that could have been with Rochester if it were not for the roadblock that was Bertha's mad existence.

While the death of Bertha Mason makes for a highly theatrical event on stage, the narrative impact of her suicide has reverberations throughout the show. The fully designed sequence of Bertha's death, while lushly staged, occurs in less than two minutes. In a notable divergence from the book—which does not extensively detail Bertha's suicide or arson beyond a quick recollection from Mrs. Fairfax—the musical goes to even greater lengths to demonstrate Bertha's demise. In so doing, they ensure that they aesthetically flesh out her scenes long enough to establish her as an important character but fall short of giving her any narrative autonomy that would humanize her. This decision—to give Bertha's menacing madness so much space and her materialized existence so little—highlights madness as a narrative function within the show itself. Musical theatre, as an artform that requires relentless embodiment to convey meaning and messages, chooses to remove the materialized existence of the very mad woman whose presence

imbues context within and throughout Thornfield Hall. Thus, the paradox of materializing nonbeing comes full circle.

I analyze Bertha's existence within the scope of both her madness and her mixedness for the consequences of each run deep in *Jane Eyre the Musical*. Multiracial characters in theatre and performance are often situated as the tragic mulatta trope (a trope that subsumes the quadroon, and octoroon, among others) and have been used historically to exoticize women for their non-whiteness. In acknowledging this history, I position Bertha, as a mixed-race woman, well within this genealogy.¹⁶⁹ This practice exemplifies what Joseph Roach identifies as the "role of surrogation in both the transmission and the displaced transmission of cultural forms and attitudes."¹⁷⁰ Surrogation consists of a process through which attempts are made to fill 'cavities' created by death or other forms of departure with replacements. As a practice in surrogation, Joseph Roach argues that these tropes are meant to displace the legacy of sexual violence of Black women as constitutive of slavery. The tragic mulatta trope illustrates a symbolic and material linkage between the representation of race and gender, in which both become commodities. That Bertha is canonically read as a mixed-race woman with racial ambiguity, exposes her to the double bind of racism and misogyny as observed by La Marr Jurelle Bruce: "black women are subject to misogynist myths of female hysteria *and* antiblack fantasies of black savagery."¹⁷¹ Indeed, Jane and the staff at Thornfield Hall refer to Bertha as "a wild animal" with "grizzled hair" and "bloated features," situating her as an always threatening, undesirable woman on account of not only her madness, but also her mixedness.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

¹⁷⁰ Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 217.

¹⁷¹ Bruce, *How to Go Mad Without Losing Your Mind*, 26.

¹⁷² Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 446 and 447.

Madness, though, is much more than a diagnostic placed on a body by medical staff. As a narrative trope made clear throughout the story, madness operates in the text to position Bertha as an always already mad being by way of her family history and behavior, whose danger to others is so well documented as to require confining her to an inaccessible portion of her own home. This behavior—that of cordoning off mad people in pursuit of collective safety—follows the historical notion that mad people are a menace to society and must be removed for fear of contamination. It, too, mirrors notions of racial contamination that permeate the tragic mulatta's narrative throughout since she represents “conflicted visions of national and racial exclusion and belonging.”¹⁷³ *Jane Eyre the Musical* is no exception here, highlighting Bertha's madness as an undesirable and dangerous nuisance in the otherwise hopeful circumstances of Jane and Rochester's budding love. The last piece of aesthetic choice that I turn to now considers what I have only thus far mentioned with respect to design: casting and the physical body of Bertha Mason.

Dramaturgy in Action/Dramaturgy Inaction: The Casting of Bertha Mason

I have stated previously that Bertha is dispossessed of her personhood by way of both her madness and her race, and that her madness is made manifest through the design resulting in a critical paradox. I further conflate the intersection of madness and race in *Jane Eyre the Musical* because of how Bertha Mason, as a notable historical literary character from Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, is stereotyped and interpolated. Even if Bertha is a somewhat ambiguously raced character in the novel, the treatment she receives from other characters certainly aligns her with the historical treatment of Black people in the West Indies, as Susan Meyer suggests:

¹⁷³ Eve Allegra Raimon, *The “Tragic Mulatta” Revisited: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Antislavery Fiction*, 1 online resource (x, 202 pages) vols. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 11.

But when [Bertha] actually emerges in the course of the action, the narrative associates her with blacks, particularly with the black Jamaican antislavery rebels, the Maroons. In the form in which she becomes visible in the novel, Bertha has *become* black as she is constructed by the narrative.¹⁷⁴

As Bertha's Brother Richard points out (somewhat oddly and unnecessarily) in his attestation to her marriage to Rochester, she is the daughter of "Jonas Mason, merchant, and of Antoinetta Mason, his wife, a Creole."¹⁷⁵ The word "Creole" was used in the nineteenth century to refer to both Black and white people born in the West Indies. So, while scholars debate over an ambiguity in Bertha's race, I take up Meyer's line of reasoning precisely because of how Rochester speaks of Bertha's madness: "...she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard!"¹⁷⁶ Rochester locates both madness and drunkenness in Bertha's maternal line, which has ambiguously been labeled "Creole." In doing so, he associates Bertha's ancestry with two common stereotypes about Black people in the nineteenth century.¹⁷⁷

Given that Brontë's novel suggests a racialization of Bertha that is intricately tied up with her allegedly inherited madness, I would be remiss not to mention the consequences of casting Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre the Musical*. Just as the aesthetic design choices impact the

¹⁷⁴ Susan L. Meyer, "Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of 'Jane Eyre,'" *Victorian Studies* 33, no. 2 (1990), 252. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷⁵ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 318; Brontë's text, too, suggests that Richard Mason is a white passing mixed-race man, describing his complexion as "singularly sallow yet socially white."

¹⁷⁶ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 522.

¹⁷⁷ The major moral and political issue of the 1840s in the United States was the debate about abolition, with an interesting sidelight provided by the national census of 1840. When the results were published in 1841, it was possible for the first time to obtain governmentally tracked data concerning madness in the US. The total number of those reported to be mad ("insane" or "feeble-minded") was over 17,000, of which 3,000 were Black. Anti-abolitionists used this as "scientific" reason that enslaved Black people were congenitally unfit for freedom, with some pointing out that freed Black people had "invariably sunk into vice and pauperism, accompanied by the bodily and mental inflictions thereto—deafness, blindness, insanity, and idiocy." The census, while US based, spawned medical literature shared globally that furthered the stereotypes of free Black people as insane drunkards on account of their liberated position.

audience's narrative understanding of the show, the casting of each character imbues meaning, too, since the body is "never an empty vessel" and that "[p]ower is performed between bodies and groups of bodies, and...is quite visceral."¹⁷⁸ What Jayna Brown suggests in her book *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* is pivotal to my argument. Bodies and how they are represented, by themselves and in tandem with aesthetic design choices on stage, make meaning within and around narratives. These narratives that I explore in *Jane Eyre the Musical* are of no exception, since the role of Bertha Mason largely theorized to be a mixed-race woman, was portrayed by Marguerite MacIntyre, a white actress with prominent credits such as Nellie Forbush from *South Pacific* to her name.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, in almost every production of *Jane Eyre the Musical* in which I could find a cast list, the actress portraying Bertha was white or white-passing.

I want to be clear here about my reading of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre the Musical*, since I acknowledge that I'm entering territory where my critique could be taken as a prescription of how I believe the show should have been produced. In the interest of avoiding that, I couple conversations with the creative team with how I read the extraction of Bertha's race in this production to identify how the casting of the role plays into a continual disavowal of Bertha and further complicates her incarceration on account of her madness. I am particularly interested in how the creative team inadvertently sidesteps what seems to be a necessary conversation about Bertha's race in the interest of centering Jane's psychological state, yet again playing into the continual marginalization of Bertha. As composer and lyricist Paul Gordon pointed out, the creative team was less concerned with the racial implications of the show and instead cast

¹⁷⁸ Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 34.

¹⁷⁹ According to the opening night *Playbill* in 2000. I cite the role of Nellie Forbush as relevant to this argument, for it is a role canonically understood as and represented by a white woman.

MacIntyre because “she can do anything.”¹⁸⁰ This casting decision does not simply extract race from the equation but rather it opens up a tangled web of considerations about how race does or does not play out on stage, complicated by the novel’s thinly veiled ambiguity about her appearance and the subsequent adaptation into a stage musical. To be clear, I’m not suggesting that the creative team maliciously or with specific intent set out to erase a historical narrative that centers a mixed-race woman. Rather, I’m pointing out how the lack of historical context and subsequent casting practices raise questions about how madness is thus variously materialized on stage.

Following Brown’s work, I cannot understate the power dynamics that result from casting a white actress as Bertha Mason. Not only for the role itself, but also for the ways in which the musical requires the actress to take part in worldmaking throughout the musical. In *Jane Eyre the Musical*, the actress playing Bertha Mason doubles as other characters throughout. She appears not only as the madwoman in the attic, but also as a party guest and staff member at Thornfield Hall in various scenes. Because of this, within the walls of the mansion, a racially homogenous experience persists. It is notable that historically characters such as Bertha Mason—those that are understood to be of mixed-race background—were not historically written to be performed by mixed-race women. They were written for and performed by white women for white audiences to fantasize about the bodies of mixed-race women through the phantasmagoric stock character rendered through the white female body. Though perhaps not intentional, the creators of the musical engage in this practice by casting a white woman in the role. *Jane Eyre the Musical* continues in a performance tradition that is, by twenty-first century

¹⁸⁰ Paul Gordon, email to author, June 10, 2022; though it is not necessarily standard that the composer and lyricist help make casting decisions, Gordon highlighted that he was “very involved with the casting process” because creating “a musical of JANE EYRE was [his] idea” that he ultimately took to his writing partner, John Caird.

standards, roundly critiqued. However, it does have deep genealogical roots in the history of the American musical.

In the continuing discussion about Bertha's race and subsequent casting practices employed therein, I want to acknowledge explicitly a tension in the temporal existence of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. The novel was penned forty years after the cessation of enslavement in the United Kingdom, yet almost twenty years prior to the passage of the thirteenth amendment in the United States, effectively abolishing the practice. This temporal tension plays out on stage, as the British novel is adapted by American writers, and I find it most palpable in the casting. Brontë's vision of mixedness would have been informed by a national reckoning with enslavement, thus it becomes possible (and plausible to a Victorian-era audience) that the handsomely decorated white suitor may marry a mixed-race woman if the financial gain were worth the "risk." I do not intend to suggest that racism and prejudice in the United Kingdom were absent when Brontë wrote *Jane Eyre*, but rather to indicate that the national framework within which the novel was written inherently informs the feasibility of Bertha's marriage to Rochester, and thus, the musical.

Following this temporal tension, the musical adaptation of Brontë's novel mirrors a performance tradition that is uniquely American. Indeed, the practice of dispossession for mixed-race women was literally staged on the auction block in the United States, wherein any woman who was not fully white was stripped of her personhood in the interest of capital gain.¹⁸¹ As Melissa Blanco Borelli highlights before dismantling the stereotype, tragic mulattas were characterized by being "unable to completely inhabit one side of the racial dichotomy, riddled with socioeconomic problems, entering into heterosexual relationships out of economic

¹⁸¹ Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 213.

necessity.”¹⁸² In an antebellum United States South, in which the definition between racialized bodies is critical to the formation of the enslaved workforce, notions of mixedness challenges the ideology of racial inferiority. An ideology that *Jane Eyre the Musical*, perhaps accidentally, sidesteps in its representation of Bertha as the mad mixed-race woman in the attic by casting a white actress in the role.

Joseph Roach in his book *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* contends that mixed-race female characters are representational of societal fear and desire. I take up Roach’s core arguments and build upon it to complicate its notions with madness as an additional analytic. As potentially white-passing people, mixed-race women demonstrate the precarity of domestic femininity in the racially defined United States. They embody a violent distinction between public and private identities, living in mortal fear of exposure. The discovery of a mixed-race woman’s identity could rip her from her home, where she may end up on an auction block as capital thus subjected to the oppressive and violent structure of enslavement.

Roach’s work centers on characters of mixed-race, the tragic mulatta among them. I take up some of Roach’s theorizing here alongside the work of Blanco Borelli to think through Bertha’s position as both a mixed-race and mad woman. As a woman whose madness is not immediately known, Bertha is initially allowed the comforts of an affluent domestic life with Rochester. Given her potential phenotypic representation, she likely “could move through varying spaces of (ambiguous) racial identity and domesticity” which might position her “as a woman with a certain degree of access.”¹⁸³

¹⁸² Blanco Borelli in Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez, eds., *Black Performance Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 77.

¹⁸³ Blanco Borelli in *Black Performance Theory*, 81.

What is interesting to me here is how notions of mixed-race ancestry were at the root of the original creation of *Jane Eyre*, and how the extraction of which in the musical adaptation dismisses the dramaturgical roots therein. How does the conflation of race and madness shape the representation of madness and what does it mean for our understanding of madness on those terms? How does the knowledge of Bertha's full identity inform the production even when the audience does not know it? How might a Black woman in the role—and the discussions in rehearsal—have changed choices and interpretations in acting and staging? These are questions that lingered after I watched the archival recording and ones I knew would benefit from context that only the creative team itself could provide.

I exchanged emails with the musical's composer, Paul Gordon, who spoke about how he approached writing the music and lyrics for the role of Bertha Mason:

Bertha is one of those characters that you know immediately, one is not going to write a “proper song” for her, so it was really an evolution of what musical language to incorporate for her character. I tried several different approaches along the way, but we finally hit upon the right notes (no pun intended). In a way, she was the most difficult character to create because she doesn't really have a “voice,” and her story is never really told.¹⁸⁴

I find Gordon's comments here intriguing, for they acknowledge a “voicelessness” that defines Bertha in the source text and subsequently in their own iteration. Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, this idea of Bertha as little more than a plot device is mirrored in an interview I had with the Broadway production's co-Director, Scott Schwartz:

It wasn't that Bertha was an afterthought, of course not. I mean, she's a major figure in the plot. But I have to say the journey that I was on with the show was much more focused on Jane's psychology and Jane's desire and Jane's wants, and Bertha was sort of a fact. She existed and she was this problem that Rochester had. And we talked a little bit about why with Marguerite McIntyre, who played Bertha...and listen, we were doing this in the mid, late nineties and so attitudes about psychology, attitudes about women and women's rights...were a little different. I think we viewed Bertha more through the lens

¹⁸⁴ Paul Gordon, email to author, June 10, 2022.

of her plot function than an equal figure to Jane...[o]bviously, we gave her a place where she could be. She had that balcony that she ultimately fell from to her death...But to be honest, we didn't have a lot of conversations about how we define Bertha's space.¹⁸⁵

When I asked explicitly about the canonical conversation around Bertha as a mixed-race woman and how that conversation manifested in their own process, Schwartz was quick to point out that they assumed she was a white woman:

...there was certainly no negative reason why we wouldn't have wanted a person of color in that role. And we did have a few people of color, I believe, in the cast, but sort of the role, because of tradition, I think, we assumed was basically a white landowner kind of figure.¹⁸⁶

Through my conversations, it became clear that the erasure of Bertha as a mixed-race woman was not an intentional or malicious move on behalf of the creators, but rather a product of dramaturgical naivete of the source material.

These conversations led me to consider the questions I prompted previously. How *would* this show change if a Black or mixed-race actress were cast in the role? How *does* Bertha's race and madness conflate to make meaning about the narrative? What palimpsestuous residue from the novel and the historical connotations of Bertha's race are leftover and what does that mean for the musical adaptation? Practically speaking, to cast a Black or mixed-race actress into the role of Bertha Mason would create racial dynamics in the world of the musical that currently do not exist. As posited earlier, the actress in the role of Bertha Mason participates in other scenes as an ensemble member. Notably and with few exceptions, the fellow ensemble members and the entirety of the lead cast are white. The racial homogeneity in the source text serves to constantly other Bertha as a non-normative being on account of both her mixed-race ancestry and her madness, something that does not occur in the musical because of the aesthetic architecture the

¹⁸⁵ Scott Schwartz, Zoom interview with author, June 27, 2022.

¹⁸⁶ Scott Schwartz, Zoom interview with author, June 27, 2022.

creative team employed. In the musical, we cannot glean details about Bertha's race because she is so constantly veiled and in shadow. This positions Bertha as simply a mad woman whose existence within the narrative is only to be Rochester and Jane's tragic foil. It eschews conversations about Rochester's complicity in Bertha's maddening circumstances, namely being married off and whisked away from her home to assimilate to Rochester's way of life. Left with little more than the representations the musical offers, Bertha reads as a character who simply has gone mad and one that Rochester must deal with, rather than a victim of relentless treatment on account of both her race and her cognitive state that understandably pushed her to her supposed breaking point.

To speak of the palimpsestuous residue that remains from the musical's source text is to explore the historical legacies that popular notions of madness continue to exist within. Part of my formulation of mad dramaturgy acknowledges the ways in which this residue continues to inform materialized madness on stage, in both restrictive and liberatory ways. In *Jane Eyre the Musical*, I've laid out that the construct of madness both in the narrative and as it has been materially constructed is a restrictive and potentially reductive representation. Conversely, then, what would a liberatory representation of Bertha's story look like? Perhaps, Bertha's most liberating narrative is one that predates *Jane Eyre's* insistence on her non-normative state. And this idea—exploring Bertha's world before all the maddening circumstances she was thrown into took hold—is well trodden terrain.

