

# Staging Poetic Justice: Public Spectacle of Private Grief in the Musical *Parade*

Wang, Pao-hsiang<sup>\*</sup>

## Abstract

This paper makes inquiries into the 1998 musical *Parade* by playwright Alfred Uhry and composer Jason Robert Brown, based on the historic case of Leo Frank, a Jewish industrialist from New York running a pencil factory in Atlanta and accused of murdering the 13-year-old girl Mary Phagan in 1913. How can the thorny case be represented with any fidelity on stage when all the facts have not come to light? What can a theatre researcher contribute to or comment on a controversial production of a reproduction of a historical incident that has never ceased to produce great furors over the past 90 years? In the absence of irrefutable legal evidence that could close the case and in the face of contending camps that claim justice on each side, the author will stay above the litigation fray and distance himself from any attempt to pass judgment on the innocence or guilt of people involved in the historic case. Rather, the paper first probes the context surrounding the case, including war, class, race, and to a lesser extent, sexuality by examining it from the perspective of historical legacy, such as the post-bellum South reeling from the repercussions of the Civil War defeat, the regional animosity between the highly industrialized North and New Industrial South, the class antagonism of management and labor in the pencil factory, the ethnic strife between blacks, whites, and Jews, and the conventional bias against the perceived sexual perversion of Jews and blacks.

Secondly, the paper discusses the embedded theatricality of both the national institution of trial by jury and the regional institution of lynching in the US. Then, it considers the staging of Frank's trial, conviction, death penalty, commuted sentence and final lynching, each phase of the case presented as public spectacle. Musicals have been conventionally considered a genre that thrives on light-hearted sentimentality and fantasy, but its recourse to spectacle and appeal to emotion paradoxically lends itself to the heightened emotion of the conflicted victims in private as well as the specular nature of the trial and lynching in public, giving utterance to both the public outrage and private trauma.

The paper concludes that since vigilante justice takes over and continues the vicious cycle of vengeance where legal justice fails, poetic justice in the form of theatrical representation, albeit not without its problematics, should be rightfully taken into account as a viable means of redressing public wrong and representing private grief.

**Keywords:** Alfred Uhry, musical theatre, Jewish American, poetic justice

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<sup>\*</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University.

## I. From Light Opera to Dark Musical: Violence, History, and the Musical

There are two ways of writing novels, one is mine, making a sort of musical comedy without music and ignoring real life altogether; the other is going right deep down into life and not caring a damn.

---P. G. Wodehouse

*Parade*, a musical with songs and lyrics by Jason Robert Brown, book by Alfred Uhry, and directed by Harold Prince, has met with critical controversy ever since it premiered on Broadway on December 17, 1998 at the Vivian Beaumont Theatre, Lincoln Center, New York. Though not commercially successful, it did well in the award circuit, winning the Tony Award for Best Original Score, Drama Desk and New York Drama Critic's Circle awards for Best New Musical.<sup>1</sup> It opened to mixed reviews as it touched on a highly delicate historical tragedy, a subject hardly regarded as the domain of musicals in popular imagination.<sup>2</sup>

This paper starts by incorporating musicals into the narrative of violence and history and ends by making a case for the validity and necessity of musical as a vehicle for treating “dark materials.” P. G. Wodehouse, not only a prolific comic novelist but also a veteran lyricist for some thirty musicals, reflects what is generally thought of as the typical image of musicals when he compares comic novel writing to musicals that “ignore life altogether,” a refuge from reality that defies “going right deep down into life.” As Irving Berlin’s song *Let’s Face the Music and Dance* facetiously attests,<sup>3</sup> musicals have a way of averting adverse circumstances at the last

1 The premiere production closed on Feb. 28, 1999 after 39 previews and 84 performances on Broadway, losing reportedly 5.5 million dollars. As a consequence, the co-producing company Livent had to file for bankruptcy.

2 The chief theatre critic of *New York Times* Ben Brantley depicts the musical as a “podium-thumping screed,” with two-dimensional “flat and iconic” characters. The charge is echoed by Vincent Canby’s review in *New York Times* when he comments that the musical is “without life.” Robert Brustein also takes the musical to task for its lack of subtlety, while Michael Feingold finds the play “distant and insubstantial.” But Pogrebin in *New York Times* hailed it as “the most ambitious piece ever done in the theater in 20 years” (Pogrebin E1).

3 The song is originally from the 1936 film *Follow the Fleet* starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, rather than the 1932 musical *Face the Music*, also by Berlin, as some

minute and turn that adversity into something light-footed and jovial as unexpectedly as the way the Irvin Berlin song twists the challenge of “facing the music” into a song and dance. Mainstream musicals, in Brecht’s classification, belong to “culinary theatre” ready-made to be consumed and enjoyed. Romance and love are therefore considered the indispensable ingredients of musicals.

Violence and musicals are not necessarily the odd couple they seem to be at first glance. Violence, probably more than love, featured as the earliest major subject for songs (Wiggins 33-34). People sang for the victors and vanquished in war. As far back as 1638, the first major opera composer Claudio Monteverdi published his eighth book of madrigals on themes of war and love in tandem, *Canti Guerrieri* and *Canti Amorosi*. Murder ballad has existed as a genre from 17<sup>th</sup> century Scotland to modern day Appalachia. They are songs that, in the words of the foremost collector Olive Wooly Burt, “come down through the years as an expression of the life and customs of the time. They have reality and permanence” (xi).

Steven Sondheim, a long-time collaborator of producer Harold Prince and originally the prime candidate for the music of *Parade*,<sup>4</sup> has written concept musicals that deal with lurid violence such as *Sweeney Todd* (1979) and *Assassins* (1991). A gallows song *I’m Going to the Lordy* from the *Assassins*, has even become a hit. However, he turned down Prince’s offer partly because his recent musicals dealing with serious subjects were considered “too dark” to be commercially viable.

The origin of Sondheim’s concept musical can date back to the 1920s, when musicals began to tackle serious subjects with Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein’s 1927 *Show Boat*, which deals with ethnic issues. History began to emerge as a viable subject in musicals and musicals that addressed historical themes have become Broadway hits. Even the American founding fathers have made, or rather, sang their way to the stage, as in Sherman Edwards and Peter Stone’s *1776* (1969). Musical has grown from putting together an assortment of Tin Pan Alley tunes to aspiring to “music theatre” in vision and scale.

The producer of *Parade* Garth Drabinsky went as far as to call three musicals he has produced “Trilogy of America,” comprising *Show Boat*, *Ragtime*, and *Parade*. The kind of historical consciousness that used to be the preserve of the great American novel such as John Dos Passos’ *USA* trilogy thus began to seep into musicals.

Alfred Uhry’s saga of Jewish Atlanta throughout the twentieth century,

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would assume.

4 Harold Prince’s daughter, Daisy Prince, directed *Parade*’s composer Jason Robert Brown’s first off-Broadway musical, *Songs for a New World* in 1995.

including *Driving Miss Daisy*, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, and *Parade*, is comparable to August Wilson's efforts at chronicling the African-American 20th century experience decade by decade.<sup>5</sup> Uhry's historical perspective is echoed by Jason Robert Brown, his collaborator, composer and lyricist, who has recognized its "historical ...and political resonance" (Pogrebin E1).