It is notable to me that both composer Paul Gordon and co-Director Scott Schwartz, in two separate interviews, mentioned that they would be interested in adapting Jean Rhys' 1966 novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* into a musical. Rhys' novel serves as a postcolonial and feminist prequel to Brontë's, describing Bertha and Rochester's marriage from Bertha's point-of-view. In

this work, Bertha's story is told from the time of her youth in Jamaica (wherein she was known as Antoinette Cosway before being renamed by her betrothed), through her unhappy marriage, and then through her subsequent isolation from the rest of the world. Throughout the novel, she is caught in a patriarchal society in which she fully belongs neither to Europe nor to Jamaica and explores the power of relationships between men and women while discussing themes of race, Caribbean history, and assimilation.

Perhaps I'm drawn to Gordon and Schwartz's interest here because of its distinct and easily identifiable separation from Jane's story. Though, I gather my interest lies more here because, to me, this feels like the most liberatory path for Bertha's story to expand. If a musical adaptation of *Wide Sargasso Sea* were cast with the historically understood canonical representation of Bertha as a mixed-race woman, much could narratively be mined to explore how the path to her madness lies in patriarchal and racist structures that determines who is and is not mad. To explore Bertha's story prior to where *Jane Eyre* and *Jane Eyre the Musical* pick up would necessitate a dramaturgical exploration of Bertha's life, not only how she came to England, but also with the circumstances that led to her removal in the first place, and its subsequent role in the accordant madness we witness throughout Caird and Gordon's musical adaptation. This would require a type of mad dramaturgy that views madness as a space to live otherwise, to navigate how socially attributed non-normativity is a mode of being that makes meaning in potentially equal measure as that which is dubbed "normal." Though it is not likely that *Wide Sargasso Sea* in any iteration could answer or address all of the nuances Bertha's existence can provide, it could serve as a way to dismantle the idea of normativity by removing the character to whom Bertha's excess is most often compared—Jane Eyre.

Conclusion: It's a Mad, Mad World

Jane Eyre the Musical follows a specific performance tradition in casting white women to play mixed-race characters and characters of color on stage—a practice that whitewashes the embodied experience of women of color in particular. In *Jane Eyre the Musical* this is seen through specifically designed elements, ephemeral techniques such as lighting and sound, and casting a white woman to portray the canonically understood mixed-race character of Bertha Mason. Indeed, these dichotomies introduce a paradox in which Bertha's non-beingness and personhood are disavowed through an intense materialization, situating her as a critical narrative force before her death at the climax of the musical. That the creative team saw Bertha as little more than a “fact” they had to work into the narrative demonstrates a, perhaps accidental, avoidance of the intersectional possibilities in Bertha and Jane's story.

The dramaturgical structure of *Jane Eyre the Musical* largely operates within an Aristotelian conceptualization of storytelling, but one that is challenged by madness as a recurrent and reverberating inevitability. Casting in *Jane Eyre the Musical*, for example, opens considerations of madness and erasure—two linked concepts by way of madness' pathologization as a shameful experience to be hidden from view. The literal whitewashing of Bertha Mason, a character who is popularly known as mixed-race, removes the complicated racial dynamics that permeate the rest of the work. These legacies loom large in the background imbuing the musical with American society's inescapable relationship to racialized and gendered notions of madness.

Chapter 3: Mad Mourning Mothers

Diana Goodman, the matriarch featured in the Broadway musical *Next to Normal*, kneels on the edge of the stage in a plaid bathrobe. She frantically attempts to assemble sandwiches to get ahead on lunches for the week as her family disconcertingly looks on. This is her next manic episode. Her husband, Dan, exhibiting a dichotomously calm demeanor, brings Diana out of her interiority by stopping her frenetic behavior. What was previously a hectic scene underscored by rapidly increasing tempo and disjointed percussive undercurrent ends with stunned silence as her husband and children interrupt her harried sandwich assembling. This moment, occurring during the opening number of the musical, physically and aurally aligns Diana's existence with madness.

The narrative of *Next to Normal*, with books and lyrics by Brian Yorkey and music by Tim Kitt, centers around Diana Goodman, a middle-aged mother struggling to cope with the ongoing effects of her bipolar disorder. The musical charts Diana's symptomatology, which is fixated around the traumatic loss of her infant son, Gabe. Following Diana through various modes of treatment, including psychotherapy, psychiatry, and even electroshock therapy, the musical highlights how Diana's mad state interrupts and intercedes in what, on the surface, appears to be the ideal nuclear family unit. Crucially, the central way the musical points out the impact Diana's mad state has on the family is by staging continual ways in which she fails to fully show up as a mother. In this chapter, I explore how Diana's madness, narratively posited as a genealogical truism for both her and her daughter Natalie, plays into misogynistic, eugenic narratives of mad genetic contamination. *Next to Normal* operates within medical and ableist paradigms of madness that indict Diana for both her and her family's unhappy reality. This is manifested through the aesthetic architecture of the musical, employing a mad dramaturgical

framework through theatrical elements and techniques that are designed to overwhelm and over-determine the narrative in ways that mirror how madness subsumes. *Next to Normal* falls into my consideration of the madness musical par excellence for the ways in which the narrative relies on madness as a predetermined outcome to structure almost every other element of the production. In practice, the musical also reifies the inherent racism of eugenics by whitewashing the narrative of alleged genetic contamination, a consideration I turn to in closing this chapter.

I pay particular attention to *Next to Normal* as my case study here for a few reasons. It is a Pulitzer Prize winning musical, celebrated for its “breathhtaking” qualities that, *The New York Times* reviewer Ben Brantley claims, “never for a minute...lets you escape the anguish at the core of [the character’s] lives.”¹⁸⁷ Trapped within this critically lauded musical are gender dynamics that are hard to ignore, and ones that are particularly salient to explore notions of femininity, madness, and how motherhood is narratively used to signal a predetermination for madness. Diana’s mad state and subsequent behaviors are always played in contrast to her husband’s responses. Similarly, she is often positioned as a damsel in distress saved only by various men who seek to save her from herself. The gender dynamics at play throughout the musical forward a sexist archetype wherein the mad woman must be saved by her heterosexual love interest, or else not exist at all. This narrative trope, too, extends to her daughter Natalie, whose saving grace from a life devolving is her boyfriend, Henry.

In this way, *Next to Normal* operates on a series of narrative tropes about women and mothers that reduce Diana’s existence to little more than a crazy woman who can’t get her life together. I am placing the madwoman in this pre-existing genealogy and, while it is outside the scope of this project, my insights on mad women prompt a reconsideration of female archetypes

¹⁸⁷ Ben Brantley, “Fragmented Psyches, Uncomfortable Emotions: Sing Out!,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 2009, sec. Theater, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/16/theater/reviews/16norm.html>.

in musical theatre writ large. There's been a plethora of feminist scholarship that focus on narrative tropes of women on stage, however musicals have largely been left out of such considerations. For example, Diana falls well in line with the narrative tropes of the overbearing and absent mother that permeated theatre in the twentieth century. The use of these tropes is seen as far back as Medea, whose murder of her children is represented as stemming from a determination to wreak vengeance that could "supposedly only be the product of a madwoman."¹⁸⁸ Such representations often situate women in relation to the patriarchal governing structure of society; a structure they narratively have little control to change yet are bound to operate within.

Interrogating the relationship between the representation of women on stage and the historical theatrical legacies in which they operate is essential to understanding the form as a reflection of American values since, as musical theatre scholar Stacy Wolf points out, gender "inflects and shapes every aspect of the musical."¹⁸⁹ Put bluntly, women in musicals are often portrayed positively—as independent, intelligent beings—or in a surplus of misogynistic roles being "commonly identified as the Bitch, the Witch, the Vamp and the Virgin/Goddess."¹⁹⁰ Prominent feminist scholars Sue-Ellen Case and Elaine Aston succinctly distinguish such categorizations in their book *Feminism and Theatre*—a text that left an indelible mark on the discipline at the end of the last century.¹⁹¹ What I'm arguing is that madness underpins narratives

¹⁸⁸ Ann Fox, "Scene in a New Light: Monstrous Mothers, Disabled Daughters, and the Performance of Feminism and Disability in *Light in the Piazza* (2005) and *Next to Normal* (2008)," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, ed. Blake Howe et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 775; E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London ; Routledge, 1992), <http://www.gbv.de/dms/hbz/toc/ht004279110.PDF>.

¹⁸⁹ Stacy Wolf, *Changed for Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6.

¹⁹⁰ Case and Aston, *Feminism and Theatre*, 17.

¹⁹¹ It's important to note here that while Case and Aston's work mentions *Bayou* as a musical produced within the feminist tradition in the 1970s, it does not include in-depth analysis about the genre of musical theatre as a site for political potentiality or feminist theorizing. This is not to say that their work cannot be

throughout theatre history and that my work can help us excavate and nuance existent feminist historiographies.

Add to these conventions and tropes historicized notions of madness, and the American musical becomes a site for popular representations of the mad woman, as Scott Wallin suggests in his work on the pathologization of disability and madness in the genre:

Oppressive tropes of madness as metaphor and archetype are ubiquitous in American musical theater because they are useful. Such tropes efficiently perform a kind of shorthand: they strengthen narrative or clarify character in ways that have little or nothing to do with the actual individual, social, and political experiences of people who live with psychosocial disabilities. At the same time, they universalize what are in actuality diverse and multifarious experiences. Rather than illuminate, educate, and explore, such tropes invalidate, infantilize, and misinform.¹⁹²

Wallin's points here coalesce with my own research in that he offers a consideration of the functional use of madness in musical theatre both narratively and materially. As such, musicals are the place where underlying tropes of madness pop up as literal dramaturgical choices. Such choices afford my own analysis not only a space for critical interrogation of how mad women are made and materialized on stage, but also about how they engender a conversation about madness' historical social construction. This is very much suggested in *Next to Normal* as the narrative portrays madness as something that is matrilineally passed down and must be curtailed or, ultimately, excised. In other words, these representations, literally staged, offer audiences a space to identify and consider how society's interpretations of the intersections of femininity and madness posit womanhood in oppressive ways.

This line of thinking—that an inferior way of being must be curtailed and extinguished—has deep ties to the eugenic theories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As

applied to musicals, but rather to highlight the opportunity for musical theatre to be considered in a different framework that accounts for all the elements that uniquely comprise the genre.

¹⁹² Scott Wallin, "Next to Normal and the Persistence of Pathology in Performances of Psychosocial Disability," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2012), 7.

Tamsen Wolff makes clear in her book *Mendel's Theatre: Heredity, Eugenics, and Early Twentieth Century American Drama*, American theatre and the American eugenics movement are “[l]inked by their investment in the relationship between performance and heredity.”¹⁹³ Indeed, as Wolff outlines, theatre has historically been a space that has forwarded narratives that center eugenic philosophies. Eugenics, the scientifically inaccurate theory that humans can be improved through selective breeding of populations, suggested that intelligence and social behaviors were solely the outcome of genetic inheritance. In fact, the relationship between theatre and the eugenics movement was especially pronounced, as the rise of eugenics coincided with the early twentieth century boom in show business.¹⁹⁴ At the time, theatre was variously used as a promotional tool for eugenic ideology, touring the country with shows and exhibitions that concretized such beliefs. I see *Next to Normal* engaging in similar discourses by using women’s bodies as the site of eugenic negotiation for mad people.

It is important to note here that eugenics was not a race neutral project. The musical sidesteps any conversation about genetic contamination related to race by featuring an all-white family, perhaps unintentionally though effectively, making it appear as though Diana’s story is made even more tragic because of her position as an affluent, educated, white suburban mother. As such, my analysis in this chapter largely focuses on notions of genetic contamination as they relate to madness, though I turn to the racial realities of the eugenics movement that have been whitewashed from this narrative in later sections of the chapter.

¹⁹³ Tamsen Wolff, *Mendel's Theatre: Heredity, Eugenics, and Early Twentieth-Century American Drama*, 1st ed, Palgrave Studies in Theatre and Performance History (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1.

¹⁹⁴ Karen H. Rothenberg, “From Eugenics to the New Genetics: The Play’s the Thing,” *Fordham Law Review* 79, no. 2 (2011 2010): 407–34.

The musical, through its speculation and demonstration that Natalie, Diana's daughter, is an always-already vessel for madness on account of her mother's mental state, lines up with eugenic considerations of embodiment, for "[e]ugenic insistence on the visibility and force of the past in the present offer[s] a perfect resource for dramatists interested in developing complex relationships between the past and the present onstage."¹⁹⁵ In focusing on the relationship between the past and the present, theatre was an ideal mimetic vessel to literally stage and demonstrate how the past and all the behaviors that eugenicists might deem unfit can be "corrected" in future iterations or generations. Indeed, the aesthetic architecture of *Next to Normal* is designed to show Diana's madness as an overwhelming, over-determined inevitability of both her existence and Natalie's. It does so by telescoping Diana's past madness-making incidents, literally materializing them on stage, and subsequently projecting them onto Natalie's future. Because Diana's madness is associated with her maternity, specifically, it is seen as transmissible through the matrilineal line. In essence, *Next to Normal* builds upon Wolff's theorizing here by materializing on stage the mad-inducing elements of Diana's past with her very real present and fully embodied family. This is how *Next to Normal* pathologizes Diana.

What follows in this chapter is a close analysis of *Next to Normal* that highlights the musical's mad dramaturgical framework and the imbrication of that framework with eugenic ideologies. I focus on the narrative overdetermination of matrilineal madness as prescribed to both Diana and her daughter Natalie through the overwhelming aestheticization and materialization of psychosis. In a musical that claims a progressive representation of mental illness, it relies upon antiquated sexist notions of madness as an inherited genetic trait, one specifically linked to motherhood. In *Next to Normal*, madness overwhelms and over-determines

¹⁹⁵ Wolff, *Mendel's Theatre*, 115.

through various material elements that stage Diana's madness: including sonic cacophony, the embodiment of Diana's late son Gabe, and the staging of Diana's other hallucinations.

The Pathologization of Diana Goodman

Next to Normal goes to great lengths to reify the notion that Diana's madness is a mental pathology. It does so through not only the narrative, but also with aesthetic architecture that position Diana's madness as an overarching inevitability. As Scott Wallin notes, the design elements of the musical communicate that Diana's madness stems from only her mind, divorcing her mad state from any immediate environmental influence:

The abstract scaffolding set that depicts [the Goodman's] self-designed, three-level home gleams with steel, brilliant colors, and an industrial shine that suggests an antiseptic cleanliness. This sterility suggests a clinical space free of any external factors that might contribute to madness...the environment has little significance at all beyond functioning as a mirror of Diana's mind, which suggests that all the vital aspects of Diana's madness lie behind her two eyes, which are literally printed on the second-story windows. In fact, the entire house is a pictorial and metaphorical representation of her head.¹⁹⁶

Wallin's reading of the set here falls directly in line with my analysis about madness, which centers not only the narrative import around madness but also its subsequent relentless materialization vis a vis the design elements in *Next to Normal*. By removing any indication that external factors could have played a role in Diana's madness, the narrative gives into historical notions of hysteria and mental illness that stigmatize madness.

In the original Broadway production—the production on which my close readings of the design elements are based—the vertical span of the theatre space is anchored by three distinct levels, abstractly suggesting the outline of a house.¹⁹⁷ The Goodman's home, presumably. The

¹⁹⁶ Scott Wallin, "Next to Normal and the Persistence of Pathology in Performances of Psychosocial Disability," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2012), 3.

¹⁹⁷ Not only did I view the archival footage of this production at the New York Public Library in July 2021, but I also personally saw the Broadway show in New York in July 2009.

upper levels of the house are initially obscured from view by two oversized eyes, designed in the likeness of comic book pointillism. These are the eyes of Diana Goodman, ominously looking out, an always already present and menacing force. I read this design as an inherent intrusion of Diana's madness. Before she is even formally introduced on stage her larger-than-life personal excess is on unavoidable display. Diana's eyes, always open and peering out on the set, are just diffused enough for the audience to see the inner-machinations of the three-story set behind, suggesting, perhaps, that Diana's inner-workings, too, are similarly obfuscated from her daily existence. As the narrative continues, we learn that this distance is on account of her mad state. The set of eyes float in and out of the story, often accompanying Diana on her trips to therapy or to her psychiatrist's office. Even when these eyes are not center stage, they are folded back on hinges so that they effectively compose the walls between rooms of the Goodman house.

Throughout the show, Diana experiences hallucinations of her deceased son, Gabe. Diana's hallucinations of Gabe are staged literally in that an actor portrays an 18-year-old version of him, but the only character who can see him is Diana. Taken in tandem with Gabe's aesthetically portrayed otherworldly existence, the eyes on the second story of the set position Diana's madness as omnipresent—an aesthetic manifestation that works to differentiate between Diana's forays into “sanity” and her madness which brings Gabe and Diana closer to one another, ultimately distancing her from her surviving family unit as a result.