As critic Barry Singer puts it, "*Parade* was no Disney musical" (175). It can be regarded as a light musical with a weighty subject of history and a dark ending of violence. *Parade* has been faulted as a drama that "falls uncomfortably between the stools of history and art" (Zoglin 184), a critique that in fact serves to accentuate the vantage point of the musical that tries to strike a balance between history and art: negotiating art with history, and representing history through art.

## II. Leo Frank Case: The Facts

He drove through small towns in Georgia where in the scant shade of the trees in the squares citizens spoke of hanging the Jew Leo Frank for what he had done to a fourteen-year-old Christian girl, Mary Phagan. They spit in the dirt.

---E. L. Doctorow, *Ragtime*<sup>6</sup>

The case of Leo Frank may be considered closed legally but the historical wounds inflicted by the case remain gaping open. Almost after a century the case still incites intense passions that threaten to obscure what really happened.<sup>7</sup> When emotion overrides reason, it undermines the truth as well. David Mamet's impassioned plea of a novel on Frank's behalf, *The Old Religion*, certainly does not get off to a sure start when he writes erroneously even before page one that "in 1915 a young factory girl was killed in Atlanta Georgia," two years later than the actual date of murder. Not to be bogged down in the "he says, she says" quagmire, the author will try to steer clear of the gray area and focus on the known facts about the case.

On April 27, 1913, the body of a 13-year old girl Mary Phagan was discovered in

<sup>5</sup> *Driving Miss Daisy* is set in the 1950s, *Ballyhoo* specifically in 1939, and *Parade* from 1913 to 1915.

<sup>6</sup> The passage is quoted from page 256 of the 1974 edition published by Random House.

<sup>7</sup> Unflagging interest in the case can be seen in an unceasing stream of dramatizations over the years, including film adaptation *They Won't Forget* (1937), TV mini-series *The Murder of Mary Phagan* (1988), starring Jack Lemmon, and up to Atlanta playwright Robert Myers' play *The Lynching of Leo Frank* (2000).

the basement of the National Pencil Factory in Atlanta by a black janitor, Newt Lee.

The black watchman Jimmy Conley was first targeted as the most likely perpetrator before suspicion fell on the superintendent of the factory Leo Frank, a Cornell-educated Jew from New York, as he failed to produce a satisfactory alibi. The murder captured public imagination and the trial was a widely publicized media event. On the day of the verdict, the Georgia National Guard was called in to prevent a riot. The jury declared a unanimous guilty verdict. The convicted Frank was sentenced to death by hanging. Following much legal wrangling, including 13 unsuccessful appeals, twice up to the Supreme Court, Governor John Slaton commuted his sentence to life imprisonment. The commutation was greeted by a storm of protests and state militia was summoned to surround the Governor's mansion as the mob threatened his life. Martial law was declared and Slaton was forced to flee Georgia. On August 16, 1915, on the eve of his transfer to the state prison for security, Leo Frank was kidnapped by 25 armed men from the prison cell and lynched near Mary Phagan's girlhood home on the outskirts of Marietta.

Some have been led to believe that Leo Frank had been cleared of his false accusation by the court and a timely rehabilitation of his reputation was in order. However, upon examining the truth in detail, this is hardly the case. A great chance did arise for the case to be overturned when a former office boy Alonzo Mann came forward and declared Leo Frank innocent in 1982, when he was at the ripe old age of 83, almost 70 years after the incident. Based on Mann's testimony the Anti-Defamation League requested a posthumous pardon, which was denied by the State of Georgia, but granted in 1986 only on the grounds that the state failed to protect him in custody without officially absolving him of the murder charge.

Complete with murder, alleged rape, and lynching, the musical has the trappings of a murder mystery. However, it is no conventional whodunit, since the real murderer has never been identified beyond the shadow of a doubt. But part of the puzzling mystery comes from the unexpected reversal of values revealed by the case. Leo Frank was convicted and sentenced to hang mainly on the testimony of black janitor Jim Conley, an escaped convict who was initially the prime murder suspect and changed his testimonials several times during the trial. Many still marvel at the fact that the testimony of an upper class white male manager would be rejected by the jury in favor of a black working class man with a former record, in a city where the stereotype of "lying nigger" is deeply entrenched, especially when considering Conley's own lawyer announced that he was convinced his client was guilty (Wiggins 29).

To solve that puzzle, we have to first turn to the convoluted history of antebellum American South with its convoluted web of social relations.

### III. Enacting the Hauntings of History: from Leo Frank case to “Leo Frank Affair”

The American South in 1913 was, on the one hand, in the midst of a new era buoyed by Progressivism, while on the other hand, plagued by multiple hauntings of historical trauma: the repercussions of Civil War for the whites, the legacy of slavery for the blacks, and traumatic memories of anti-Semitism in Europe for the Jews. Added to historical ethnic scars is the class contradiction that pit the haves against the have-nots, the manager against the laborers, the highly industrialized North against the newly industrialized South. Atlanta, the gateway to the South, suffered from what has been called “a split personality” (Melnick 31), as industrial center of the urbanized New South at the dawn of Progressive era, and as the classic sleepy little town of the Old South, looking back nostalgically at its agrarian arcadia and defunct slavery.

Jeffrey Melnick focuses on the case as “Black-Jewish relations on trial,” in fact race, class, gender, and even sexual relations are all put on trial. The Leo Frank case proved to be the litmus test that exposed and unraveled the intricate web of internal contradictions embedded in the Southern social relations. Such an entangled web threatens to overshadow the complexity of legal niceties and one runs the risk of losing sight of impartiality in considering the case.

Take race to begin with. Ethnic rivalry in the US is often reduced to the polarity of two opposed races, a dualism that disregards the melting pot of ethnic diversity that would factor into the confrontation. The Leo Frank case highlights the Black-Jewish conflict often obscured by the attention lavished on Black and White conflicts. The Black-Jewish relationship in the South has been just as fraught with tension as in the North: there exists an alliance forged by shared history as prejudiced minorities, but also an antagonism often aggravated by class conflict as Southern Jewish plantation owners endorsed slavery. Hence a shifting dialectic of oppressed alliance or oppressed rivalry is sustained between Jews and Blacks.<sup>8</sup>

What kind of role does anti-Semitism play in the case? While some would argue Leo Frank’s crime was that of “being a Jew” (Boyle 205), making this “an American Dreyfus case” (McLean 159); others would downplay the role anti-Semitism plays (Lindemann). The truth seems to lie somewhere in between. The Jewish population in the American South was miniscule compared with that in

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8 From Anna Deavere Smith’s *Fires in the Mirror* (1992) to Tony Kushner’s recent musical *Caroline or Change* (2003), Black-Jewish relations have received more attention in theatre in the last decade.

New York. Only 5 percent of the Jewish population in the U.S. lived in the South in 1907 (Lindeman 224). Home to the largest Jewish population in the South, Atlanta was known for being free of “Juden-hetz” or Jew hatred (Oney 366). The Jewish community in Atlanta consisted mainly of Jews of German extraction, who regarded themselves as highly assimilated, Westernized, cultured, and secular Jews, radically different from the religious Judaic Jews from “East of Elbe,” an internal contradiction well explored in Uhry’s play *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*.

Assimilation based on self-denial is built on slippery ground. Renouncing one’s poor relations—the Eastern Jews, did seem to facilitate the assimilation process for Western Jews, that is until a crisis arose. When internal difference collapsed, Leo Frank, a German Jew, was identified as belonging in the group of Russian Jews, some of whom were associated with degenerate sexuality for running brothels and gambling dens in Atlanta.

Apart from race, class plays an equally major role in the case but tends to be overlooked in the musical. Not only is Leo Frank’s role as a manager downplayed in the musical, but also Frank as a Jewish leader is overlooked. Leo Frank happened to be president of the Atlanta chapter of B’nai Brith. But his social roles are ignored in favor of his private roles as husband and lover manqué.<sup>9</sup>

According to historical studies, the rising economy of the New South depended in significant part on the contributions of women and children. Mary Phagan’s father died when she was little and her mother remarried. She had to work as child laborer in order to make ends meet in the family. She was laid off temporarily due to the delayed shipping of supplies. She went back to the factory on April 26, 1913 to collect her overdue pay of \$1.20, as well as to catch the parade on Confederate Memorial Day.<sup>10</sup> Child workers worked ten-hour days for a petty twelve cents an hour (Wiggins 26). Thus Mary Phagan became a symbol of class oppression, as many of her mourners were mill plant workers and farmers.

The scene of the crime is the factory, as commonplace as could be in an industrialized society, but for the American South still reeling from the impact of the Civil War, the scene of the crime has always been the Factory, the symbol of the industrial North triumphant over the agrarian South. As Dorsey in the play puts it:

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<sup>9</sup> For secular Jews, B’nai Brith served as a “secular substitute” of religious, Judaic institute such as synagogue. B’nai Brith, meaning Sons of the Covenant in Hebrew, was founded in 1843 in New York. It is the oldest Jewish organization dedicated to community service and human rights issues.

<sup>10</sup> Confederate Memorial Day is observed on different dates in different states: April 26 in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Mississippi; May 10 in North and South Carolina; May 30 in Virginia; and June 3 in Kentucky, Louisiana, and Tennessee.

“People of Atlanta fought for freedom to their graves, and now their city is a fact’ry and their children are its slaves” (Brown18).

Emancipation of black slaves was deemed ironically as slavery for the Southerners. Freed blacks in the South underwent not only continued racial and class oppression, but even sexual discrimination. The ethnic minority is often associated with sexual deviancy. Far more often than the Jews, blacks have always been the borderline of sexual normalcy against which the non-blacks define themselves. Jim Conley has been painted by Frank’s defense lawyer as “a great black spider...a lustful animal,” in the hope that the implication of primitivism and insufficient intelligence might discredit his testimony.

Though never as overstated and feared as black sexuality, Jewish sexuality has been perceived as an implicit threat due to its assumed tendency of perversity. Such as transgression of sexual norms remains a die-hard stereotype in European anti-Semitism. Leo Frank’s appearance, with his bulging eyes and thick lips, seemed to be conspicuously Jewish and his cold manner did nothing to help defuse the stereotype. Tom Watson went so far as portray him as a “lascivious pervert, guilty of the crime that caused the Almighty to blast the cities of the plain” (Wiggins 30), insinuating that Frank was a sodomite. Leo Frank’s implied sexual perversion in public opinion, besides testimonials of his office orgies and sexual harassment, is assumed by sheer guesswork based on his Jewish background alone.

The public image of Mary Phagan wavers between one devoid of sexuality and one potent with it, as “innocent waif” or “alluring woman” (Melnick 31). As furor over the case mounted, Mary Phagan was dubbed “little Mary” and adored almost as a saint by “Mary’s people,” while during the trial attention was focused voyeuristically on her precocious physique. In *The Picture Show*, the only number devoted to Mary Phagan in the musical, she is shown to be a demure and lively girl, one minute following the insistent promptings of her mother not to date till the age of 16 and the next following the promptings of her heart. In the musical portrayal, her giggly girlishness overrides her budding womanhood.

Mary’s next two appearances seem as ghostly as they are brief. She puts in her next appearance at the end of a number which cross-cuts Leo at work and wife Lucille at home, Mary shows up when the contrasting song trails off and announces herself for picking up her pay,

MARY. Hey.

LEO (startled). Yes?

MARY. I came for my pay.

LEO: Name?



MARY. Mary Phagan. (Brown 13)

And the rest is silence, because the rest, as it is often said, is history. It's history that has passed yet refuses to go away. It's history that has deep resonance and dire consequence. It is too delicate to be tampered with artistic speculation and literary invention because too much is at stake. Nobody knows for certain what comes next between Mary and Leo; silence, therefore, is the only option at such a crucial historical juncture. The moment of silence comes across as curiously deafening and jarring in a melodious musical alive with the sound of music.

The silent treatment in the musical is the pained utterance of the victims: Leo Frank wronged, and Mary Phagan killed. Convinced of the innocence of Leo Frank, there can be little doubt that the Uhry/Brown team rule out the possibility of Frank as murderer, as demonstrated not only in their words and music but also in their deeds. In his introduction to the story of the musical, Jason Robert Brown states that Leo Frank was "falsely accused" of murdering Mary Phagan(3), setting the tone of the play as a defense of Leo Frank's honor, an attempt to resuscitate his reputation by granting him poetic justice. Two weeks before the premiere of the musical on Broadway, Brown and Uhry paid respects to Leo Frank at his grave in Brooklyn for the first time and according to Brown, Uhry telepathically echoed his thought when he uttered "I hope we didn't let you down, Leo" (Brown 9). Evidently the musical is dedicated to Leo Frank's memory and the duo strongly desires to justify Frank's innocence and do justice to his suffering through the work.

Their silence and utterance did not find a sympathetic chord in the majority of Atlanta back in 1913. There were growing public demands for incriminating someone whose importance would match the enormity of the crime. Prolonged racism against blacks in the South led many to argue that a black criminal is not a "sufficient villain" for such an unconscionable crime (Wiggins 27). The murderer of little Mary began to take on symbolic stature. As Mary Phagan's minister confessed in retrospect, hanging a black man seemed to be "poor atonement," but Leo Frank, a Yankee Jew, "would be a victim worthy to pay for the crime" (MacLean 158). The culprit is obliged not only to pay for the murder of the little girl, but as it were, also for the defeat of the South half a century earlier, as Uhry says, "somebody had to pay for the South losing the Civil War" (Silverman 42). Only through a cruel twist of historical irony did an African-American manage to escape the gallows, thanks to his racial insignificance.

As the opposed stances hardened into deadly enmity, any possibility of a dialogue was excluded. Jews in the North began to rally behind Leo Frank: a campaign was launched, a lobby was formed, and top-echelon lawyers came to his defense. The Jewish elite backing Leo Frank piqued the anxiety of the white

Christians in Atlanta when the poor could hardly afford a defense attorney, resulting in growing public opinion against Frank. They formed what was called “Mary’s people,” and along with the so-called Old Marietta residents (also known as OMS), were dead set on targeting Leo Frank as the murderer. This antagonism extends beyond mere ethnic confrontation and enters into class division. However, the class conflict, which is not limited to labor vs. management, largely goes unrecognized in the musical.