A scene from *Next to Normal*; Michael Berry (l) as Dr. Fine/Dr. Madden, and Alice Ripley (r) as Diana Goodman. Set Design by Mark Wendland.

By placing Gabe in the upper portions of the home for much of the first act, and thus, in the area of the set design most readily interpreted as Diana's most interior consciousness, I read it as creating a space in which Diana's husband and daughter are continually caught between the corporeal world in front of her and the fantastical construction that occupies her psychological recesses. And, nevertheless, the madness that permeates *Next to Normal* is predicated on motherhood and is subsequently deemed a threat to the family. I spend time here drawing out this analysis to demonstrate how Diana's purported madness is narratively set up to be all inside her head. As the musical aesthetically structures it, Diana's family life is both the reason for her madness (metaphorically represented through the home as her head) and that her madness intrudes into her literal home through her hallucinations (materialized through Diana's corporealized hallucinations). Though Diana's hallucinations of Gabe start in the upper portions of the home, they slowly seep into other parts of the playing space suggesting that Diana's madness continually permeates all aspects of the family unit. I offer brief examples here to highlight the first moments we meet both Gabe and Natalie to point out how Natalie's madness is

aesthetically overdetermined from the outset as compared to Gabe's initial introduction. I do so in order to concretize how the aesthetic architecture of the musical sets up Diana's madness as a mental pathology and its alleged inevitable transmission to Natalie.

As the opening notes play out, Diana sits alone awaiting the late-night return of her son, Gabe. Or rather, she waits for what we come to learn is her hallucination of him. That the very first interaction of the show is one of maternal instinct and oversight—Diana waiting up for her son worrying about “the ways he could have died”—immediately establishes her position as a mother and one who is clearly exhibiting care for at least one of her children.¹⁹⁸ Though the audience does not yet know that Gabe is a hallucination, made manifest in Diana's manic visions, her madness is materialized through him as an infiltration to the Goodman home and the nuclear family within its walls. Gabe, dressed like many a teenage boy in a semi-fitted t-shirt and jeans, scoffs at his mother's concern, feebly attempting to convince her to worry less about his whereabouts since he's almost eighteen. Being shooed away by Diana, Gabe retreats to the second story of the home—Diana's metaphorical yet aesthetically manifested interiority—where he remains briefly before taking position on the third floor of the home for much of the first act.

Aesthetically, Gabe, as the staged manifestation of Diana's madness, is dashing. Young, fit, and charming, his smile is enough to loosen Diana's frustrations about his tardy late-night return. As the Goodman family goes about their morning routines, getting ready for work and school, Gabe watches from the abstractly suggested bathroom on the second floor. Clad only in white boxer shorts with a white towel draped over his shoulders, he hovers slightly above the hectic action of the rest of his family below. Though Gabe becomes a somewhat menacing and malicious force later in the musical (as I'll parse out throughout this chapter), his initial

¹⁹⁸ Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey, *Next to Normal* (New York, NY: Theatre Communications Group, 2010), 2.

presentation, and thus the initial manifestation of Diana's madness, is one of familial comfort and maternal care. This again links Diana's mad state with her maternity and the heteronormative suburban family that exists as a result.

So, while the figment of Diana's son embodied on stage seems to be endeared, if not slightly annoyed, by his mother's insistence on waiting up for him, as he posits in the opening scene, her living daughter, Natalie, does not appreciate her mother's presence as much. Throughout the opening number, Natalie is watched by Gabe who, decked out in ethereal white, contrasts Natalie's plaid pajama pants and oversized grey t-shirt ensemble. Natalie intervenes in the opening number only long enough to list off the tasks she must complete before school later that morning, interspersed with her taking long swigs from a canned energy drink. Her aura is chaotic yet uptight and driven as she quantifies the homework, practice sessions, and meetings that comprise her week. Our introduction to Natalie positions her as a neurotic perfectionist whose time is deliberately taken by school and piano lessons so as to keep her far from the family domicile.

After the opening number the first time we see Natalie away from Diana and her accordant madness is at school. She is diligently plugging away at a piano keyboard in a rehearsal room. Living in the dual "craziness" of both her mother and Mozart's legacy as she practices one of his sonatas, Natalie dreams of her life beyond high school and getting away from her "paranoid parents" in her introductory number "Everything Else." Underscored by Mozart's own music Natalie's introduction is ensconced in sonic cacophony. As the scene opens, the audience hears the cohesive lyrical melodies of classical music. It is flowing, simple, and clear. At the top of the song, Natalie recounts how Mozart was able to produce great work,

despite the mental illness that plagued him during his life—a parallel she draws to her own circumstances:

Mozart was crazy
Flat fucking crazy, batshit I hear
But his music's not crazy
It's balanced, it's nimble
It's crystalline clear.
There's harmony, logic—you listen to these
And, you don't hear his doubts or his debts or disease.¹⁹⁹

Initially, Natalie sings these lyrics in time with and mirroring the Mozart sonata underneath. As the musical number progresses, Mozart's clear arpeggios and chromatic scale runs give way to percussive beats that aurally juxtapose the clarity with which the number began. As Natalie sings of her impatience to get away from her family, both Mozart's flourishing sonata and the driving pulse of Natalie's solo song collide, causing a cacophony of noise that operates as competing soundscapes. The cacophony of noise the audience hears as Natalie plays Mozart while contemplating her own perceived pre-destined madness imbues the show with sonic friction. This friction is an aural technique unto itself in that it challenges audience perception of dialogue and narrative. The duality of "craziness" between her and Mozart, as Natalie puts it, is clear in both the lyrics she must sing, but also the underscoring of Mozart's own music, which is a stark contrast to the rock music in the song immediately preceding. I read the musical composition of this number as a technique to imbue the omnipresence of matrilineal madness since it utilizes two distinct and competing soundscapes to signal how deeply and expansively Natalie's experience with madness truly is.

In contrast to Gabe's suave and smooth entrance, Natalie's first solo scene is filled with anxiety, both her own and that which the disjointed music communicates. The sonic architecture

¹⁹⁹ Kitt and Yorkey, *Next to Normal*, 9.

around Natalie signals a madness already within, one that is operating against the grain of everything else around her. In this way, the musical over-determines Natalie's inevitable madness by injecting it into the very music that accompanies her story. Natalie can't escape the madness that haunts her, even when she metaphorically tries to play different notes. Drawing connections between Mozart and herself, Natalie lays out clearly why she's eager to go to college: she wants to be known for more than her mother's madness, which has caused her public humiliation and grief over the years. The legacy of madness runs deep here, leaving Natalie to worry that she might end up just like her mother and subsequently ruin all her own interpersonal relationships. And, perhaps Natalie has reason to worry within the confines of *Next to Normal*'s narrative, since Kitt and Yorkey's writing suggests that Diana's own madness is borne out of a genetic predisposition, as she recounts in a session with her psychotherapist:

DIANA: When I was young, my mother called me 'high spirited.' She would know. She was so high-spirited they banned her from the PTA.

DOCTOR MADDEN: Sometimes there's a predisposition to illness, but actual onset is only triggered by some...traumatic event.²⁰⁰

The dialogue here suggests that the ingredients of Diana's madness are genetic, inherited from her mother who experienced her own dysfunctional "high spirits" ultimately triggered by the untimely death of her son Gabe. By controlling for all other possible causes of her madness, *Next to Normal* presents a woman in distress largely because of her biological makeup and unlucky circumstances—a concern that Natalie attends to directly. Natalie succinctly ponders her future with her love interest Henry by asking him "Hey—am I crazy?/I might end up crazy."²⁰¹ That Natalie is always already aware of this potential impact on her life allows Diana's madness to

²⁰⁰ Kitt and Yorkey, 33; Dr. Fine here suggests what some studies refer to as multifactorial inheritance, a concept in which both external factors (such as trauma) trigger and operate in tandem with different genetic factors that impact how people handle that trauma.

²⁰¹ Kitt and Yorkey, *Next to Normal*, 88.

take on an omniscient presence, causing Natalie to question her own future as a result—a notion that scholars contend is part of the continual policing and maintenance of disability and madness itself.²⁰²

But it isn't just Diana's relationship with her children that work to pathologize her and her madness as solely a mental obstacle to overcome. Diana's husband, Dan, too, often situates his relationship with Diana and her madness solely as a medical conundrum in need of a cure. Dan, feeling that he is increasingly running out of treatment options to suggest for his wife, encourages her to visit her psychopharmacologist to find a new cocktail of pills that will remove Gabe from her hallucinatory landscape. Indeed, it is only when Diana expresses that she "feels nothing" after having tried several pills at the end of the musical number "Who's Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist and I" that her doctor deems her medically "stable."²⁰³ To those familiar with *The Sound of Music*, "Who's Crazy/My Psychopharmacologist and I" borrows the musical structure from the song "My Favorite Things." Listing off the various medications she has tried thus far, Diana's cadence and melody match almost exactly that of "My Favorite Things":

Zoloft and Paxil and Buspar and Xanax
Depakote, Klonopin, Ambien, Prozac
Ativan calms me when I see the bills
These are a few of my favorite pills²⁰⁴

The callback to a popular musical that features a surrogate mother is not coincidental here. Specifically, the matriarch in *The Sound of Music* is seen as a problem ("How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?"), and it is through her work as a governess to the Von Trapp family and falling in love with Captain Von Trapp, that she finds her personal salvation. In contrast, Diana

²⁰² Susan Burch and Michael A. Rembis, eds., *Disability Histories* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 2.

²⁰³ Kitt and Yorkey, 16.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

is a mad woman whose “problems” are so overdetermined that they cannot be solved by the traditional marriage trope because the son (and the circumstances of his death, which greatly contributes to her madness as the narrative posits) is the result of said heteronormative marriage. In so doing, the presence of both Diana as a heightened emotional figure, and the continual presence of Gabe in her life, reifies her genealogical trajectory in that she is a mad woman whose mad state is both on account of and from her own mother and her chosen maternity. This eugenic discourse ties Diana to the dichotomous well/unwell discourse that leading mad studies scholar Margaret Price contends centers a cure for Diana rather than considering her mental state wholly.²⁰⁵

To further pathologize Diana’s madness as solely a mental affliction, Dan often speaks of her in binaries. According to Dan there is everything before she went “crazy” and everything that has happened after, as he posits in the same musical number:

Who’s crazy?
The one who’s half-gone, or maybe
The one who hangs on?
Remembering when she was twenty and brilliant and bold,
and I was so young and dumb, and now I am...old.²⁰⁶

Drawing such a clear delineation here falls in line with pathologized notions of madness that have historically disproportionately affected women and people of color: someone is either “crazy” or they aren’t, and any deviation toward the former requires an immediate cure or isolation to remove them from society for fear of further danger. Specifically, I read this as a clear delineation of the gendered implications of madness. As librettist and lyricist Brian Yorkey states:

²⁰⁵ Price, Margaret, “Defining Mental Illness,” in Lennard J. Davis, *The Disability Studies Reader* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013).

²⁰⁶ Kitt and Yorkey, 15.

Exposing the stigma of mental illness is one of the reasons [composer Tom Kitt and I] wrote the show, why we pursued telling this story. We both feel that an awful lot of people try to live up to a standard of what they consider ‘normal’ and that actually can be as destructive as anything.²⁰⁷

I inherently focus here on Yorkey’s use of the word “normal.” In suggesting that normal is a concept that separates some individuals from others and can harm those who are unable to meet its standards, he echoes the basic argument of both disability and mad studies: society constructs an impossible standard of what is normal that alienates and disenfranchises people who cannot meet that threshold. Yet, even after this acknowledgement the writers still construct Diana and Natalie as women in search of unattainable normalcy, whose ultimate preoccupation with being normal is destructive to them both.

In *Next to Normal* madness is so overdetermined as to be an unavoidable reality for Natalie. What I’m pointing to here is the pre-destined narrative that permeated eugenic philosophies for decades. In essence, the musical positions madness as genetically inherited and inextricably linked to the trauma of motherhood. Diana’s mom was “high-spirited,” and her madness linked to her female parenting, as represented by the ultimate index of maternal social labor: the PTA. Diana’s madness is tied to Gabe’s death, and Natalie’s familial trauma all but pre-determines her to be a mad woman, too. It is present not only in the narrative, but in how madness is materialized for both Natalie and Diana throughout the musical. The overbearingness of this conceit of mad femininity as being inextricably related to motherhood informs the entire aesthetic structure of the musical, collapsing the past with the inevitability of Natalie’s future mad state. Even the audience’s initial introduction to Diana’s respective children situates them as dichotomous beings. Gabe is a dashing, charismatic teenager with an infectious boyish charm,

²⁰⁷ Tobin, “Next to Normal: Tackling Stigma on the Stage,” *BpHope.Com* (blog), November 1, 2009, <https://www.bphope.com/tackling-stigma-from-the-stage/>.

while Natalie is a perfectionist whose own mental health exists in the shadow of her mother's. The musical, too, has the audience consider Natalie's own future offspring by pairing her with love interest Henry early in the musical, following in the footsteps of the marriage trope that so often concludes musical theatre. The marriage trope in musical theatre foregrounds the eventual reproduction that married couples in the United States are expected to provide. In essence, I contend *Next to Normal* sets up, according to its own logic, an endless cycle of mad women, simply by way of the overwhelmingly heteronormative frame, as indexed through the show's set—a heteronormative home.

The misogynistic underpinnings of eugenic thinking are highlighted throughout the musical in that the narrative posits the continual affliction of madness as being the woman's fault. It does so through Diana's own narrative of navigating her madness, Natalie's response to her mother's madness therein, and the ways in which Diana must rely on and be righted by the men in her life. These elements comprise the mad dramaturgical ideology that materialize an inescapable matrilineal madness. Throughout my analysis, I demonstrate how the musical narrates and stages the relationship between madness and motherhood. I then show how it plays out eugenic ideology by making these links seem over-determined and inescapable through aesthetic architecture. This mirrors eugenic ideology itself: it is pre-determined and cannot be altered.

The Aesthetic Activation of Eugenic Ideology

In *Next to Normal* the trope of the mad mother is materialized as eugenically overdetermined by deploying it through the aesthetic architecture of the musical. In the case of Natalie, the daughter's predetermined mad fate is staged through music, lyrics, and direction that highlights Natalie's burgeoning anxieties, themselves triggered by Diana's madness. Notably,

the musical links Natalie and Diana as concurrent mad beings even when they are narratively and visually separated throughout the musical's progression, including from the very first moments of the show. During the opening number "Just Another Day" Diana refers to Natalie as "her daughter, though a genius, is a freak" engaging directly in discourses that seek to pathologize "freaks" as non-normative beings in need of containment.²⁰⁸ In a subtle acknowledgement of their non-normative existence, both Natalie and Diana foreshadow the resistance they push up against as mad women who must keep "a smile so white and winning all the way."²⁰⁹ This lyric, sung together in the opening number, creates an aural union between the women, signifying their shared genealogical trajectory toward madness. This is an element of mad dramaturgy in practice. A returning motif throughout the show, Natalie and Diana frequently share lyrics that indict them on their own mad behavior. In fact, it is often only within these overlaps where explicit language about being "crazy" is uttered. Of the 21 times the word "crazy" is explicitly written in the script, Diana and Natalie say it or sing it in 16 of those instances.

The aural link between Natalie, Diana, and their alleged genetically unavoidable madness permeates their relationship. Operating in contrast, Diana's corporeal presence in the show is narratively juxtaposed with that of her son Gabe through her own imagined visions of him. Though the character of Gabe is portrayed by an actor, whom the audience can see throughout the musical, the only character who experiences Gabe's presence within the show itself is Diana. While Diana's husband and daughter fight to get her to behave like "something next to normal," Gabe encourages her to eschew medical and practical advice in the interest of furthering her delusion, for it is only within her delusion and manic episodes that he exists. Diana's personal

²⁰⁸ Kitt and Yorkey, *Next to Normal*, 2; Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 4.

²⁰⁹ Kitt and Yorkey, 5.

agency is often thwarted by Gabe, who pushes her to take actions that are often harmful and damaging to both her and the remaining family unit. Increasingly and ultimately frustratingly for Dan and Natalie, Diana continually chooses to follow her embodied delusion of Gabe over her “real” family. The presence of Gabe as Diana’s materialized madness is performatively shown to impinge not only on Diana, but on the audience, who like Diana are the only ones who must see and inhabit alongside the hallucination. Increasingly, this hallucination moves from outside the bounds of the attic to pervade the scenic life of the show, further inculcating Diana’s (and by extension Natalie’s supposed) madness as a contamination within the family.

In one such example of Diana’s madness pervading the aesthetic architecture of the show, the writers of the musical frequently place three scenes back-to-back-to-back to juxtapose Diana’s madness with the “normal” life she leads, complete with her daughter Natalie. In a particularly salient example of this narrative technique activating mad dramaturgy, Diana, after admitting she loves Natalie “as much as she can” visits a new doctor, one who will treat her “without the drugs.”²¹⁰ Diana then finds herself in the office of Dr. Madden in a scene simply titled “#11a – Doctor Rock.” This scene is Diana’s psychosomatic existence on full theatrical display:

DOCTOR MADDEN: Diana? This way please.