The case polarized the opposed ethnic stances in the South: 1915 witnessed the “expansiveness of white supremacy,” leading to the revival of Ku Klux Klan (Boyle 205); and the minorities responded in kind: the Jews with the establishment of the Anti-Defamation League, and the blacks with NAACP. The Anti-Defamation League was in fact established in New York largely as a consequence of the impact of the Leo Frank case and its aftermath.

Despite overwhelming evidence and recent new testimony that indicate the likely innocence of Leo Frank, the only legal redress has been an admission of the legal system’s failure to protect the accused. The murder charges against Leo Frank have never been dropped. Since *de facto* innocence does not constitute *de jure* innocence, the paper rests content with leaving aside the contradictory legal claims and focuses instead on the underlying causes leading to the tragedy, the multifarious implications of the Leo Frank case, and the significance and strategies of staging the spectacle of grievance for private grieving.

There are two murder victims in the case, Mary Phagan and Leo Frank, but no convincing murderer was found for the former and nobody was even charged for the latter. In the absence of an impartial legal system, an unbiased press, and rational citizens, and in the presence of historical traumas, ethnic prejudices and emotional baggage, the Leo Frank case has thus become, in Lindemann’s term, like the Alfred Dreyfus case in France, and the Mendel Beilis case in Ukraine, an “affair.” The case soon spiraled into an emotionally charged affair, a *cause célèbre* for both camps behind which ethnic and class identification rallied.

#### IV. From Parade to Spectacle: Show Trial, Lynching, and Post-Lynching

May you be involved in a lawsuit when you’re right.

--- Yiddish curse

The musical is structured historically, with Confederate Memorial Day giving

the time frame to the beginning of Act I and Act II, as well as the Act II epilogue after Frank's death, each opening with a parade, in 1913, 1914, and 1915 respectively. However, the third parade in the musical rounds up the play with historical anachronisms.<sup>11</sup> Historically the Mary Phagan murder did occur on Confederate Day, Mary having expressed the wish to come to town to see the parade after picking up her pay check.

The opening scene is set in 1862, the second year of the Civil War, with a young soldier from Marietta, Georgia, ready to go to the war front, bidding farewell to his beloved as he vows to fight for the values of the South. In the same song, time fast forwards half a century later to April 26, 1913, Confederate Memorial Day, with the same soldier fifty years older, a gaunt, limping veteran, still in Confederate uniform for the parade, reminiscing about the sacrifices he and his beloved have made for their homeland.

The opening number segues seamlessly from 1862 to 1913 as it leaps from a farewell to arms of lovers to a celebration of arms and fighting. In deed, it's as if the South suffered from historical amnesia, emerging from the Civil War unscathed. All the traumas and wounds of war that have torn the South asunder are temporarily papered over by the superficial pomp and circumstance of the parade.

In the same vein of *God Bless America*, town folks burst into an anthem singing praise of Georgia, honoring the soldiers who died fighting for their land. The sense of native triumphalism and nostalgia; however, fail to strike any sympathetic chord in Leo Frank. Alienated by such a blatant display of nativism, Frank longs all the more for being "home again" in Brooklyn, New York, in the midst of the Jewish community he grew up in: "Back with people who look like I do, and talk like I do, and think like I do" (Brown 11).

Not only is Leo Frank regarded as an outsider by the local people, he also recognizes his own identity as a stranger in a strange land. His being perceived as a resident alien is probably the only thing Leo Frank shares with the local Southerners, as he muses in his solo *How Can I Call This Home?* that "being Southern is not just being in the South" (Brown 11). Leo Frank has made a conscious choice to come to the South make a living without every emotionally identifying with the South.

Insulated from the rousing parade outside, Leo Frank's isolation in his office foreshadows his later confinement in prison, his estrangement reflecting his trapped predicament as a Yankee Jew in the Christian South, as demonstrated in the cover

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11 In the musical, by 1915 Hugh Dorsey was the new Governor and Tom Watson a Congressman, when in reality Dorsey was not elected Governor of Georgia until 1916, while Tom Watson was elected Senator in 1920 (Melnick 7).

art design in the sound recording and piano score of the musical. Such failure or resistance of assimilation works decidedly against him during the trial.

While the American judiciary system operating on trial by jury does lend itself to intense theatricality, complete with attorneys and jury as performers and spectators, the Act I Finale trial scene of *Parade* is most unconventional in that instead of sticking to the facts as realistically and matter-of-factly as possible, it is staged as a fantasy sequence with song and dance, which is part and parcel of musicals. Nevertheless, it invites baffled questions that the authors would drop the highly theatrical convention of courtroom verbal sparring in the tradition of *Twelve Angry Men* (1954) and *Inherit the Wind* (1955) in favor of courtroom fantasy. It seems to suggest the historic trial is nothing more than a show trial by making a show out of it. It is a daring and risky move at once. On the one hand, the fabricated testimonies given by the factory girls allegedly coached by prosecutor Hugh Dorsey serve to underline the trial as a travesty of justice, achieving through its very form of musical fantasy an unsparing critique of the presumed failure of the legal system. On the other hand, it is just as vulnerable to the counter-critique of being completely subjective and lopsided by failing to present an impartial view of the courtroom scene. It replicates what it attacks by rendering the representation utterly unrealistic and unreliable.

Firstly, a real witness account is mixed with a speculative scene. Frankie's testimony that Mary told him about the strange looks Leo Frank gave her is interspersed with the imaginary Mary enacting her private encounter with Leo Frank, which may very well be the last one before she was murdered. The tentative overture made by Leo Frank has Mary Phagan singing:

He calls my name,  
I turn my head,  
He got no words to say.  
His eyes get big,  
My face gets red,  
And I want to run away,  
And he looks...  
And I wait...  
And he smiles... (Brown 19)

The song trails off hauntingly with the smile. Is it a harmless smile of a benign, avuncular boss, or the "smile, smile and be a villain" kind of sinister smile? This remains an open question. This is as far as the authors could go in realizing what

could have happened in reality, the limit and limitation of representation beyond which lies the truth still yet to surface.

The “collective ‘memory’” scene launches further into all-out fantasy in which the factory girls sing and dance to the great show tune, *Why Don’tcha Come Up to My Office*. A caricature of the presumed coached testimonies given by the girls, it is clearly intended as a condemnation of the trial by showing it as it really was: a show trial. At times it is reminiscent of the feigned group fainting of the girls in Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, when the factory girls in unison recount Leo Frank’s sexual exploits and exploitation at work, even Leo Frank is shown incorporated into the seduction game. But it works effectively as good theatre almost in spite of itself, with its brilliant choreography and bouncy tune, and has been almost unanimously acknowledged to be the highlight of the musical. Great music and theatre, taken out of context, ironically threatens to sabotage the underlying significance of the scene altogether.

Frank’s own testimony is converted in the song *It’s Hard to Speak My Heart* into a self-defense of his own reticence.

It’s hard to speak my heart,  
 I’m not a man who bares his soul.  
 ....  
 I hide behind my work,  
 Safe and sure of what to say...  
 I know I must seem hard,  
 I know I must seem ...cold.  
 I never touched that girl! (Brown 21)

In reality Leo Frank’s own testimony, rife with contradictions, raised more questions than he answered. However, the creators of *Parade*, evidently intent on precluding any suggestion that he be a possible suspect, choose to sidestep the dubious loopholes in his testimony by presenting the testimonies against him as pure spectacle, implying it is all superficial and staged fabrication; while presenting Leo Frank’s self-defense as stripped of showy gimmicks, inexpressive and inarticulate, nothing sensational and camera-worthy. Such a lack of theatricality definitely plays against him in a courtroom of spectacle where seeming counts more than being, looking innocent overrides true innocence, being able to play not guilty overrides being guiltless. Since Leo Frank’s plea of innocence is incommensurable with the spectacular idiom of the legal system, he retreats into the wordless internal recesses of his “heart” that defy verbalization.

The spectacle of attorneys and witnesses as performers and judge and jury as spectators in court continued outside the courthouse. Inquiring reporters and inquisitive folks thronged outside the court during the trial, their heightened emotions egged on by political speechifying, religious sermonizing and cheered on by performing artists such as folk singers. It is said that Fiddlin' John Carson, one of country music's pioneers in American history, made daily appearance at the trial, singing songs in memory of Mary on the courthouse steps. (Wiggins 29)

Upon the announcement of the guilty verdict and death sentence of Leo Frank, a "cakewalk" dance is performed in the musical, which came very close to reality, as the outcome was greeted with general jubilation, with thousands of people taking to the streets singing and dancing for the victorious verdict. Racial tension found an easy outlet in public performance. According to a witness account from an autobiography written in Yiddish by David Davis, musicians on the streets sang songs about "We will kill the Yankee-Jew" to the general approval of the crowd (Wiggins 43).

Besides the fanatic agitators, the mass hysteria, spectacle and sensationalism surrounding the case were drummed up in no small part by the press. Often frustrated by increased industrialization and urbanization, people in Atlanta relied on the newly flourishing press for information to guide them through the transition process. Newspapers resorted to yellow journalism to compete for public attention, especially in the Frank case, which snowballed into "the greatest news story in the history of the state, if not of the South" (Dinnerstein 13). As the jaded journalist from *Atlanta Georgian* named Craig trumpets in the song *Big News*, the news-hungry media is the "stir-crazy freak in Atlanta," pouncing on the juicy story and sucking the last ounce of sensationalism out of it. It didn't take long before they realized that scapegoating the Jew was the surefire selling point. As Craig cynically sings in *Real Big News*, all it takes is "a snippy, pissy Yankee," one "little Jew from Brooklyn" and a "superstitious city" plus "a mousy little wife" to make "the scoop of the year" (Brown 17).

Tom Watson, publisher of *Jeffersonian* who later turned politician, was the most responsible for exploiting inflammatory writings to stoke hatred. "Give him fangs, give him horns," so he sings for demonizing Frank in the musical, advocating unabashed populism and virulent racism.

If the media played a vital part in blowing the case out of proportion, placing the blame squarely on the media would be a gross misrepresentation of the whole picture. Media tycoon Randolph Hearst's newspaper *Atlanta Georgian* just had established a foothold in Atlanta when the murder occurred. One would expect that with Hearst's notorious brand of yellow journalism the paper would play on the

sensationalism of the case, as the musical would have us believe. This is true, but only initially, as the position of the paper on the case swerved from targeting Frank as the culprit into defending his innocence, an about-face that some claimed was made possible only by “Jewish money” (Lindemann 247).<sup>12</sup>

Neither of the victims—Mary Phagan and Leo Phagan—was freed from the manipulation of spectacle even after death. Virtually the whole town of Marietta went to see Mary Phagan. It is estimated that as many as ten thousand people paid homage to Mary Phagan as she lay in state (MacLean 159). The spectacle of the dead Mary Phagan for public mourning stands in strong contrast with the spectacle of the lynched Leo Frank for public gloating. Ownership of the mutilated body is ensured by the power of visual representation. Leo Frank’s body was photographed by photographer Roger Rosenblatt and made into postcard, which was generally made available for sale in drugstores. Even though as early (or as late) as 1908 the U.S. Post Office had ordered a ban on mailing lynching postcards. As a sort of unique American public art form, macabre as it may seem, Leo Frank has become a spectacle, dead or alive.

Though lynchings still occurred occasionally well into the early twentieth century, they became increasingly frowned upon in the South as an outmoded practice; an embarrassing reminder of a bygone age in the era of Progressivism (Brundage 9). Therefore Leo Frank’s lynching was by no means the rule, but more an exception in 1915. Lynching a Jew was even more of an anomaly since usually the blacks were the targeted victims. The atrocity of lynching was even condoned and endorsed by many Jewish slave owners.

*Parade* is not the first musical to touch on the subject of lynching. As far back as 1933, the musical *As Thousands Cheer* by Moss Hart and Irving Berlin obliquely alluded to it. While the Hart/Berlin’s revue deals with implicit absence, *Parade* is all about explicit presence, whether live visuals such as viewing Mary’s body and lynching Leo Frank, or visual memorials such as photography and postcard, both embodied and dismembered, the conspicuous presence of lynching becomes a spectacle to behold and abhor.

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12 The conversion into supporting Leo Frank proved “a fatal turn of events” for the *Atlanta Georgian* as its circulation went from being the largest newspaper in the South into steady decline and closed business in a couple of years. See Lindemann 245-6.

## V. Fractured Historical Memory: Exploiter or Scapegoat, Murderer or Victim

The passion sparked by the incendiary case was so intense that it almost made objectivity and impartiality impossible. Judge Roan, a highly respected judge presiding over the case, who gave Frank the death penalty, had second thoughts about the verdict and wrote a personal letter to Governor Slaton. Paraphrased in the musical, it goes:

And maybe I was wrong.  
Maybe what was “obvious” then  
Would not have been for long,  
But I would not delay. (Brown 23)

His deathbed confession reveals that passion could even get the best of a professional judiciary, since “with hatred in the air/ How is any man to know/ What is or isn’t fair?”

His contrite self-correction is particularly striking in that it is delivered as a solitary voice in the production, a disembodied sound striped of the trappings of spectacle and visuals that tend to overwhelm rational thinking.

Contrary to the authors’ intention; however, few people convinced of Frank’s guilt would undergo a change of mind. Uhry has characterized the musical as one “about noble people, tragic figures... whose genuine pain and love for Georgia was manipulated by a few evil men” (qtd. in Hulbert 1). The melodramatic form of radical good and evil is firmly in place.

“The few evil men” suggested by Uhry certainly includes Tom Watson and Hugh Dorsey, the glaring villains of the musical. While Tom Watson is portrayed as the zealot and demagogue that he was, he was formerly known as a liberal fighting for the rights of minorities. His sympathies for the downtrodden are exhibited in his sentimental lullaby in the musical, *Watson’s Lullaby*, when he is determined to avenge Mary’s death, using his news media as a mouthpiece to advocate populism, and call for Leo Frank’s lynching. Riding on popular support, he was later elected Senator, though not in 1915, the year indicated in the musical, but in 1920.

Uhry’s melodramatic formation for Watson and Dorsey found a perfect counterpart in the targeted villains themselves, who made their career out of playing on either/or Manichaeian dualism to mobilize popular identification. Their doctrine of taking sides is best seen in *Where Will You Stand When the Flood Comes?* Both claim to exercise divine justice, blessing their own followers to “walk with us at the



side of the Lord” while damning the dissenters for “put(ting) your soul in the Devil’s hand” (Brown 25).