*She walks past him into his inner office, studying him. Once she’s past him –
A CHORD, lights hit, and he’s briefly a rock star.*

DOCTOR MADDEN: Yeah!

DIANA: (*Spins around; lights restore.*) What did you just say?

DOCTOR MADDEN: (*a doctor again*) I said welcome. Have a seat. It’s nice to meet you.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 31.

Watching him suspiciously, she does. She sits, turns, and another CHORD and he's a rock star again:

Let's get it on now baby...

DIANA: Excuse me, what?

DOCTOR MADDEN: *(now not a rock star)* I said, let's get started. Are you...nervous, Diana?²¹¹

The scene vacillates between these extremes for the rest of Diana's intake appointment.

Diana's experience with "Dr. Rock" serves as a precursor for the following scene, wherein Diana's hallucination of Gabe reifies his existence in her mind ("I'm Alive"). For the first time since the opening lines of the musical, Diana interacts with Gabe directly, rather than him being a peripheral presence. Still sitting in the psychiatrist's office on the stage floor, Diana stands center stage and reaches upward, as if yearning to grasp Gabe who is perched on the third floor of the house. Throughout "I'm Alive," a solo number for Gabe, he begins to occupy space around and between characters in a manner that has otherwise not yet occurred. As Dan and Natalie go about their day on the second floor of the house, Gabe descends to join them. Though both Dan and Natalie do not see him among their space, his presence allows him to be viewed within the same plane as them for the first time, furthering the notion that Diana's madness is permeating every aspect of the Goodman family's lives. Gabe, too, begins to touch and interact with the house in a manner that suggests his entwinement with its metaphorical representation as Diana's interiority. As Gabe himself offers, his involvement within Diana's mind, coupled with the directorial decision to bring Gabe down on the same plane as his surviving family members, make it "not so clear/if I'm a simple spirit/or I'm flesh and blood."²¹²

²¹¹ Ibid., 32.

²¹² Ibid., 34.

Natalie, in a scene immediately following and having been intrigued by the calming powers of Henry's consistent marijuana usage, shows interest in exploring how ingested substances might help her own relentless anxiety and seemingly inevitable penchant toward madness. Gabe, physically standing next to her but ethereally witnessing her wonder about such chemically induced effects, finds Natalie in Diana's bathroom and opens the medicine cabinet, revealing an incredible stock of medication. Natalie pops a couple of pills in her mouth because "what the hell!" I find this moment a pivotal and telling turning point in the subtextual narrative about Natalie's predetermined madness. Gabe, the theatrical device meant to signal Diana's madness, co-exists on stage with Natalie without Diana present. To some degree, this implies that the madness that has previously been reserved only for the recesses of Diana's mind now infiltrates Natalie's life in a more direct way than the audience has seen before. An implication runs subtextually in this scene, that perhaps Gabe, too, is a mad hallucination of Natalie's. This is the eugenic philosophy of genetic contamination in progress: Diana's mad state coupled with her maternal link to Natalie is what presupposes Natalie to her own path of madness, which is aesthetically represented by having Gabe, the embodied figure of Diana's madness, give Natalie pills that alter her own sense of reality.

In essence, these three scenes: Diana with Dr. Madden, then Gabe, then Natalie's scene with Gabe played back-to-back-to-back starts with "normal" Diana, then Diana actively contending with her madness, before giving way to it fully, experiencing the hallucinations of Gabe that come to mark her non-normative cognitive state and his infiltration into Natalie's space. This progression enacts a mad dramaturgy in that the plot structure of the musical is mirroring the break in Diana's own madness. Diana's madness, previously only represented by a version of Gabe confined to the upper third of home, has pushed beyond those boundaries and spills onto other characters, as is evidenced with Gabe's interaction with Natalie.



Aaron Tivet as Gabe (l), Alice Ripley as Diana Goodman (c), and Brian D'Arcy James as Dan Goodman (r) in the 2008 Broadway production of *Next to Normal*.

Time and time again in *Next to Normal*, the men in Diana's life try to convince her that the path they think she should pursue is the best one. This often places her in a position to choose what two men want from her, rather than her exercising her own choices without influence. Reminiscent of a love triangle in many regards, the push and pull between Diana's husband, Dan, and her deceased son, Gabe, is readily apparent in the musical number "I Am the One." Gabe, having aesthetically broken the staging confines that relegated him to the third floor of the set, further envelops himself into the narrative action of Diana's personal relationships. Sitting onstage at the Goodman dining room table, Diana is caught between Dan's pleading and Gabe's diversions. Positioned center stage, seated in a dining room chair in a stunning red wrap dress, Diana is encroached upon by Gabe to her right and Dan to her left, both of whom have a hand of hers in their grasp:

DAN
And wonder why?
Are you bleeding?

Are you bruised, are you broken?

And, does it help you to know
That so am I?

GABE
I wonder why
Are you waiting, are you wishing,
Are you wanting all that she can't give?
Are you hurting, are you healing,
Are you hoping for a life to live?

Well, so am I.

Tell me what to do.
Tell me who to be.
So I can see what you see.

Look at me.
Look at me.
And you'll see...²¹³

Both Dan and Gabe holding Diana's hands is significant not only for the narrative import it has, but also for the materialization it provides between Diana's hallucinations and her reality. For the first time in the musical, the audience witnesses physical touch between Gabe and Diana. That it occurs as Dan is also touching Diana is significant in that the link between Diana's madness and its effects on her family have never been so physically close. In so doing, Gabe has fully infiltrated Diana's life vis a vis her psychosis, which not only gives Gabe greater narrative import, but also takes up space that was previously reserved for Diana's surviving family members. In essence, this moment—with Gabe and Dan clutching Diana's hands—signals the inevitable finality of her madness. It cannot be undone because Gabe has now so fully ensconced himself in her life that he, in Diana's mind, exists in the same spatial and literal plane as her husband and daughter. This number and its accordant staging, concretize aesthetic elements that situate Diana as a mad mother culpable in her own downfall—in essence, it is mad dramaturgy in action. As Diana sits at the dining room table, she is always flanked on either side by Dan and Gabe. At various points in the number, both Dan and Gabe physically pull Diana closer to them as their pleading becomes more urgent. At the end of the number Diana is in Gabe's clutches, as he antagonistically sings in Dan's direction, "[y]ou just don't know who I am." This moment—Gabe pulling Diana in close as he addresses Dan—reads as Diana succumbing to her own path to madness. This directorial choice reads as Diana choosing to follow Gabe, putting her on a path to continued madness, since he is only materialized on account of Diana's mad state.

²¹³ Kitt and Yorkey, *Next to Normal*, 34.

Where the infiltration of Gabe into Diana's psyche makes the most consequence to Dan and Natalie's existence is perhaps when Gabe convinces Diana to attempt suicide. It is here where, again, some of the design techniques work to highlight both Diana's maternity and her femininity as linked to her mad state. A haunting moment with her son, bathed in gorgeous stage light, Gabe enters dressed in a white dinner jacket, and slowly dances with her, beckoning her to go with him to another world, "a place we can go where the pain will go away." Promising her that "there's a world where we can be free," he leads her off stage.²¹⁴ This is only the second instance wherein the audience witnesses Gabe and Diana share a physical touch, borne out of their previous interaction in "I Am the One." As the musical materializes, once the physical manifestation of Gabe in Diana's mind joins her on the stage floor, she is overtaken by his direction. The explicit depiction of Diana's suicide attempt is limited to Dr. Madden's authoritative spoken words, which are inserted between lyrics and sanitized with clinical jargon: "Goodman, Diana. Discovered unconscious at home. Multiple razor wounds to wrists and forearms. Self-inflicted. Saline rinse, sutures and gauze. IV antibiotics. Isolated, sedated and restrained. Damn it...ECT is indicated."²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Kitt and Yorkey, *Next to Normal*, 52.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 52-53.



Aaron Tveit as Gabe and Alice Ripley as Diana Goodman in *Next to Normal*. Photo: Sara Krulwich/*The New York Times*.

Though Diana has been vocal about her feelings against receiving electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), she is ultimately convinced to undergo the procedure by both Dan and Dr. Madden. Act I concludes with Diana being whisked away on a gurney to undergo her first session.

During the opening of the second half of the musical, the audience is taken directly into Diana's electroconvulsive therapy, as the stage directions indicate: "At the hospital, the patient in head cap and gown is rolled in on a gurney. A NURSE and a DOCTOR [Dan and Gabe], in gowns and masks, assist Doctor Madden."²¹⁶ At the top of Act II, the narrative physically positions Diana where only her madness was predominantly staged. The patient lying on the gurney is an actor made up to look just like the one playing Diana Goodman, while the actual actress stands on the second story of the abstract house that is grounded upstage. The portions of the stage previously saved for Diana's hallucinations of Gabe are now home to her corporeal self as she witnesses her own treatment. The patriarchal control over Diana's body and mind is put on literal display as the actors portraying Dan and Gabe administer Diana's shock therapy. Even

²¹⁶ Ibid., 53.

in a fantastical theatrical representation of Diana's ECT treatment, she operates within the heteronormative relations that define her waking reality.

Perhaps the musical's insistence of Diana's madness as a genealogical trajectory for both her and Natalie is no more saliently staged than in this moment. Throughout the rock ballad "Wish I Were Here" wherein Diana is receiving ECT treatment and watching herself be allegedly excised of her madness, a scene between Natalie and Henry plays in contrast. In the scene the audience learns that Natalie has become addicted to her mother's pills and spends multiple nights a week variously partying in clubs across town, so often ending up incapacitated to the point that Henry must come collect her at 3AM. For the first time since Diana's appointment with Dr. Fine in Act I, the plexiglass panels on which Diana's eyes are printed once again come together and close. For the first time, too, the bottom level of the abstract house structure closes revealing a similar plexiglass pointillism design with Diana's mouth on it. Together, these shutter off the Goodman house and create the largest looming portrait of Diana yet. In so doing, the set as an abstract representation of the Goodman house gives way fully to its metaphorical representation as Diana's mad cognitive state. As the musical number progresses, Natalie occupies the second level, in front of Diana's eyes, and Diana the lower level, in front of her own mouth. This is a directorial choice that reifies the aesthetic architecture supporting the mad dramaturgy of the piece. If taken metaphorically, the eyes are seen as windows to the soul and decidedly outward looking. Interpreting the eyes as a harbinger for what's to come, that Natalie's staged foray into madness takes place under Diana's watchful gaze feels particularly important. Diana has watched, and is witnessing, Natalie's presupposed descent into madness in real time, made inevitable and inescapable by the matrilineal link between the two. Metaphorically, too, the mouth signifies the deeds already done by Diana toward Natalie: the

hurtful words about her inability to love Natalie fully, the discussions with hallucinatory Gabe at the expense of her relationship with her own daughter, the indictment of her unhappiness on the reality of her existent family. In this way, Diana's positioning in front of the lips situates her as the one whose madness is concretized and passed on to Natalie. What I'm pointing to here is how the design and directorial choices materialize madness in a way that not only imbues narrative importance, but also works to situate Diana and Natalie as mad women in need of intervention. In *Next to Normal* these elements similarly indict both Diana and Natalie as women whose madness is overdetermined on account of their biological relationship.

As the music in "Wish I Were Here" pounds on in percussive and intense fashion, Diana and Natalie remain relatively separate from one another. Both women stand upstage, witnessing the body double of Diana receive shock after shock in her ECT session. Natalie and Diana harmonize the chorus separately before they come together "in the ether."²¹⁷ The ether, here, is Diana's unconscious mind space, that which she occupies while she is receiving ECT. As Diana's treatment progresses, the actress portraying Diana climbs up the stage left staircase and joins Natalie on the second story of the set-in front of Diana's oversized eyes. They both watch as she receives another shocking pulse from Dr. Madden. For the first time, Natalie and Diana occupy the same mad space literally and metaphorically. Once they're both on the same level the plexiglass pointillist depictions of Diana's eyes and mouth quickly recede, forming once again the sidewalls of the Goodman home. In the "ether," both women acknowledge that their lives are different now that Diana is undergoing ECT. The staging of this number brings the aesthetic architecture that comprises the mad dramaturgy to, perhaps, its most tangible head thus far in the

²¹⁷ Ibid., 55.

musical. While singing the following chorus, Natalie stands in front of Diana, both of their arms outstretched as if flying together:

Plug me in
And turn me on
And flip the switch—
I'm good as gone
It slips my skin
And trips my brain—
I feel the burn
But I don't feel the pain²¹⁸

Diana wraps her arms around Natalie hugging her from behind for a brief moment. At the conclusion of their shared sonic and literal embrace, they part, and Diana returns to the stage floor, once again standing directly over her own body as she receives treatment. This moment, occurring in the middle of a physical disruption to Diana's madness and during Natalie's first explicit foray into it, links the two implicitly using their shared madness as a connecting point for communal commiseration.

In the final quarter of the musical, Diana starts to wonder about the overdetermined nature of her madness that the musical has thus far dramaturgically situated as true but has not yet explicitly stated it in the narrative. She wonders if the madness were never able to be controlled by medicine, but instead that it may have likely been "in [her] blood and in [her] soul," for the first time allowing Diana to express an inherent unavailability of her madness that the musical has only thus far suggested.²¹⁹ Natalie is linked to her implicit madness, too, when she hopes that one day she'll, similarly, be free. In the waning remaining musical numbers, Diana and Natalie continue to sing together, signaling her genealogical link to her mother's mad state.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 56.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 82.

Perhaps in a distinct departure, though, Natalie's social prognosis is better than Diana's, for Natalie's boyfriend Henry seems more willing to go along with the symptoms of Natalie's madness rather than follow in Dan's impulses to snuff it out. In "Perfect for You" after Natalie wonders how long it will take for her inevitable madness to manifest in their hypothetical married future, Henry states his explicit acceptance of Natalie: "Cuz crazy is perfect/and fucked up is perfect/so I will be perfect, perfect for you."²²⁰ In this way, the musical provides a hopeful moment for Natalie. Henry, seemingly, is the only person who is willing to move past the eugenic discourse about the unfitness of Natalie to let her exist as her holistic self. If there is any liberatory moment to be found in *Next to Normal*'s deep indictment of mad women, it's this one. For the first time, someone is explicitly acknowledging the eugenic philosophies that encourage the suppression of mad women, with an immediate follow up that that suppression is not necessary. That this liberatory moment is funneled through the heteronormative relationship Natalie holds with Henry is still significant in that it requires a man's approval of her potential mad future for Natalie to achieve radical self-acceptance. But, in a musical that positions mad women as little more than medical and personal nuisances, it's a notable, positive blip.

The hopeful reprieve of madness' liberatory possibility is short-lived, however, when at the end of the musical Diana shares that she is leaving the family unit entirely so that she can focus on treating her madness after deciding to forego continual ECT treatment due to the memory loss it causes. Again, putting Dan's feelings at the forefront, Diana announces:

So anyway, I'm leaving.
I thought you'd like to know.
You're faithful, come what may,
But clearly I can't stay,
We'd both go mad that way—

²²⁰ Ibid., 89.

So here I go.²²¹

The lyrics suggest that it is Diana's choice, and Diana's choice alone, to leave the family unit. That she indicts madness as a reason for removing herself reads as a self-acknowledgement of a cognitive state that has the power to contaminate the family unit, as has already happened to Natalie. It is notable to me that Diana expresses this concern for Dan's wellbeing before the alleged madness has a chance to permeate his life, though the same consideration was not continually exercised for Natalie. That fact indicates that Natalie's predetermined madness is so deeply presupposed as to not be worth mentioning at all, as it has not been stated as explicitly as Diana's concern for Dan is here. Diana, after making her proclamation about leaving the family, exits stage left, suitcase in tow. Suggesting that Diana's madness has truly infiltrated the family unit, Gabe sneakily slides into the scene, moving ever closer to Dan, even after Diana has left the stage.

For the first time in the musical, both Dan and Gabe are left alone together, with Gabe watching upstage as Dan sits in an armchair downstage under a reading lamp, processing the news his wife has just dropped on him. What starts out as sadness turns to anger as Dan slams a book down on the end table beside him and sings: "I am the one who waited/and now you act like you don't give a damn—like you never knew who I am." Even in this moment, the effect of Diana's madness is centered on Dan's reaction to it. Dan's lack of self-awareness creates a sense of victimhood wherein he suggests his life is ruined simply because he tried to help cure his wife's madness, rather than acknowledging that he may have aided in her unhappiness by forcing her to undergo treatments in which she did not want to participate.

²²¹ Ibid.

What strikes me most here is how, even in Diana's absence, she is still made to be the reason for Dan's unhappiness. As Gabe makes his way downstage, he reaches out to his dad for the first time, hugging him over the back of the armchair. Reacting to Gabe's touch, Dan turns to him directly, suggesting that he finally sees Gabe as the materialized 18-year-old that has thus far only existed in Diana's mind. Though I've used Gabe's name throughout this chapter in the interest of clarity, it is notable that his name is not uttered once in the musical until this penultimate scene. In a moment of disbelief at what he's seeing, Dan names Gabe for the first time:

DAN: Gabe. Gabriel.

GABE: Hi, Dad.²²²

Dan and Gabe's relationship here is notably different from that which Gabe has held with both Diana and Natalie up until this point in the musical. He is soft, caring, and demure. Earlier, Gabe's interactions with Diana and Natalie signaled a madness overtaking through a menacing, determined, and direct overbearing presence. Here, the musical suggests that Dan is finally able to name and grieve Gabe because his wife's madness no longer consumes all his emotional and mental energy. After their brief moment together, Gabe slowly recedes back to the upper portions of the Goodman home.

Devastated by his wife's abandonment and reeling from his interaction with Gabe, Dan comforts Natalie as she arrives home to find her mother gone. In the final number, "Light" the surviving members of the Goodman family come to terms with the pain that has torn them apart, acknowledging that "the price of love is loss."²²³ The staging of the final number works to

²²² Ibid., 92.

²²³ Ibid., 94.

delineate Diana as the arbiter of the broken family's unhappy reality. On the stage floor, Dan, Natalie, and Henry sing the final refrain, with Diana and the actor portraying Dr. Fine/Dr. Madden on the second level. Perched atop the set is Gabe, watching down on the action in angelic fashion, as his name might suggest. This tableau reifies that even when Diana and the hallucinations of Gabe are gone, they still very much peer over the experiences of the remaining Goodman clan, Natalie included. The genealogical truism of her madness, living in the cognitive legacy of her mother, is an always already present force so deeply ingrained that it frames both her first and last moments on stage.

Diana Goodman and the Pressures of Womanhood

In analyzing *Next to Normal* I'm always struck by the musical's insistence on painting Diana Goodman as an attractive woman whose mad state is at odds with her physical appearance, confirming a popular notion throughout Western literature that madness and attractiveness are ideally mutually exclusive. What I find particularly interesting about *Next to Normal* is its restless insistence on Diana Goodman's physical appeal, as is made clear from the character description that precedes the script: "DIANA: Sexy. Sharp. Delusional bipolar depressive. Thirties or Forties."²²⁴ I read this description as being at odds with the normal/not normal dichotomy the writers evoke throughout the story. Diana is anything but. Diana isn't just ordinary. She is exemplary and possesses a beauty of the type that is often used in commercial advertising. She is a "sexy and sharp," middle-class, educated, suburban mom. Both actors who portrayed Diana on Broadway were conventionally attractive white women with blue eyes and

²²⁴ Ibid., 4.

blonde hair. Indeed, Diana herself reminisces about various versions of herself citing her pre-bipolar disorder existence as a time where she was “the wild girl running free.”

Diana’s physical description and the casting that has been historically employed for the character sidesteps the reality that the eugenic ideology that undergirds the musical was a deeply racial project. The musical’s narrative continually suggests madness is a product of matrilineal eugenics but situates Diana’s downfall on account of her madness as a personal tragedy. By foregrounding Diana as “sexy and sharp,” the musical mourns a woman who, without her madness, would be physically and intellectually exemplary. Instead, the pretty white woman is lost to the madness she cannot control. What’s most insidious, to me, about the representation of madness as a genetic contamination that permeates the musical is that, historically, eugenic practices were disproportionately applied to poor women and people of color—a reality the musical side steps by positing the loss of the pretty, white, educated, suburbanite as a personal tragedy, distinctly removed from the racial politics that undergird eugenic ideology. Because of how this musical is cast consistently and always, it obfuscates the eugenic reality of it. It appears as little more than a middle-class tragedy as opposed to a very menacing construction of femininity, motherhood, and madness. I trouble this musical because it operates on eugenic discourse while making invisible the ways in which such discourse was decidedly worse for poor women and women of color.

More evidence of how Diana’s madness is seen as a loss of white femininity can be found in the character descriptions for the remaining characters. For instance, Diana and her appearance are almost always called upon in contrast to her daughter, Natalie. This narrative technique is effective insofar that it illuminates the very real differences both experience on account of their respective mad states. Diana is a mother whose madness precludes her from

fulfilling the societal duties expected of her while Natalie's is so predetermined that it is often explained away as her being a teenager overtaken by the social pressures of perfectionism that she gives in to somewhat damaging behaviors and habits. What I'm most drawn to is how Diana's attractiveness exists in contrast to how Natalie is physically described. In the character list, Diana is described as "sexy and sharp" while Natalie is simply "[h]er daughter. Sixteen and trying to be perfect. It's not going well."²²⁵ Natalie is neither attractive nor explicitly mad, yet she continually falls short, predestining her to the mad outcome that unfolds throughout the narrative. She is not exceptional in the aesthetic manner Diana is and is roundly ignored because of it. The gender dynamics are notable here, too, and not just between Natalie and Diana, but also because of how both are described in contrast to the remaining cast members, who are all male. Natalie is the only character in the list in which no physical description of her attractiveness is mentioned. Gabe is described as "dashing," while Dan is "handsome," and even the actor who plays Dr. Fine/Dr. Madden is supposed to be "on the young side of ageless."²²⁶

It's hard for me to read these character descriptions as little more than a calling card of attractive male bodies that surround Diana in all aspects of her life. I suggest that the writers are pointing out Diana's attractiveness, surrounded by attractive men, to highlight the tragedy of her madness. "Isn't it such a shame she's mad? Otherwise, her sexiness would fulfill the patriarchal notions of society that are demanded of women!" I find myself facetiously thinking. And, while I point this out in a manner that is rather tongue-in-cheek, I am not the only one to notice the patriarchal confines prescribed (no pun intended) to Diana, as Ann Fox offers in her analysis of the musical: "Not only does the musical again indict patriarchal medicine but also over its course

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

we come to see that what drives this family to distraction, as much if not more than Diana's illness, is the attempt to contain Diana in a kind of veneer of the normate."²²⁷ The musical's insistence that Diana be presented physically as a normate is meant to fill in the less desirable part of her existence that has succumbed to her madness.

What I'm pointing out here is not unique to *Next to Normal*. With an all-male writing team, the lens through which the musical was written is inherently deeply informed by how men view mad women. Writers Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey have been interviewed extensively about the impetus for the musical and its various iterations. It began as a 10-minute piece they wrote in college inspired by:

[A] television report on shock therapy that indicated most patients were women and most of those prescribing the treatment men, and, it hit [Yorkey]: what about a story about a woman who's suffered from mental illness her whole life and the men who tried to help her? The result was a piece about a woman, Diana, suffering from bipolar disorder, and the effects of her illness on both herself and her family.²²⁸

Though they didn't have any specific experience, Kitt and Yorkey have made clear in interviews that the show is not based on anyone specific they know, but that they've "both known and loved people who have struggled with depression...[i]t's not based on any specific person or persons. And neither of our mothers is crazy. At least not clinically."²²⁹

What stands out to me in these comments is the flippancy with which Kitt and Yorkey discuss madness. They indict their mothers as not being "crazy," playing directly into sexist notions of women either behaving in a socially accepted manner or being seen as deviant. It

²²⁷ Fox, "Scene in a New Light: Monstrous Mothers, Disabled Daughters, and the Performance of Feminism and Disability in *Light in the Piazza* (2005) and *Next to Normal* (2008)."

²²⁸ Juliet Wittman, "Brian Yorkey Explains How His Pulitzer-Winning *Next to Normal* Evolved," Westword, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.westword.com/arts/brian-yorkey-explains-how-his-pulitzer-winning-next-to-normal-evolved-5803939>.

²²⁹ "Chatting with the Creators of *Next to Normal*," accessed December 7, 2021, <https://dctheatrescene.com/2008/12/11/chatting-with-the-creators-of-next-to-normal/>.

comes to me as no surprise, then, that Diana is similarly placed in dichotomous positions throughout the story. She is “crazy,” yet attractive, well and then unwell, “on fire” and then subdued. That two men—a demographic that has historically been at the helm of defining which groups were determined mad or not—write Diana in a way that indicts her on registers that invoke her gender, her maternity, and femininity, is ultimately unsurprising to me. As is evident at the end of the musical, the writers suggest that the only way for the mad mother to truly release her family from the pain she causes is to not exist within its confines at all.

Conclusion

Expectations of womanhood and motherhood permeate society, categorizing women based on their relationships to deeply ingrained patriarchal structures, and the American musical takes up these expectations through particular tropes. The eugenic philosophies of genetic contamination inform the trope of the mad women at the center of *Next to Normal*’s narrative. Engaging in a mad dramaturgical framework, the musical uses Diana’s madness as a narrative element to variously make meaning throughout as it materializes her madness through hallucinations of her deceased son, Gabe. Gabe’s overbearing presence, coupled with her relationship with her husband Dan who ties her progress to intimacy, imbues the musical with patriarchal and sexist undertones that require women to conform within heteronormative relationships if they are to be seen as desirable and “normal.” Situating madness as the ultimate reason for the family’s downfall, the mad mother continues the historicization of female madness as a social conundrum. What looking at this musical, it offers a way to explore how eugenic philosophies permeate a musical that, on the surface, presents itself as a progressive telling of the reality of mad woman though it instead offers an antiquated and misogynistic notion of mad

women and their supposed inevitable outcome with madness itself while sidestepping the racially motivated project of eugenics itself.

A Brief Practical Policy Manifesto

Much of this project thus far has been theoretical in nature, activating dramaturgical analysis as a methodology that is deeply informed by my experience as a practitioner. In addition to my formal schooling and experience as a professional dramaturg, I am an arts administrator with a decade of experience providing administrative support to various rehearsal and production processes. As such, I'm compelled to offer a manifesto, of sorts, that attends to producing musicals and plays that center madness. In essence, I'm approaching this policy manifesto as if it were a speech or workshop, designed to provide practical guidance to theatres and organizations who are thinking about producing works like those discussed throughout this dissertation.

The Rehearsal Room

Producing theatre often requires members of the creative team to be vulnerable, open, and honest to get to the core of the story. Such openness can beget closeness among the team and create a trusting bond that enhances the performance. But, as the demands posed by We See You White American Theatre (WSYWAT) in 2020 offer, these emotionally open processes are often used for exploitation of labor which is disproportionately applied to BIPOC artists.²³⁰ WSYWAT is a coalitional movement created by more than 300 BIPOC theatre makers who, in light of the ongoing racial inequities in the United States and specifically after the murder of George Floyd in 2020, banded together to interrogate the white supremacist structures that permeate theatre institutions across the country. In their list of demands to address systemic racism in American theatre, WSYWAT attends to dismantling oppressive and racist structures within theatre

²³⁰ "BIPOC Demands for White American Theatre," We See You White American Theatre, accessed February 6, 2023, <https://www.weseeyouwat.com/demands>.

institutions and practices that frequently other, under-represent, overwork, and underpay non-white artists. Their demands are far reaching and comprehensive, attuning to everything from how BIPOC artists are cast, which plays are selected for production, how diverse the organization's full-time staff is, the compensation schedule for contracted artists, and the level of experience design team members should have working with non-white actors whose hair and skin complexion may be different from their own. Anecdotally, I've heard of WSYWAT's demands spurring organizations to draw up documents addressing many of these points, with additional attention paid to how organizations can better support rehearsal processes that center BIPOC stories and artists. In following this incredible work, I see a space wherein the demands posited to support artists of color can be a foundation for considering artists who have similarly been marginalized. To be clear, I'm not suggesting that the demands created by and through WSYWAT can be taken wholly and applied to stories that center madness or disability. Rather, I'm suggesting that WSYWAT's list of demands opened a door for other historically excluded artists to similarly outline and demand what would make their involvement less painful, less exploitative, and hopefully, more frequent in American theatre.

The rehearsal room, which I take as a literal and metaphorical space for examination in support of a story, is perhaps the most readily available one to consider where such demands and changes might be implemented in the hopes for generative and lasting change. Practicing "room agreements," wherein all members of the production agree to the conduct, values, and behaviors that compromise a safe working environment are pivotal. But, in addition to such room agreements, I suggest that theatres, too, have some structures in place to employ cultural and/or access consultants who share in the lived experience of those featured in the play, the actors portraying such characters, or, ideally, both. This work is happening in earnest with race, gender,

and sexuality, as is evidenced by the trainings offered by artist-educators such as Nicole M. Brewer, Ianne Fields Stewart, and Gwendolyn VanSant, but is happening less so with disability and madness.²³¹

I want to note here that as an arts administrator, I am uniquely aware of the financial requirements such work requires and I am attuned to the precarious funding structures that undergird the institution of American Theatre. However, budgets are moral documents. As such, organizations that pride themselves on centering anti-racist, inclusive, and diverse processes in line with WSYWAT's demands should prioritize such work if they are truly to embody the values they espouse to enact. This may require pursuing new funding opportunities, hiring staff with more knowledge about obtaining grants to support this work, and/or appealing to donors with connections to organizations and communities able to financially under write the infrastructure required to take on these processes.

What follows below is a set of questions—a checklist, of sorts—that theatres could use to begin discussions about how to best facilitate rehearsal processes where the story centers around characters and/or features mad and disabled experiences. Of course, this set of questions is not a substitute for practices that center equitable hiring, compensation, and more transparent programming conversations. They are, ideally, a supplement to such work.

A Mad Cultural Competency and Access Questionnaire Template

Theatre is an art of empathy in a business of representation.

²³¹ For more information about Nicole M. Brewer's anti-racist trainings and consultations, visit <https://www.nicolembrewer.com/>; Ianne Fields Stewart offers consultations for processes that center Black queer and trans narratives, and they can be contacted at <https://www.iannefieldsstewart.com/>; Gwendolyn VanSant offers equity and inclusion consultations at the organizational level, including to arts organizations across the country, and her work is detailed at <https://www.gwendolynvansant.com/>.

It is not uncommon for playwrights, or other creative artists in the theatre, to draw from their own experiences in their work. It is similarly not uncommon that they may stretch beyond them to investigate and interrogate the human condition.

As we bring plays to production to serve and welcome our audiences, we must ensure that relevant competency permeates our creative processes and rehearsal rooms.

This competency may come in the form of personal experience or learned expertise among members of the creative team. If not, competency can be developed in collaboration with consultants whose lived experience and personal expertise offer a viewpoint that can enhance understanding across populations.

Even if members of your creative or production team or cast have personal experience with a represented culture (e.g., gender, disability, religion, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, profession, etc.), it is essential that it not be exploited for the benefit of the production without consent and/or adequate compensation.

Here are some questions to consider when evaluating your production's competency and the opportunity to engage consultants who may be able to support your process and proactively identify harm reduction measures:

1. What cultural identities and/or lived experiences are represented in your production?
2. What processes has your organization historically used that may create personal or access barriers for those in the production process?
3. What physical accommodations might need to be made for disabled, mad, or neurodivergent artists? Do you have multimodal options ready to go for members who might need printed material in other formats (i.e., large print, screen reader accessible, etc.)?
4. What relevant experience or expertise is represented by your dramatist, director, dramaturg, designers, and other members of your creative and production team?
5. Are there competencies you expect your cast to bring into the room that are not represented on your creative team?
6. Are you intentionally or unintentionally expecting any of your creatives or actors to perform emotional labor in order for your production to achieve essential competency?
7. If discussing content that is upsetting, sensitive, or harmful, do you have steps in place for actors and creative team members alike to "check out" at the end of the rehearsal process (i.e., therapists, journaling, check-ins, etc.)?

Activating the Practice

Of course, being in a rehearsal or production process that actively centers those whose stories are impacted requires a multifaceted approach. The example of a competency questionnaire I provided above is simply the starting point, used to identify gaps in competency based on who's in the room. This work must continue in earnest throughout the process. It must consider the ongoing and persistent rehearsal process that often requires creative team members to be in conversation and community with one another, even amongst potential disagreements or sensitive topics.

I think of my own positionality within these structures, too, since my work as a dramaturg and arts administrator, coupled with my theoretical foundation of madness and its operative construct in musical theatre, offer a unique viewpoint for thinking about representations of madness on stage therein. Staging works that center historically excluded communities, including mad and disabled people, may require an ongoing consultant present in the rehearsal room whose lived experience aligns with those in the production. It might demand a subject matter expert who can help the actors explore what madness and disability means to them, its historical socially constructed definition, and/or its liberatory possibilities along the lines of the theoretical work mad studies scholars accomplish. A dramaturg seems well suited to this sort of work, given the support they often offer in the rehearsal process. However, I'm hesitant to suggest that this work should be accomplished by a person whose role in the structure of the American theatre is already somewhat precarious, with dramaturgs often being seen as a superfluous or luxurious expense rather than one that is essential to any production process. For example, a play might require a more clinical look at madness and its treatment. Might, then, a psychologist offer specialization that can support the work the creative team seeks to do?