Governor Slaton’s public statement is juxtaposed with Tom Watson’s speech, contrasting Slaton’s soul-searching contemplations with Watson’s rabble-rousing rhetoric. Watson and Slaton represent the extremes of the political spectrum on the issue. Slaton resorts to his clear conscience, using Roman Governor Pontius Pilates as an analogy to caution against a similar act of atrocity committed against another Jew. Also invoking the Bible, Watson warns of apocalyptic disaster, suggesting that “someone’s gonna pay when the flood comes” (Brown 26).

Watson and Dorsey gave the green light to the mob’s doings, as they put it in the musical, “so let the mob do whatever they must” (Brown 25). The lynch mob is represented by Frankie, an invention more dynamic than others in characterization. He grows from a lover in *The Picture Show*, to a mourner vowing vengeance in *It Doesn’t Make Sense*: “God forgive me what I think, God forgive me what I wish right now” (Brown 16) and ends up an avenger by lynching Leo Frank. The trajectory from love to hate to violence is sketchily outlined but clearly developed.

As Uhry told Brown that he hoped the enraged white community wouldn’t “come across as idiot rednecks” (qtd. in Hubert 3), Frankie certainly would not. Historically it was also not the case. The executors, or rather, executioners of Leo Frank’s lynching consisted not of the redneck mob one would usually associate with such wanton violence. Instead, the act was planned and carried out systematically by people far “above the woolhat level,” mainly prominent male citizens of Atlanta (Wiggins 40), including local notables on both judicial and political fronts, such as members of the Georgia House of Representatives and Senate, former mayors of Marietta, as well as local prosecutors and judges. Lynching Leo Frank meant taking justice into their own hands, a belated triumph of justice, rather than a blatant miscarriage of justice. The twenty-five armed kidnappers and lynchers of Leo Frank called themselves the Knights of Mary Phagan, as if they were knights in shining armor coming to the belated rescue of a damsel in distress, continuing the honored Southern tradition of gallantry and chivalry. The Knights formed the basis of a new chapter of Ku Klux Klan (Frey 95).

Once the seeds of mutual hatred have been planted, antagonism will keep growing like the big oak tree, branching out in different directions. No less important than the tree in O’Neill’s *Desire under the Elms*, the oak tree looms large in the background throughout the play, dominating the stage design concept. It almost attains the stature of a major character, a constant reminder of nature’s being subject to divergent interpretations. Like the swaying tree in Billie Holiday’s gruesome song about lynching, *Strange Fruit*, the oak tree bears bitter fruits of

enmity. It is under the tree that the Confederate soldier bids farewell to his sweetheart at the beginning of the musical, and it is the same old tree under which Leo Frank gets hanged by the mob. Called endearingly as *Dear Old Oak* by John “Fiddlin” Carson in his tribute song, it grew into a “hallowed oak” for townspeople who would make pilgrimage there, patting and hugging the tree (Dinnerstein 145).

The Jewish community’s determination to fight for justice on Leo Frank’s behalf is only matched by the Gentile community’s determination to make sure that Leo Frank does not escape justice. Deeply convinced of their own righteousness and suspicious of the corruption of jurisprudence, both sides disregarded the due process of law. Ironically, both attempted to intervene in the legal process for fear of the presumed interference of the opposite camp: the Jews feared the anti-Semitic prejudice, and the Gentiles the “Jewish gold.”

While an alliance with God and truth was embraced by both camps, the facts were sidelined and obscured in the welter of inflamed passion. As populism was mobilized on both sides, the case ceased to be regarded strictly in legal terms but became embroiled into a tangle of politics and passion, eventually escalating into an article of faith. Operating on a rigid dichotomy of quasi-religious dimension, the sanctification of Mary Phagan has to be accompanied by the demonization of Leo Frank.<sup>13</sup>

What often gets lost in the binary opposition is the plight of the third party, which in the case of Leo Frank is the Southern blacks. The portrayal of blacks in the conflicting roles of victim and villain remains one of the trickiest problems facing the adaptation. The strategy of *Parade* is to separate the likely villain: Jim Conley, from the victims: the common black folks. In *A Rumblin’ and A Rollin’* the train is carrying Leo Frank’s supporters from the North down to the South because “a white man gonna get hung.” The high-profile “rumblin’ and rollin’” of the “Yankee brigade” stands in stark contrast with the low-key “mumblin’ and shuffling” of the black local community, since if a black girl were attacked, “the local hotels wouldn’t be so packed” (Brown 22), underscoring the sharp racial inequality and unequal resources at the disposal of Jews and Blacks. Ironically, it is Jim Conley, the other prime suspect for murder, who discerns the collective victimhood of blacks throughout history.

Under such divisive circumstances, all sense of general justice was forfeited in recognition of specific justice only, and people were forced to take sides along ethnic lines. What is not lawful then might be considered as just and fair in the light of historical memory or in the interest of the community. The retreat into their own

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13 Originally the musical was ironically entitled *The Devil and Little Mary*.

specific community might thus be regarded as withdrawal into the private sphere, forged by each close-knit social unit, battling their own foes and nursing their own wounds based on their own values. Such vigilante justice needs no further justification than doing justice to their own wrongs.

## VI. Finale: Last Dinner and Last Prayer

The wrong-headed defense strategy of exploiting anti-Semitism and anti-black racism by Leo Frank's lawyers, which goes untreated in the musical, is a good example of disregarding general justice in favor of specific justice or self-interest. Instead, *Parade* highlights the efforts on the part of his wife Lucille in his defense. After much inner struggle, she sheds her helplessness in *Do It Alone* and transforms herself into a most eloquent champion of her husband's honor and life in the next scene with Gov. Slaton. In their encounter at the state ball hosted by the Governor and set to the waltzy *Pretty Music*, Lucille bides her time as she waits to be his next dancing partner. Alternately coaxing and coercive, she tries to wrest a promise from him, cornering him to being either a coward or a fool not to save Frank.

Her heroic gesture at rescuing her distressed husband is reciprocated by her savior John Slaton. If Tom Watson and Hugh Dorsey are the obvious villains of the musical, then Governor Slaton seems to be the only Romantic hero in the musical. Their brief encounter is staged almost as a romance, one of the few truly light-hearted moments in an otherwise gloomy musical. Though he is the first Governor in American history that has declared martial law for his own protection, in the musical he answers Lucille's call of heroic chivalry for a Southern belle. Assigned the task of inquiring into the case, he even personally questions Jim Conley; acting like a savvy detective in a whodunit in the number *Blues: Feel the Rain Fall*.

Lucille Frank is delineated in the musical as a classic Southern woman in denial of her Jewish origin, preferring her Northern husband to greet her with "Howdy" to "Shalom."<sup>14</sup> In other words, she is a perfect assimilationist, the kind of German-Jewish Southern-born belles seen in Uhry's *The Last Night at Ballyhoo*. Just as she is totally oblivious to her ethnic roots is another so is she ignorant of her class status. Actually Lucille was a descendant of an entrepreneur who owned a chemical company in Atlanta; the class issue is sidestepped in the musical.<sup>15</sup>

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14 *Shalom* is Hebrew for both "hello" and "goodbye": it literally means "peace."