Perhaps more foundational to this policy manifesto is a notion centered on interventions at the beginning of the production, starting with casting. I follow the demands laid out by WSYWAT which advocate for theatres to cast people whose lived experiences align with the characters they portray. I'm not advocating that we limit actors' opportunities to only those they can personally relate to, but I am offering that we interrogate when a character's experience is unique and specific so as to require a deeper understanding of the nuances therein that can safely and accurately be portrayed when someone with that shared experience is at the helm of exploring it. I'm hopeful that, as an industry, we're moving beyond non-neurodivergent actors playing the lead in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, for example, because the ways in which that character experiences the world as an autistic teenager is unavoidably intertwined with the plot of the play itself. In practice, this could look like a dramaturg hired into the process with a specific cultural competency, an inclusion officer with the organization who hires experts who can support specific rehearsal processes based on their own expertise, and/or utilizing the artistic team to reach out to and cast people whose lived experiences line up with the programming of the theatre itself. None of this is intended to be a single-faceted approach.

In essence, I'm advocating for increased awareness about the necessity of access and cultural competency in the production process as it relates to mad and disabled stories and actors, starting from the first moments the team gathers in the rehearsal room. I'm asking organizations to invest in capital and human resources, both internally and externally, that can engender safer, more competent, and collaborative production processes that accurately portray and center stories from historically excluded communities. I'm asking for the American theatre to give due consideration to creating art by, about, and for historically excluded populations in a way that gives them a safe seat at the table.

Coda

My own experience through this dissertation required me to traverse hazy boundaries of contested identities and areas of study both academically and in practice. I began this work from the academic space of theatre and performance studies, my approach to which was deeply informed by my career as a dramaturg and director. I observed (much as dramaturgs are so often called upon to do) a tension within an artform I hold dear that I wanted to interrogate. In doing so, I found myself immersed in disability studies, mad studies, feminist theory, and critical race theory as intellectual foundations from which to think about representations of madness in the contemporary American musical. To locate, understand, and interpret how the American musical operates as a site of cultural production, I contended with the legacy of madness both as a narrative plot point deployed in musical theatre, its accordant materialization, and its role as a label disproportionately (and often inappropriately) applied to women and people of color in an effort to capitalize on their continued oppression.

Taking on this work meant acknowledging and building upon but diverting from the existent scholarship on representations of madness in popular culture. Various scholars have considered madness' narrative hold in literature, poetry, television, and music. Yet, few have done so with theatre, and even fewer with the unique genre of musical theatre.²³² Seeing that there was little scholarship on the representation of madness in theatre but identifying that madness nonetheless narratively structured and relentlessly informed through its materialization the dramatic action of some musical theatre pieces, I had to identify my own theoretical framework to operate within. Born out of that necessity was my formulation of *mad dramaturgy*.

²³² *Dionysus in Literature: Essays on Literary Madness* (1994) edited by Branimir M. Rieger, "Media, Morality, and Madness" (2009) by Jo Tavener, and *Madness and the Romantic Poet: A Critical History* (2017) by James Whitehead are a few works exploring representations of madness in various media.

Mad dramaturgy is an analytic that acknowledges madness as a narrative structure and operative dramaturgical construct in the dramatic action and materialization of musical theatre. It is an intersectional analytic that I utilize to read madness as only one portion of a character's identity that imbues meaning. Mad dramaturgy embraces a mad methodology, wherein non-linear, non-normative structures are seen as meaning making in ways that break from traditional notions of strictly forward progressing narratives. I activated mad dramaturgy throughout the project to identify and articulate how it informed musical theatre storytelling and subsequent aesthetic architecture using *Violet*, *Jane Eyre the Musical*, and *Next to Normal* as three case studies to elucidate this framework.

In “(Un)Marked Madness,” my chapter on *Violet*, I activated mad dramaturgy and my formulation of the madness musical to interrogate how specific aesthetic decisions reify or undermine a character that is understood to be disabled or mad. This gave way to consider how other intersectional sites of identity are read on stage and the accordant consequences of engaging in ableist conforming and color conscious casting. My second chapter, “Madness Made Manifest,” takes this investigation a step further by exploring how design elements, both literal and ephemeral, disavow mad characters from their own personhood. By focusing on Bertha Mason as the canonically understood mad biracial woman in the attic, I considered how *Jane Eyre the Musical* uses historical notions of madness and blackness to undermine and effectively incarcerate a woman on account of her mental state. Taken in contrast with Jane Eyre herself, this musical traffics in antiquated performance traditions that center white femininity as prized and universal under the guise of containing the excessive deviant locked away upstairs. Exploring *Next to Normal* in my third chapter, “Mad Mourning Mothers” allowed me to investigate how femininity, maternity, and madness operate as co-constitutive sites of perceived

deviance, as is posited in the musical. This chapter interrogates how the musical itself gives into eugenic conversation about genetic contamination and the ways in which the narrative makes matrilineally inherited madness seem like an inescapable biological truism. I concluded my body chapters by briefly exercising my muscles as an arts administrator, offering a practical policy manifesto and checklist for theatre organizations to consider before producing a work that centers on mad or disabled characters. It calls for a critical interrogation of the emotional and personal labor required to produce such works and advocates for sustainable and safe practices.

Throughout these chapters, I navigated theoretical frameworks that didn't quite fully articulate the nuances of performance in the way that my study required. I built my inquiries upon the incredible work of mad studies scholars but my project, and my formulation of mad dramaturgy, operated slightly differently and required me to apply a framework to aesthetic architecture of the musical, both material and ephemeral, in a way that I had not yet encountered. It called upon this deep theoretical engagement coupled with my experience and expertise as a theatre practitioner whose discipline foregrounds constant questioning and conversation. Through this work, I found that though madness has been present in popular narratives as far back as the ancient Greeks, its power as more than an indicator of moral incongruity required specific care and critical attention when considering how it is manifested on stage and its accordant consequences therein.

Contributions

How madness is manifested on stage not only drives my initial research question, but also underlies a tension at the heart of this project. I set out to explore how musical theatre, as a genre that requires relentless embodiment, stages a psychic phenomenon so often historically and narratively pushed to the margins that it is effectively brushed aside, if

explicitly named at all. It was ultimately this tension that led me to outline mad dramaturgy as an analytic, for it helped me make sense of the meaning making madness was doing on stage, though it was often going unnamed. In doing so, I answered the proposed research question by activating mad dramaturgy to make sense of how madness operates in the contemporary musical. Looking through the musical and all its components—music, song, dance, text, direction, choreography, etc.—I illuminated madness as an operative narrative construct that informs and is informed by the aesthetic and material choices employed through staging these works. This work is important because the American musical serves as a space to literally stage American ideology about embodied sites of difference. This materialization, I’ve argued, is deeply consequential as it reifies societal ideology about mad people and illuminates the ways in which madness has largely been absent from social discourse.

The historiographic constructions of musical theatre that so often rely upon linear progress narratives to identify new interventions in the form lay the groundwork for this project but are ultimately a convention I challenge. This upends the idea that musical theatre becomes more progressive in its representation of critical difference as society similarly navigates such conversations, and ideally accepts more progressive ideology about such differences itself. However, I’ve demonstrated that the legacies of madness and hysteria that work to keep women and people of color under oppressive control remains and continues in the ways madness is literally staged in the contemporary American musical. As such, madness is not only an operative narrative construct that gives meaning to the character’s lives and stories, but it also is negotiated in the materialized elements. Such materialization tells us something about the state of madness as a societal concept and its (in)acceptability in the social sphere. It requires theatre makers and audience members to both reckon with their own preconceived notions about

madness and renders their decisions on how to engage with the material as consequential decisions with deep dramaturgical implications.

Limitations and Future Research

In concluding this project, I'm aware of the limitations of its contained scholarship both due to both internal and external restrictions. One of the largest limitations of study, and one I would like to explore further in future iterations of this research, as outlined here, is exploring works where the mad character identifies as a man. I see this as a limitation of the current project because of how often and frequently I posit madness as operating within a sexist paradigm held up by patriarchal notions of femininity. This is both a theoretical and practical limitation. For the purposes of the dissertation, I needed to cull specific case studies that felt most pertinent and exemplary of mad dramaturgy in practice. This project is hyper focused on laying out such a technique and analysis, and practically, this resulted in exploring fewer musicals. However, though a limitation in its current iteration, I believe the work I've done throughout foregrounds much of the future research I intend to take up.

The formulation of mad dramaturgy I've drawn up throughout this project can be variously applied to other works of musical theatre. In future research, I look forward to exploring how madness operates in tandem with race and gender in other twenty-first century works such as *Spring Awakening* (2007), *American Psycho* (2013), *Dear Evan Hansen* (2015), and *Be More Chill* (2019). These musicals are intriguing to me, specifically, because their narratives are driven, wholly or in part, by mad men, an intersection of madness and gender that I did not fully explore in this project. In future research, I would look forward to exploring how mad men are staged to hopefully identify and draw conclusions about the differences therein. Questions I would want to explore include: if men work to uphold and

ultimately formulate that sexist and racist notions of hysteria and madness operate within, how does that change when there is a mad man at the center of the story? How does mad dramaturgy work in these shows? Is madness experienced by men materialized in a different way on stage than women, and to what end, if so?

In *Spring Awakening*, a tortured youth confronts his burgeoning sexuality and academic pressures before committing suicide. *American Psycho*, a musical adaptation of the eponymous 2000 horror film, would be a prime example to explore mad dramaturgy for its overwhelming and incohesive design elements, leading the audience to consider if anything they've seen on stage has truly happened to its characters—a similar question the protagonist asks himself at the conclusion of the story. Social Anxiety and its alleged maddening effects are explored in *Dear Evan Hansen*, laying bare the moral judgements society writ large holds about mad people. *Be More Chill* takes notions of madness and explores it through the lens of a generation whose connection to technology is an unavoidable truism for many. In laying out these examples here, I'm not trying to introduce a new paradigm, but I signaling the functionality of mad dramaturgy and the ways in which it is an analytic that is applicable beyond the three works I've presented in this dissertation.

Similarly, I'd be remiss not to mention the very practical obstacle that most greatly impacted my project: Covid-19 and the ongoing global pandemic. In early 2020, I had laid out grand plans to travel to various archives, interview multiple creative team members, and see productions of these works to better inform my own analysis. In light of the ensuing lockdown period—a time period that encompassed almost half of my writing time—I necessarily had to adjust where, how, and when I gathered such information for this project. While I was able to finally gain access to the New York Public Library Theatre on Film and

Tape Archive in late 2021, I was unable to visit the archives for Roundabout Theatre Company (where the 2014 Broadway production of *Violet* premiered), or the archives that would have provided context for *Next to Normal* at George Mason University until much later in the process due to their own visitor restrictions. Thus, I was only able to gain access to valuable archival documents well after initially anticipated when I laid out the timeline for this project.

In an expansion of this dissertation, I would actively seek out more interviews from creative team members. Though I did continually reach out to artists associated with each production only Paul Gordon, composer of *Jane Eyre the Musical* and Scott Schwartz, the musical's co-director responded. (And, as I should note, it took over 5 months to secure these conversations via email and Zoom, respectively.) I tried to get in contact with not only the original creative team members for *Violet* and *Next to Normal*, but I also similarly tried to contact producers, theatre institutions that developed these shows, educational institutions where some team members taught, and even their union representatives, to no avail. In future versions of this work, I would look forward to incorporating more interviews so I could fully examine how madness entered early conversations about these works (if at all), and its subsequent journey to production.

As is briefly explored in this dissertation, I would like to continue to fold my skill sets as a practitioner, administrator, and scholar together in my future work. Though I've offered the beginnings of a manifesto, which is only one example of how these ideas might occur in practice, I would look forward to exploring how this could take shape in other forms, inside the rehearsal room and beyond. I see my work as a practitioner and administrator in theatre as a form of public facing scholarship that is deeply informed by my pedagogy and research and

vice versa. As such, allowing these various spaces of my work to intersect is vital to identifying mad dramaturgy in action and how it can be used to dismantle and interrogate musicals that may give into the historical racist and sexist legacies madness often exists within.

In Closing

At the heart of this project lives a dramaturgical intervention in the interrogation of madness as a functional element, both narratively and materially, in the contemporary American musical. I introduced the analytical framework of mad dramaturgy to make sense of how madness is materialized on stage and the accordant consequences of doing so. Specifically, this work focused on understanding how mad women have been positioned on stage, paying attention to the ways in which the historical sexist and racist legacies of madness still permeates its theatrical mimetic representation. In so doing, my research ultimately reveals an obscured history of how racialized and gendered disability ideologies inflect the narrative and staging of American musical theatre.

Appendix A: Musicals on Broadway That Center Madness (Before and After the Passage of the American with Disabilities Act)

Musicals before 1990

Lady in the Dark

Original run:

- January 22, 1941 – June 14, 1941
 - Alvin Theatre
 - 467 performances

Revival(s):

- September 01, 1941 – May 29, 1942
 - Alvin Theatre
 - 467 performances
- February 26, 1943 – May 14, 1943
 - Broadway Theatre
 - 83 performances

Synopsis: Liza Elliott is at the top of her field as the successful editor of a fashion magazine, but her mysteriously profound lack of fulfillment frightens her into psychoanalysis. She has been unsettled by confused and fantastic dreams, the central characters of which are, in various guises, four men: her married lover, a handsome if shallow movie star, the magazine's flamboyant photographer and her chief nemesis, the cynical advertising manager.

Mad characters: Liza Elliott

Anyone Can Whistle

Original run:

- April 03, 1964–April 10, 1964
 - Majestic Theatre
 - 9 performances

Revival(s): N/A

Synopsis: What is insanity? For corrupt Mayoress Cora Hoover Hooper and her cronies, it is a threat to the money-making scheme for the bankrupt town. When water suddenly springs from a rock, Cora sets her sights on making money from pilgrims desperate to receive the healing waters. But when Nurse Fay Apple, the dedicated and skeptical nurse of the local insane asylum, brings her patients to the so-called miracle, Cora's plans are threatened, and she turns to psychiatrist J. Bowden Hapgood to straighten out who is mad and who is sane. But he instead declares everyone insane, and the town enjoys its madness in the face of conformity.

Mad characters: Asylum residents, Town residents, Cora Hoover Hooper

On a Clear Day You Can See Forever

Original run:

- October 16, 1965 – June 10, 1966
 - Mark Hellinger Theatre
 - 280 performances

Revival(s):

- December 10, 2011 – January 28, 2012
 - St. James Theatre
 - 57 performances

Synopsis: Daisy Gamble decides she'll give hypnosis a try to help her stop smoking, at the request of her fiancé. While hypnotized, she discloses to her psychiatrist, Marc, that she's the reincarnation of a 19th-century seductress named Lady Melinda Winifred Waine Tentrees. Marc soon falls in love with Daisy's former self, while Daisy in turn falls for Marc. When she realizes that Marc is only interested in Lady Melinda, however, she pulls away.

Mad characters: Daisy Gamble

Man of La Mancha

Original run:

- November 21, 1965 – June 25, 1971
 - Martin Beck Theatre
 - 2328 performances

Revival(s):

- June 21, 1972 – October 20, 1972
 - Vivian Beaumont Theatre
 - 140 performances
- September 14, 1977 – December 30, 1977
 - Palace Theatre
 - 124 performances
- April 23, 1992 – July 25, 1992
 - Marquis Theatre
 - 108 performances
- December 04, 2002 – August 30, 2003
 - Martin Beck Theatre
 - 304 performances

Synopsis: In the volatile days of the Spanish Inquisition, the writer Miguel de Cervantes and his manservant make livings as tax collectors but soon find themselves imprisoned after being accused of crimes against the church. Now facing the wrath of their fellow inmates, Cervantes must persuade the unruly bunch not to burn his prized manuscript -- by performing it for them. With the help of a prostitute, they begin the tale of *Don Quixote* and *Sancho Panza*.

Mad characters: Miguel de Cervantes

Promises, Promises

Original run:

- November 30, 1968 – December 31, 1971
 - Shubert Theatre
 - 1281 performances

Revival(s):

- April 24, 2010 – January 01, 2011

- Broadway Theatre
- 289 performances

Synopsis: Chuck is young, ambitious, likable, charming and a bachelor whose bosses use his apartment for extracurricular amatory pursuits, promising rapid promotion within the company for its use. Fran Kubelik, a waitress in the company restaurant and a girl whom Chuck has admired from a distance has an assignment with a chief executive. Fran is dumped by him, and she tries to commit suicide in Chuck's bedroom. A Jewish doctor, Dr. Dreyfuss saves her life but suspects that Chuck was the cause of the suicide attempt.

Mad characters: Fran Kubelik

Musicals after 1990

Falsettos

Original run:

- April 28, 1992 – June 26, 1993
 - John Golden Theatre
 - 487 performances

Revival(s):

- October 26, 2016 – January 07, 2017
 - Walter Kerr Theatre
 - 84 performances

Synopsis: *Falsettos* is the story of a large, eccentric, and dysfunctional—but loving—Jewish family in New York at the end of the 1970s. Initially, Marvin seems blessed with the perfect family. He has a caring wife, Trina and a young son, Jason. Nevertheless, the family is soon broken apart, when the homosexual Marvin leaves Trina for a man called Whizzer. Trina, meanwhile, ends up romantically involved with the family psychiatrist, Mendel. All the while, their son, Jason, is stuck in the middle. Included in the mix are lesbian neighbors Dr. Charlotte and Cordelia. When Marvin's lover, Whizzer, is diagnosed with AIDS, the entire family—non-traditional as it may be—must put aside their issues and come together.

Mad characters: Trina

Violet

Original run:

- February 14, 1997 - March 30, 1997
- Playwrights Horizons

Revivals:

- April 19, 2014 – August 09, 2014
- American Airlines Theatre
- 128 performances

Synopsis: As a girl, Violet was struck by a wayward axe blade when her father was chopping wood, leaving her with a visible scar across her face. With enough money finally saved she's traveling across the Deep South in 1964 towards a miracle—the healing touch of a TV evangelist who will make her beautiful. Although she may not succeed in having the scar on her face healed, Violet is able to repair those scars that are lying deeper than her skin. On the way, she

meets a young, African-American soldier whose love for her reaches far past her physical “imperfections.”

Mad characters: Violet

Jane Eyre the Musical

Original run:

- December 09, 2000 – June 09, 2001

Revivals: N/A

Synopsis: Jane's story begins in Gateshead, where she is in the unfortunate care of her cruel Aunt Sarah and cousin, John, as per her uncle's dying wish. The miserable young orphan is finally rescued when she is sent away to attend Lowood School for Girls. After six years, Jane leaves Lowood and is shortly after hired as a governess at Thornfield Hall. Here, she meets Mr. Edward Rochester, thus beginning her passionate and heart-wrenching journey of love, loss, and the struggles of morality.

Mad characters: Bertha Mason

Assassins

Original run:

- April 21, 2004 – July 17, 2004
 - Studio 54
 - 101 performances

Revival(s): N/A

Synopsis: This musical depicts nine misfit men and women who set out to assassinate American Presidents. Though only some were successful, all left their mark on American history. While every nation has its assassins and would-be assassins, only in America, the authors suggest, do disturbed and disturbing individuals act not because they hope to influence national politics, but because they are wrapped up in a malignant sense of entitlement. Feeling betrayed by the failed promise of American democracy and the American Dream, they strike out at the symbol for America: The American President.

Mad characters: Lee Harvey Oswald, Squeaky Fromme

Light in the Piazza

Original run:

- April 17, 2005 – July 01, 2006
 - Vivian Beaumont Theatre
 - 504 performances

Revival(s): N/A

Synopsis: Summer 1953: Margaret Johnson, an elegant and strong-willed Southern woman, has taken her daughter, Clara, on a vacation to Italy. When a gust of wind blows Clara's hat right into the hands of a young Italian gentleman, neither age nor language nor familial disapproval can stop their whirlwind love affair. As Clara and Fabrizio fall into each other's arms, Margaret must grapple with the question of whether to disclose Clara's devastating secret to Fabrizio's warm, passionate Italian family. With soaring operatic melodies that set it apart from most contemporary musical theatre, *The Light in the Piazza* is a story about mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, and the deeply intertwined emotions of love and loss.

Mad characters: Clara Johnson

Grey Gardens

Original run:

- November 01, 2006 – July 28, 2007
 - Walter Kerr Theatre
 - 307 performances

Revival(s): N/A

Synopsis: *Grey Gardens* begins at the grand 1941 engagement party of stunning and spirited “Little Edie” Beale to handsome Navy man Joe Kennedy, Jr., hosted by Edie’s mother, Edith Bouvier Beale. As the upper-crust, New England family gathers, so do the storm clouds of trouble that eventually leave both “Big” and “Little” Edie alone and heartbroken. The second act launches the narrative into the overgrown, cat-riddled, and bug-infested estate in 1973, where the two Edies live, alone. “Big Edie” is now bedridden, and “Little Edie” grows more eccentric by the day, haunted by dreams of love and success, long since dashed. Weaving documentary text with imaginative speculation, the musical documents the journey of the Beales from royalty to ruin.

Mad characters: Bid Edie, Little Edie

Spring Awakening

Original run:

- December 09, 2006 – January 17, 2009
 - Eugene O'Neill Theatre
 - 859 performances

Revival(s):

- September 26, 2015 – January 23, 2016
 - Brooks Atkinson Theatre
 - 135 performances

Synopsis: It’s 1891, and grown-ups hold all the cards. Headstrong Melchior and naive Wendla stumble into each other’s arms, passionate and curious, while anxious Moritz struggles to live up to the stringent expectations of society. With only each other for guidance, this group of young men and women travel the fraught and rocky path of adolescence, discovering their bodies, their minds, and themselves along the way.

Mad characters: Moritz Stiefel, Ilse Neuman

Next to Normal

Original run:

- April 14, 2009 – January 15, 2011
 - Booth Theatre
 - 733 performances

Revival(s): N/A

Synopsis: Dad’s an architect; Mom rushes to pack lunches and pour cereal; their daughter and son are bright, wise-cracking teens, appearing to be a typical American family. And yet their lives are anything but normal because the mother has been battling manic depression for 16

years. *Next to Normal* takes audiences into the minds and hearts of each character, presenting their family's story with love, sympathy, and heart.

Mad characters: Diana Goodman

Natasha Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812

Original run:

- November 13, 2016 – September 02, 2017
 - Imperial Theatre
 - 336 performances

Revival(s): N/A

Synopsis: Natasha is a beautiful ingénue visiting Moscow while she waits for her beloved fiancée Andrey to return from the war. In a moment of indiscretion, she is seduced by the dashing (but already married) Anatole and her position in society is ruined. Her only hope lies with Pierre, the lonely outsider whose love and compassion for Natasha may be the key to her redemption... and to the renewal of his own soul.

Mad characters: Pierre

Dear Evan Hansen

Original run:

- December 03, 2016 – March 11, 2020; December 11, 2021 – September 18, 2022
 - Music Box Theatre
 - 1678 performances

Revival(s): N/A

Synopsis: Evan Hansen is an anxious, isolated high-school student who's aching for understanding and belonging amid the chaos and cruelty of the social media age. He soon embarks on a journey of self-discovery when a letter he wrote for a writing exercise falls into the hands of a grieving couple whose son took his own life.

Mad characters: Evan Hansen, Connor Murphy

American Psycho

Original run:

- April 20, 2016 – June 04, 2016
 - Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre
 - 54 performances

Revival(s): N/A

Synopsis: Wall Street greed is at its peak, and investment banker Patrick Bateman is determined to achieve the highest echelon of status in his image-driven, yuppie world. Restaurant reservations and swanky business cards are identifiers of success in his crowd, and Patrick meets his nemesis in Paul Owen, a rival banker who seems to have it all. But as Patrick enjoys the luxuries of consumerist greed, he feels increasingly disconnected from his world until his homicidal impulses can no longer be controlled. On his 27th birthday, Patrick commits his first murder--and takes off on a psychotic killing spree, taking out Paul, prostitutes, and anyone who even mildly annoys him. Patrick expresses his murderous desires to his fiancée Evelyn and his best friend Tim, but no one seems to hear, or even see, his torment. Patrick becomes one of the

serial killers that have intrigued him for so long, and even yearns for the fame and notoriety that those killers possessed.

Mad characters: Patrick Bateman

Be More Chill

Original run:

- March 09, 2019 – August 10, 2019
 - Lyceum Theatre
 - 177 performances

Revival(s): N/A

Synopsis: Jeremy Heere is just an average teenager. That is, until he finds out about “The Squip” —a tiny supercomputer that promises to bring him everything he desires most: a date with Christine, an invite to the raddest party of the year and a chance to survive life in his suburban New Jersey high school. But is being the most popular guy in school worth the risk?

Mad characters: Michael

Jagged Little Pill

Original run:

- December 04, 2019 – March 11, 2020; October 21, 2021 – December 20, 2021
 - Broadhurst Theatre
 - 171 performances

Revival(s): N/A

Synopsis: The Healy’s appear to be the picture-perfect family in their competitive Connecticut suburban neighborhood. Yet pictures can be deceiving. Despite her efforts to keep up appearances, MJ battles a growing addiction to opiates following a car accident and battles with trauma in her past that she has not yet come to terms with. Steve watches his wife become increasingly withdrawn and distant from him, without knowing why. Meanwhile their children are battling challenges of their own. Frankie is determined to find her own voice and discover her sexuality, while Nick must balance the pressure of his parents to do well against exposing his own faults to make sure justice is served.

Mad characters: MJ Healy

Appendix B: Email Exchange with Paul Gordon, Composer of *Jane Eyre the Musical*

Fri, Jun 10, 2022, 11:18 AM

Hi Lindsey,

Sorry for the delay! Here are my answers to your questions.

Cheers,
Paul

How did you become involved in the show? What was the general timeline of your joining the team?

Creating a musical of JANE EYRE was my idea, actually. I had just seen LES MIZ in LA and I thought to myself, “I wonder if I can write a musical based on a classic novel? I was literally at an airport bookstore, and I saw the “classic book section”, and I began looking at the synopsis of a few books and I ended up purchasing JANE EYRE and LITTLE WOMEN. As fate would have it, I started reading JANE EYRE first, was in tears by page 10 and knew this was the musical I had to write.

I was living in Los Angeles at the time and as I wrote the show, I made “demos” of the music. The singer I used for JANE happened to be in the Los Angeles production of LES MIZ and John Caird, the co-director, was in town. Through another cast member, the demo was given to John. He called me up, said he liked it, we met, and we were off and running. It was within a month of 10 years – from writing my first note – to getting to Broadway.

What was your general approach to adapting the novel into a musical?

I was so excited to write music to this piece that I literally had to stop myself from writing before I completed reading the novel. As I read, I would underline and highlight potential lyrics and song ideas. This poor paperback was practically in pieces before I was finally able to sit down at the piano and compose. It really all came pouring out, I didn’t think about it. I don’t preplan what “kind of music I write in general. I let the story inform me and then I’m able to sort of find the sound that I’m looking for.

Was there a specific approach you took to Bertha Mason's character in terms of music and lyrics? (Her sonic landscape is generally through sardonic laughter or the “ahhs” in “The Sirens,” so I'd love to hear more about the how and why of those choices!)

Yes, Bertha is one of those characters that you know immediately, one is not going to write a “proper song” for her, so it was really an evolution of what musical language to

incorporate for her character. I tried several different approaches along the way, but we finally hit upon the right notes (no pun intended). In a way, she was the most difficult character to create because she doesn't really have a "voice", and her story is never really told. (Not until *The Wide Sargasso Sea*).

Were you involved in casting the show at all? If so, did you have specific characteristics you sought for the actor's singing qualities (beyond their vocal range)? I'm curious how Jane, Rochester, and Bertha, in particular, were thought about throughout the casting process.

Yes, I was very involved with the casting process. It's very important to me that the songs are sung the way I hear them in my head. I come from the pop music world, so musical theatre singers were sort of "new" to me and I had to change my thinking about what kind of vocal sound the show would eventually have. Our actors and singers were wonderful, of course, but it took me a minute to adjust my ears to a new kind of sound for my music. And of course, the casting of Jane was crucial and we got really lucky with Marla Schaffel who was just wonderful but didn't always enjoy the keys that I had her sing in. I never heard Jane as a soprano. I felt an alto sound would add more weight to the character. We had two different Rochester's in our first two First Class productions. One was a tenor and the other was a high baritone. Both ranges worked well for the part. Marguerite MacIntyre was our amazing Bertha, and she can do anything, so it was wonderful working with her to find the nuances of the role.

Do you have any additional thoughts about the character of Bertha Mason? Her trajectory, her music, etc.?

Well, I'll tell you a quick story. One always learns a great deal about oneself in undertaking a project of this magnitude. I had always been told by my parents that my maternal grandmother had died of a heart attack when my mother was 10 years old. Several years after I'd written the show and my parents had passed, I was with my uncle, and I mentioned the story of my grandmother. It was then that I learned, in fact, my grandmother had not died when my mother was ten. She was "put away" in an asylum and was alive when my parents were married. It was mind boggling to learn that I had a "Bertha" in my family – and now that my parents are gone and my uncle is gone, I have no information about who she was or what her story was. But I thought you might be interested in hearing that.

What is, for you, the highlight of having worked on this piece?

Honestly, writing it. I get no greater joy than writing. All the many productions, the workshops, the readings, the audience, the reviews.... It's all part of it, but for me, I love being in a room with a piano and an inspiring idea. That's heaven to me.

Appendix C: Interview Transcript with Scott Schwartz, Co-Director of *Jane Eyre the Musical*

Monday, June 27, 2022 at 1:30PM, via Zoom

Lindsey: So maybe we'll just jump right in if that's okay.

Scott: Absolutely.

L: So potentially what might be helpful is a little background on my chapter and sort of where *Jane Eyre* is taking me. So, my dissertation looks at the representation of madness on stage in the contemporary American musical, specifically after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in the 1990s. And so, *Jane Eyre* is sort of following up, I focus on Violet first and then move to *Jane Eyre*, and then I move on to *Next to Normal*. And so, I'm sort of crafting this chronology of how women have been put on stage and how their stories have circulated around madness. And so, my adviser was like, you need to talk about *Jane Eyre the Musical*. And it is not one that I was familiar with, but I've traveled to the New York Public Library. I've watched the archival recording, so I'm very familiar with the production at this point. So, I'm curious about how you found yourself on the project.

S: Yes, well, sort of an interesting thing. You know, I had known John Caird since I was in high school because my father, Steven Schwartz, had done *Children of Eden* with him, and John was around, and I was lucky enough to get to observe some of those rehearsals. I already knew when I was in high school that I wanted to be a director. And so, I was very lucky. And John was very generous to me and spent time with me. And then he saw something like some workshop reading or something I did in New York prior to my joining *Jane Eyre*. I don't remember what it was at this point. And I just got this call out of the blue. And they had done the show in Toronto initially. I had nothing to do with it at that time. And I got this call from John. He said, "Hello, Scott, I have a question for you. Would you like to co-direct *Jane Eyre* with me? And we're going to the La Jolla Playhouse and then to Broadway." And I think I was 25, 26 when I got this call. And I was like, Yeah, sure. And I did review the materials before we finalized everything. I really liked the show and of course, adored John. And I think that John, because of his work with Trevor Nunn, and that Trevor had been older than him when he started working with Trevor. And John was very comfortable with the idea of co-directing and I think of having a partner. And I think I won't speak for John, but I think in this case, he said to me, that he wanted an American co-director because it was all happening in America. And I think he wanted someone again, this is just my supposition. He never said this to me, but I think he wanted someone young who had energy and sort of boots on the ground who would get in there as things needed to be done. I hope I did that for him.

L: So, you joined after Toronto, but before La Jolla. So how did that transition process happen? Were you sort of reworking the book and the lyrics? Or was it sort of—I've already emailed back and forth with Paul a little bit, so I have his conversation at the end of it. But I'm curious from your view sort of how that transition happened, what was changed and the project of that?

S: We did quite a lot. I mean, I don't remember now what exactly we changed, but I remember we went up to Westport, Connecticut, I think it was, for a whole weekend. And John and Paul and I and Nell Balaban, who was an actress in the show but ended up kind of assisting us and

then actually ended up being my assistant on several projects, was there. And we really worked through it and songs were cut, ideas were changed. There was like a whole back and forth about how to open the show and if we opened it with "Secrets of the House" or not. And then finally that went away for a while and then it came back, and we did quite a lot. And, when John invited me aboard, he said, we want to do an all-new physical production as well. And so that's another step to the process. But we also kind of started kind of from scratch in terms of what the physical production would be. When I joined.

L: And when you're talking about the physical production, I've read lots of articles at this point about sort of the impressive technological advancements that were made in this production in terms of the carousel and the set design and lighting design and things like that. And that's certainly a part of the chapter I write. And so, I'm curious if you could talk a little bit about fleshing out that physical space and sort of what conversations you had or thoughts you had about sort of reimagining that world in that way.