15 Lucille's family Selig owned the Selig Chemical Company in Atlanta. Lucille died in 1957. Her cremated ashes were carried around in the trunk of a relative's car until 1964, and finally buried in an unmarked place in Oakland Cemetery in Atlanta. Even at the time

More than a love story of “two mismatched people” (Bishop B.7), her arranged marriage with Leo Frank was an alliance of the Jewish elites. Lucille remains throughout the musical as a Southern Georgian girl, as constant in her self-identity as she is unshaken in her belief in her husband’s innocence and unshaken in her faith in his final homecoming.

The couple’s picnic scene and Leo Frank’s ultimate prayer are crucial theatrical inventions that not only add to the dramatic poignancy of the ending but also reveal the underlying identification process at work in the musical. It depicts a pastoral scene shared by lovers, as often seen in operas and musicals. The picnic scene occurs after Leo Frank has been moved to a prison farm. It is there that the couple enjoys a moment alone together for the last time.<sup>16</sup>

The couple sing the major lyrical number of the musical *All the Wasted Time*. The song stands in the tradition of lament, a sad gesture of venting frustrated love in a lyrical aria-like outpouring of affection. Laments are about passive resignation, surrendering the fight and surrendering oneself to emotions.

I will never understand

What I did to deserve you

....

How could I not be in love with you?

What kind of fool could have taken you

For granted for so long? (Brown 26)

Rebuked by public grievance, the couple seeks refuge in private grief. Their private grieving is a utopian moment against the dystopian, almost apocalyptic reality. After being transferred to the state penitentiary, what really happened was Leo Frank was seriously mangled by his cellmate and his throat was deeply slashed. The picnic is therefore created as a beautiful theatrical illusion that Frank could barely afford to stomach in reality.

And more than just about a couple who “depend on, appreciate, and eventually love each other” (Zoglin 185), the couple’s reconciliation also implies that the erstwhile staunchly secular Leo Frank has come to terms with his own Jewish identity. The last words Leo utters in the musical come from the Hebrew prayer

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of her death in 1957, her relatives were wary of giving her a public funeral.

16 The dining scene demonstrates the only personal detail about Leo Frank that Uhry has managed to wrench out the sealed silence of his family: that one of his grandmother’s sisters used to bring him meals in jail (Uhry 2.7).

*Sh'ma*.<sup>17</sup> His last resort to Hebrew is a final return to what Mamet refers to as “the old religion.” David Mamet’s old religion is a “different religion” that is excluded by the Gentiles and in turn excludes them. The Jew’s “efforts to belong” were spurned and mocked as “pathetic” (148-149). By uttering a language unintelligible to the Gentiles, Leo Frank in his ultimate moment excludes his persecutors by his private language, reaffirming the failure of assimilation and his innermost identity as a Jew.

Anne Anlin Cheng in her recent work on the melancholy of race observes an overabundance of “vocabulary of grievance” on the social and political front in the U.S. and an inadequate “immaterial, unquantifiable repository of public and private grief.” Contrary to the conventional “restitution” of ethnic minorities is the conversion “from being subjected to grief to being a subject of speaking grievance” (6-7). *Parade* manifests such a reversal by turning back from the public into the private, from mounting campaigns and filing lawsuits to voicing grief and saying prayers, for Mary Phagan’s mother, for Lucille, and for Leo Frank. The musical itself constitutes an attempt to make room for private grief for different ethnic communities.

In contrast, the trajectory of mourning shifting from the internal to the external is best seen in Mary Phagan’s mother in *My Child Will Forgive Me* when she first prays for her daughter’s forgiveness for not being able to save her. Her prayer is also a litany of complaints about class afflictions: poverty, child labor, and social hazards. But class disadvantage soon shades into name calling when she blurts out, “And so I forgive you, Jew!” (Brown 20) The single word Jew is uttered in a way that makes it as much condoning as condemning, as private grief turns into public grievance against the Jew.

Another example of converting private grief into public grievance is Watson and Dorsey’s demagogic tactic, inciting the crowd to cry out, “see the blood as the city grieves!” (Brown 26). For Mary’s people, Atlanta belongs to them only and their public grieving excludes the mourning of the Jews in the city. “Blood for blood” vengeance becomes the outlet through which public grievance channels private grief.

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17 The prayer has three levels of meaning: to hear, to understand, and to heed.

## VII. Ghetto Musical or American Opera? : The Poetic Justice of *Parade*

We were all descendants of the Leo Frank case.

---Alfred Uhry

“Southern extended families are prone to telling stories and so are Jewish ones. Mine was both, so I got a double dose.” So says Alfred Uhry in the liner notes to the recording of *Parade*. He often describes himself as “a Georgia boy,” with a “Southern heart,” and “Jewish face” (Uhry 1998:2.7). Yet his double identity of being Jewish externally and Southern internally has been a source of pride as well as anxiety, as he muses, “People often ask me if Southern Jews are more Southern than Jewish or the other way around. I never know how to answer” (Uhry 2002, xi). His quandary is directed more to the one raising the question than himself, as he has already answered, being both Jewish and Southern complements each other like “a double dose.” While his Southern origin is well known, his Jewishness is often obscured, not least by his own professed ignorance of his own Judaic roots. But the making of the musical *Parade* would not be possible without joint efforts of the pool of Jewish talents. In fact, the concentration of Jewish creators in *Parade* is so high that one wonders if it should be called, borrowing from Eddie Gale’s groundbreaking 1968 jazz album *Ghetto Music* on *Blue Note* records, a ghetto musical? Can we call *Parade* a Jewish musical? And if it is such, does it circumscribe its reach by privileging only the Jewish, or does it celebrate its ethnicity while reaching out to other communities?

Albeit a politically incorrect subject in the US, let’s face it, virtually the whole production team of *Parade* consists of people of Jewish descent: composer Jason Robert Brown hailed from Brooklyn; book writer Alfred Uhry formerly a Southern Jew, currently a New York Jew; director Harold Prince is Jewish and has produced a number of Jewish-themed musicals; and producer Garth Drabinsky, whose company Livent financed the show, is a Canadian Jew. The musical is about the Jews, by the Jews, and though not necessarily for the Jews, the theatre in which the musical was premiered, Vivian Beaumont Theatre, was the legacy of a Jewish patroness, not to mention the New York audience of which the Jewish clientele always formed a significant part. In addition to being the chair of the Lincoln Center Theatre, Linda LeRoy Janklow, is the daughter of Mervyn LeRoy, who directed the first film based on the Frank case *They Won’t Forget* (1937).

The musical can thus be regarded as a collaboration of Jewish artists across

different disciplines and generations. Hal Prince is one of the most revered theatre veterans, Alfred Uhry a widely respected prizewinning dramatist, and the co-conceivers picked the 24-year-old Jason Robert Brown for his Broadway debut, continuing the tradition of Jewish artists making musicals that started with Berlin and Gershwin, which in fact constituting a great American cultural tradition. If it has been suggested that a Jewish-run company was presumptuous enough to call itself the “National” Pencil Company, Harold Prince and Alfred Uhry had absolutely no qualms about approaching Jason Robert Brown for penning “an American opera” (Brown 9). As mentioned earlier, Drabinsky even boasted of “an American trilogy.” The Jewish idiom has long been incorporated into American musicals as an integral part of its tradition. Especially coming right on the heels of the Centennial Summer Olympics held in Atlanta in 1996, *Parade* is rooted in Jewish background and aspires to national themes.

Moreover, Alfred Uhry was chosen as the book writer not merely because of his prestige as the triple crown winner of Pulitzer, Tony, and Oscar awards and the fact that there is Jewishness in his genes and the South, as his collaborator Jason Brown puts it, is “in his bones” (Pogrebin E1). He has personal stakes in the musical. His great uncle Sigmund Montag was Leo Frank’s employer and financed the defense for the case. His cousin Herbert Haas was one of Frank’s attorneys. His grandmother, on whom Uhry’s most famous character Miss Daisy was supposedly based, befriended Leo’s wife Lucille, who used to visit the Uhrys as one of the “old lady” family friends. As far as Uhry is concerned, the Leo Frank affair is a domestic affair.

The Leo Frank case, however, was always a taboo subject shrouded in mystery and fear, not to be broached in the Uhry family. It was a traumatic experience too painful to be brought up. “All of us who were Jewish in Atlanta grew up under that cloud,” says Uhry (Hulbert). With the musical, Uhry not only continues the family tradition by taking up defense for Leo Frank, but also comes to terms with his personal demons by breaking the spell of fascination he was held under since childhood.

He gives voice to the suppressed silence imposed by the “hush-hush policy” at home (Brown 8). The Jewish silence is a form of self-censorship borne out of the fear for provoking the majority community. It is also a form of unspeakable trauma too painful to be articulated in language. A veil of silence has fallen over both Jewish and Gentile communities in the Atlanta area, with the former fearful of provoking the wrath of the majority, and the latter refusing to give away the names of the lynchers.<sup>18</sup> Such an obstinate silence reveals a jealously guarded secrecy and

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18 The Jewish community kept mum about the case not merely because they lacked new

solidarity shared only by each private community. Doubly muffled by the conspiratorial silence of the Marietta community and the censored silence of the Jewish community, the case clamors to find its utterance in alternative form, and this is where the musical comes in. As Harold Prince has exclaimed, “The story begs to be musicalized!”

What verbal representation lacks is compensated for by vocal expression. The musical, by its very form of maximizing oppressed emotions and vocalizing the interior sphere, becomes not only suitable but essential as a medium to coax the Jewish community out of their pained silence and to pry open the vices of Marietta’s collective conspiratorial silence, whether enforced or self-imposed, whether out of complicity or conviction.

As Samuel G. Friedman says, “the outside world hates Jews, so the Jews must cling to one another” (Melnick 3). The Jews behind *Parade* try not only to cling to one another but also to reach out to other communities. The Jewish cohort which created *Parade* not only attempted to redress the wrong done to their Jewish fellowman by addressing their private grief in the public spectacle of musical, they also tried to reach out to other aggrieved communities. Whether channeling private grief to public grievance in the manner of Mary’s mother and Mary’s people, or diverting public grievance to private grief in the fashion of Leo and Lucille, they all find expression in the spectacle offered by the musical *Parade*.

Faced with the impossibility of “justice for all,” *Parade* grounds itself on particular Jewishness. However, its creators try to perform a balancing act of elevating Leo Frank from legal damnation and steering clear of competitive victimhood by touching base with the emotions of non-Jewish victims in the musical. Just as Nussbaum uses Whitman’s injunction of regarding poets as “the equable man” (Nussbaum 80), *Parade* ventures the feat of being such an equalizer.

An equable man is entitled to conferring poetic justice where legal justice is defunct. Even though the musical stops short of granting poetic justice to Frank by clinching the true criminal, *Parade* grants poetic justice to the aggrieved couple who were denied legal justice, by rewarding them with true love, after their arranged marriage and estranged relationship.

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evidence, as demonstrated when Alonzo Mann approached an Atlanta newspaper in the 1950s about his eyewitness account. Mann’s offer was turned down. It was mainly because the local Jewish community “would not want to have the case brought up again.” During the era of Civil Rights Movement in the 60s and 70s the Seligs, Lucille’s family, went so far as to employ a lawyer to subdue undue publicity about the case (Frey 148). A list of the lynchers has been compiled by Dr. Steven Goldfarb, the website address is <http://www.leofranklynchers.com/leofranklynchers.html>.



As Nussbaum maintains that judicial neutrality does not necessarily entail distancing, and literary imagination can in fact enhance impartial judgment through empathy. Theatrical imagination appears to be just as, if not more fitting a metaphor as literary imagination, blessed with its advantage of physical proximity between the stage and the audience. With the audience serving as “judicious spectators” not enamored with dazzling spectacle but attentive to insightful details (Nussbaum 72-78), the musical can thus be given justification as a valid alternative to legal and vigilante justice, which even if incapable of bringing about true justice, can endeavor to do justice to the sufferings of the victims.

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## 搬演「詩的正義」 ——音樂劇《大遊行》中的私怨公演

王寶祥\*

### 摘要

本篇論文探討劇作家阿佛烈·尤瑞（Alfred Uhry）與作曲家傑森·羅勃特·布朗（Jason Robert Brown）於一九九八年合力譜寫的音樂劇《大遊行》（*Parade*）。《大遊行》的靈感來自一九一三年的歷史懸案，一位來自紐約在亞特蘭大經營鉛筆工廠的猶太企業家里歐·法蘭克（Leo Frank），被控謀殺一名十三歲的小女孩瑪莉·范根（Mary Phagan）。在真相仍未完全水落石出之前，這棘手的案件如何能翔實呈現在舞台上呢？戲劇研究者面對根據此近百年來爭議不休的歷史公案所改編的舞台劇，是否有資格置評，甚或有餘地提出翻案？在欠缺法律鐵證的前提下，在兩造訴求正義的抗爭團體前，作者試圖跳脫訴訟爭議，不捲入歷史事件，避免妄作罪愆定論。要言之，本篇論文主要持歷史遺產的觀點——檢視南方如何受南北戰爭失利的震盪，高度工業化的北方與新興工業發展的南方之間的地方嫌隙，鉛筆工廠裡勞資雙方的階級對立，黑人、白人、猶太人間的種族糾葛，以及對猶太人與黑人的情慾偏見等等——以探查此案件背後的構成環境，包括戰爭、階級、種族，情慾等面向。

再者，本文討論美國陪審團的國家司法體制及動用私刑的地方仲裁機制，二者底蘊之強烈戲劇觀看性質。本文認為，舞台上的法蘭克案從裁決、定讞、死刑、減刑到最後私刑，每一步驟都充滿吸引大眾觀看的戲劇張力。音樂劇向來就被視為喜溫情、愛幻想，而它撩人情感又訴諸場面的雙重特質不但強化了受害雙方的私密情緒，且又映照公眾審判和私刑的觀看本質，使得民怨公憤及個人創痛皆得以找到宣洩的出口。

本篇論文的結論是，當司法正義失效時，私了正義就會取而代之，開始以暴制暴的惡性循環。而以戲劇形式呈現的詩的正義，儘管非無可議之處，應加以正視為彌補公冤及傳達私怨的可行方案。

關鍵詞：阿佛烈·尤瑞 歌舞劇 猶太裔美國人 詩的正義

\* 國立臺灣大學外國語文學系助理教授