S: Yeah, well, I think the original instinct for the change in physical production came really from John Napier. John Caird and John Napier had worked together a lot. They had some initial meetings, and I think it was really Napier who had this idea to do the carousel and the turntable, and the whole idea was to make the show more impressionistic and kind of expressionistic and that things would kind of swirl around and form and then disperse, that it didn't want to be a kind of heavy production, but a much more unimagined, but sort of "in the mind" feeling, which sort of relates to what you're talking about, that we never wanted to show anything too literally. We didn't want to have, like, a full house surface or that, and to make it much more fragmentary and psychological. And I think, again, to be honest, that John Napier kind of wanted to explore this carousel idea. I'm not sure that it was just because of *Jane Eyre* that this thing got invented. This is my own supposition. I have a feeling that he had what if I invented a whole turning fly system? What would that be like? Napier is such a brilliant designer, but he has really big ideas. And I think maybe the carousel was a big idea for this production, but I've always wondered if it was sort of a big idea. And he decided to employ it for *Jane Eyre*. And of course, we have turntables as well. And so, everything kind of flowed. You've seen it. I mean, we had a big tree, and we had a big bridge piece, so it wasn't like there was no scenery, but it was meant to be much more fluid and sort of dance like how it all came together again, I think mostly to express Jane's psychology. And what happened was Napier and John Caird kind of designed the idea and there'd be these two scrims, and they could turn and there'd be lights on it, and the scrim is so cool because you could sort of create these passageways, and it was fun. And then John Napier kind of created lots of little bits and pieces, the topiaries, the horse statue, chairs, tables, chandeliers, windows. And then his associate and I met up in London and we sort of figured out exactly how we were going to use these and how they were going to move. I forget his name, I feel like it was Keith Gonzalez, but I may be wrong about that. He was one of John Napier's regular associates. And we sat there and basically played with all these pieces in the model box and sort of figured out how they would go. Of course, John Napier had an idea of how he wanted things to look, but sort of figuring out how we get from place to place and which way the turntable would go and all of that. When we would turn the carousel, we roughed that in, Napier's associate and me. And then, of course, John Napier came in and had comments and changed stuff and said, well, what if we did this instead? And then we got into rehearsal, and of course, things changed again. But that first pass on how all the little wonderful pieces would work was something that I did for about a week in London, which was fun. And then in terms of the lighting, Chris Perry did the lighting at La Jolla Playhouse, and it was lovely. It was

beautiful. But for Broadway, I think John Caird and the producers wanted something a little bit different again, maybe a little more psychological. We invited Jules Fisherman and Peggy Eisenhower to join the team, who are two of the great lighting designers of all time. And they had this idea of like, now Veri-lights and all this technology nowadays is completely outdated. But at that time, Veri-lights were the thing. Wow. You could have lights that move around. That was a big deal at that time. But beyond them being able to move around, there was this new thing where you could put glass slides into them, basically the equivalent of gobos, but they are almost like projections, basically. But we didn't use projections. It wasn't a projector. It was all done through Veri-lights with these glass images that were printed on them. So that was fun to explore as well.

L: Yeah, that's so fascinating because I did find myself wondering how the projection-like quality of things were coming across, because I was like, is there a projection designer? This seems very early for what sort of we now would term a projection designer. So that makes total sense.

S: It's interesting because a lot of what I think we were trying to do nowadays is quite common and related to—it's all done with projectors now, but this was a whole different thing and that was all Jules and Peggy.

L: Interesting. I'm so glad that you are talking about the dance-like quality to things to explore, sort of Jane's psychology, because one of the threads that I talk about in this dissertation a lot is sort of the push and pull of what's materialized on stage and what isn't, and how that lends itself to being Jane's physical space or Bertha's physical space. I'm wondering if you can talk about that a little bit. How did you see or did you potentially see that push and pull in your approaching direction of how much space do we give Bertha? How does this reflect on Jane? Or sort of that dance, if you will, for lack of better term.

S: Yeah, it's interesting. John Caird may have a different opinion than I do about this. It wasn't that Bertha was an afterthought, of course not. I mean, she's a major figure in the plot. But I have to say the journey that I was on with the show was much more focused on Jane's psychology and Jane's desire and Jane's want, and Bertha was sort of a fact. She existed and she was this problem that Rochester had. And we talked a little bit about why. And certainly, with Marguerite McIntyre, who played Bertha, we certainly discussed it, but like where Jane was played by Marla Shaffel from before I joined the show, I think there were like three different Berthas or four different Berthas. Like every time the show got done, somebody else played Bertha. Again, nothing wrong with that, but in a way, the role evolved differently. And listen, we were doing this in the mid, late nineties and so attitudes about psychology, attitudes about women and women's rights, which obviously, particularly today, I'm thinking about and we're all thinking about, were a little different. And so, I think we viewed Bertha more through the lens of her plot function, in a way, than sort of an equal figure to Jane Eyre and sort of more how she affected Jane and Rochester than Bertha herself. Obviously, we gave her a place where she could be. She had that balcony that she ultimately fell from to her death. Obviously, you saw her kind of ghost kind of occasionally float through the show, and you didn't know who she was for a while. But to be honest, we didn't have a lot of conversations about how we define Bertha's space. It was more how Bertha works in the novel, of course, and then, therefore, how she works most effectively as the obstacle for Rochester and Jane.

L: I'm a professional dramaturg outside of being a scholar. So, I'm always really drawn to exactly what you're suggesting. Right. Which is, like, how does this narrative sort of construct and how do these moving parts fit within and next and near to each other? This is a great conversation. I already have so much to think about and write. But I'm curious...

S: I will say, after I did *Jane Eyre*, I was always like, oh, I should do a musical of *The Wide Sargasso Sea* and really explore. I still actually think that's a good idea. And, explore Bertha and that story. But that was another idea.

L: Yeah. I'm so curious about what level of the novel's existence of Bertha if I'm hearing you say sort of more in terms of how it serves Jane's story. But I'm curious about there's, like, historical debates about, is Bertha a Black woman? Is she a mixed-race woman? What does that look like? And I'm just curious if any of those conversations sort of came in through the work, potentially not, seeing as that wasn't the focus. But I'm just curious because everything I read about *Jane Eyre*, that is one of the first and highly debated things. And I'm just curious if that found its way into your process.

S: You know, we didn't have a lot of debate about that. It was, again, a different time in the theatre, a different time in terms of representation. I think nowadays it would be very interesting to have a Black or mixed-race actress play Bertha based on the novel, also the original novel, *Jane Eyre*, that she was a white landowner's daughter who had been in Jamaica, and he married, and that was mad now. But what's interesting, as we're having this conversation, is we just assumed that in my time on the show, perhaps others had conversations prior to my joining the show that were different, but we just went with that story. And that was sort of just how it was. I mean, there was certainly no negative reason why we wouldn't have wanted a person of color in that role. And we did have a few people of color, I believe, in the cast, but sort of the role, just because of tradition, I think, we just assumed was basically a white landowner kind of figure.

L: Yes, and this is why, when my adviser was like, you need to look at this musical because there's something interesting happening. This is one of the things that I'm heartened to hear, because I think that is, uh, I'm particularly aware not to apply 2022 ideals to productions that don't exist in 2022 or didn't come of age in the same time period. And hearing you say that is great because I can assume all I want. But hearing you say that it was a different time and we had different considerations and conversations sort of confirms what I had assumed at a certain point about the process.

S: Again, by the time I joined the show, the focus was really on Jane and just making sure that her story and her journey was the most effectively told it could be. And, of course, Rochester and of course, other secondary characters, Mrs. Poole and all that, but it was really always about Jane. And, to a certain extent, by the time I came on board, because they'd already done the show up in Toronto, we sort of, to a certain extent, left the novel behind. I mean, of course, I read the novel and I watched adaptations when I joined the team. I watched *Wide Sargasso Sea*, for that matter. But we were sort of saying, we must make this a musical. And a musical isn't a novel, and, yes, it's based on a novel and inspired by a novel, but we can't be so trapped by the novel that we can't change things that need to be changed to function on stage in a two and a half hour show and not a novel that takes you to two and a half weeks to read. It's a whole different form. And again, the central focus was always Jane. How do we most get the audience to invest in her and how do we really track her journey?

L: Yeah, what you're saying is mirroring a lot of what the conversation I had back and forth in an email with Paul, who was sort of talking about reading the novel, having ideas about how these characters might sound in song and lyric, and then having to sort of adjust that as you moved beyond the source text, in a way, did you find that that was true sort of across the board in terms of lyrics, directing all those things that sort of had to remove yourself from the book?

S: I think so, yeah. I mean, we'd all read the book, God knows, but yeah, I think at a certain point and that's how I feel whenever I felt when I did *Hunchback of Notre Dame* for Disney. It's how I felt when I've done many shows. *Hunchback* we went back to the book, this is a whole different show, so it's not your thesis, but we went back to the book to make it much more like a novel. So, maybe that was the reverse of text from the novel and incorporated it. But I feel in *Jane Eyre*, we sort of, at a certain point said, look, we must tell our own version of this story and we can't be trapped. Though John always had his copy with him, and he would incorporate text and some of the narration. I mean, a lot of stuff still came from the book.

L: Yeah, I think there are even some exact lines in lyrics that come from the book. Speaking of *Hunchback of Notre Dame* and Disney, did you work with Ken Cerniglia on that project? Yeah, Ken. I know Ken very well. He's one of the most brilliant dramaturgical minds I've ever been in a room with. He's amazing. Paul was also saying that when he would read the book, he would highlight sections of text that he felt that they wanted to find their way into the musical. I read the book and then I watched the musical, then read the book again just so I could sort of see the throughline and the trajectory of all those stories. *Sweet Liberty*, I think, is one of the most often used refrains in both, which is really fascinating to me.

S: I mean, I will say that when they did the show in Toronto, I wasn't there. I wasn't involved. But I think that was closer to the process John had had on *Les Misérables* and *Mickles Mickleby*, and that I think the cast all read the book and had the book in rehearsal, and they sort of workshopped ideas from the book. That's the impression I got. Again, you can quote me, but I can't verify it because I wasn't there. But my impression was that it was very much using the book in a workshop-y fashion over the course of the process. But by the time I joined, first, it was in America, you have less rehearsal. We had sort of moved past that and we probably had the book in rehearsal. But I think as much as the book, we use research about the period and imagery that was related to the production. We weren't constantly going back to the novel when we were in rehearsals in La Jolla.

L: Sure. Yeah, that makes sense to me. Can you talk a little bit about it opening on Broadway and its reception afterwards? I know that--I'm like digging through archives--I was probably potentially too young to sort of understand at the time what was happening, but I know that there are ardent and die-hard fans that would come see the show like four or five, six times. And I'm just curious if you can talk through sort of what the reception was, how you all perceived that. I know that that's subjective and dicey, but nonetheless, it'd be interesting to think about.

S: Well, I must confess to you, I've never read all the reviews for *Jane Eyre* on Broadway. I don't read my own reviews, except when a show is in development at a theater and it's going to be moving on to another production, then I read the reviews because then I think they can be useful because you kind of analyze, are there commonalities in them and things that everybody felt. Because if there's commonality or you feel like a lot of people were responding to the same thing, then that's probably true. Whereas one person's opinion is one person's opinion and whether their name is Ben Brantley or Joe Schmo or Susie Schmoe, that's just an opinion. But if

a lot of people have the same opinion or seem to be kind of pecking at the same idea, even if they're coming from different angles, that's useful. That's my philosophy of reviews. In terms of Jane Eyre's reviews on Broadway, I know they weren't great, but I never actually read them. I just got reports from family members and my girlfriend at the time. We were all proud of the show and you could feel that it was connecting with an audience. The audience was really loving it and listening and emotional about it, but I'm not sure it was connecting with a big enough audience. And I don't know if that's just about the reviews. I think it was about, ya know we opened in 2000 going into 2001, and people at that time, we didn't know it when we were doing Jane Eyre on Broadway before we opened, but people wanted to be funny. It was sort of a tough time. And then obviously September 11th happened, and people just wanted things that were fun. So, it was the year of The Producers. The thing that everyone wanted to see was The Producers and a great show, nothing wrong with The Producers, but a very different kind of show than Jane Eyre. I mean, it was satirical, it was tongue-in-cheek. It didn't take the musical theater form too seriously. Whereas Jane Eyre was a flat-out serious show wanting to tell a serious story in a serious way. And I think people felt it was a little this is my guess maybe the review said that a little dated in that it was like one of those shows from the early 90s, those sort of big, curious British shows, which by the time Jane Eyre opened, I think people in New York were a little bit over, it's like, oh my God, do we have to see another big, serious, heavy, British melodrama kind of musical again? I don't know that people said that out loud, but I think there was a feeling that they wanted something new, wanted something more American, and just wanted stuff that was a little lighter. This was the same season where I did Bat Boy, which was a big critical success, and Tick, Tick...Boom, which was also a pretty big critical success, but they were smaller, and they were funky, and they were kind of rock based. And I mean, Paul's score is contemporary and pop based, but it's not rock based. It's more influenced--this score of Paul, though he's written many others, of course, that are wonderful--I think is more influenced by the sort of British pop musicals of the eighties and early nineties. I don't know, I'm sort of just rambling here, but I think the style of the musical wasn't what everyone was sort of looking for at that time. I think it certainly wasn't what the critics were looking for, for whatever set of reasons. I have a feeling, though, we were at Brooks Atkinson Theater, which is, I think, where *Six* is now, and that's not that big. It's, like, about 1000 seats or 1100 seats, I don't remember exactly how big. And we would sell out on the weekends. We would basically have full houses all through the weekends, and then the weekdays would be light. And a couple of producers said to me at the time, if you were in a theater that had 200 more seats, given that your show is pretty big, you'd probably be making a little bit more. You'd be making money as opposed to losing money because you'd still sell out on the weekends. And so, you'd sell 600, 800 more seats a week, which, at whatever it costs at that time, \$89 a pop or whatever, is a substantial amount of money. And so even if you didn't sell out during the week, it wouldn't matter. So, in a way, listen, it was the theater we could get. It wasn't just my choice. We liked that we were in an intimate theater. It's a beautiful house, but it may have been a little small for us financially.

L: Interesting, because I've heard from some of the other pieces I'm working on, some people were talking about the opposite, where they have a theater that's like St. James or, you know, the Gershwin, these massive theaters that they can't possibly make financially viable.

S: And listen, I've had that experience, too. We had that experience on *Prince of Egypt* that I directed in London, which was selling out when we could only sell 1000 seats a night because of COVID rules. And before the Pandemic was selling out in 2000 seats a night. But after the COVID rules got lifted and there weren't enough tourists, we just couldn't sell enough seats in a

huge theater. So, there's always that sweet spot. *Jane Eyre* didn't want to be in a 2000 seat theater, but maybe if we had been at what, at that time, was called the Martin Beck and now is, of course, the Al Hirschfeld. Maybe if we had been at that theater, we would have actually been able to sustain financially longer than we did. But who knows? I mean, we'll never know.

L: Yeah, always the “if” game. But I'm looking at time, and I just want to be super mindful because I know you gotta run. Is there anything else that you want to share about *Jane Eyre* or anything that you want me to know? Since there's not a ton of scholarship writing on this, I'm one of the first people doing a deep, deep dive into it, so I welcome any thoughts that you might have.

S: Sure. I don't know. I'm happy to answer other questions, or if you have more questions as you're continuing, I'm happy to jump on Zoom again or whatever. I mean, I will tell you, it was an incredibly formative experience for me. I was a young director. I directed off Broadway. I was starting to have a career, but I was still a very young director, and I got sort of pulled up by John Caird, and I got to watch John at work. And John is a genius, and he's an incredibly kind man and an incredibly generous man with his time, and he's a wonderful storyteller, wonderful visual artist. But of all things that I think he's best at is he's just brilliant with actors. And the way he communicated with the actors and the way he enlisted the actors in the storytelling and to bring all of themselves to the process while keeping a firm hand on where we were going was remarkable. And, I mean, I learned so much from him. I mean, Paul and I became very good friends. I don't know if Paul told you, but when we were doing the show at La Jolla every weekend, we would drive up to LA. Because at that point, my dad had an apartment in LA. And I'd go up to LA. And I'd stay overnight in LA and hang out with friends up there. And Paul lived in LA. And so, we would do the three hour drive to LA on Sunday night and then another three hour drive back to La Jolla on Monday night. And so, we got to be very close. But none of this is good for scholarship. It's just my experience of the show, and I do think the physical production, while that kind of thing, has never been quite replicated, because the carousel is as brilliant as it was proved technically challenging, it didn't always work and it would break down, and that was very tricky because everything was sort of dependent upon it being in the right position. And mostly it broke down during Tech, not so much once we got into performances, but it was also a very expensive piece of machinery that ultimately you can achieve a lot of what it did now in different ways, that are less expensive, where you don't have a whole system that turns, but you just have tracks or whatever those things move around on. So that's never been replicated. But I do think the sort of fluidity of it is something that maybe was a little bit influential to future productions. And I think certainly Jules and Peggy were exploring a language with projection that didn't exist yet. And I'm not saying they invented modern projections, but I think they were part of a group that was sort of learning about how to use projections in different ways in the theater, and that was exciting. So, I do think there were things about the production that were very influential. And listen, I still hum “Brave Enough for Love” occasionally. I still sing what's this one Rochester sang? The ones, uh as good as not as good as it gets, but good enough for you, or whatever it's called that occasionally “the secrets of the house right behind these walls.” The score lives inside me and the story does and some day it might be fun to tackle the show again in the right setting, but you never know.

L: Yeah, I think as I'm sort of exploring it now in 2022, I do think that there are threads to pull on that might speak to a contemporary moment that feels really prescient, but for someone else to tackle. I'll just write about it. But yeah, definitely. Thank you so much. This is so helpful and

generative and has given me a lot to think about. And I know you're busy, so I'm deeply appreciative of your time.

S: You got it, Lindsey. It's a pleasure meeting you. And keep me posted. Maybe when it's all done, send me a copy. I'd love to read it. It sounds like the whole thing sounds like an interesting topic. And please feel free if more questions arise. I'd be happy to talk again or answer stuff via email.

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