Weill's Musical Theater

Stages of Reform

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Weill described *Love Life* as "a study of marriage in the last 100 years."[3] His description raises a question about the subtitle "A Vaudeville," which sits uneasily with the notion of "a study," as it was no doubt intended to. What are the precedents for this contradiction? Or are Weill and his collaborator Alan Jay Lerner establishing one? Take, for example, Kander and Ebb's line "Life is a cabaret," which they have Sally Bowles sing in the 1966 musical *Cabaret*. Weill and Lerner's pre-*Cabaret* musical does something similar: "Love Life" is a "vaudeville." The musical "studies" life, that goes without saying. Yet the influence cuts both ways. Life imitates art, the art of vaudeville. The title is thus multilayered. Not only does it link "Love Life" with "vaudeville," but by inviting the spectator to appreciate the art in life, it also accommodates an exhortation, akin to "Come to the cabaret!" Seen in this way, the "love" of *Love Life* could suggest an imperative.

Irony is never far from the surface, however, for example when the male lead, Sam, celebrates his divorce in the soliloquy (more *scena* than song) "This Is the Life!" Here, "love" and "life" have little to do with each other. They have become incompatible substantives, not a harmonious compound. That is the story of Sam and Susan's marriage: a story of growing incompatibility, told in terms of an ineluctable social and historical process during the era of industrialization. By way of emphasizing the rift, the program booklet for the premiere production printed the title both on the cover and in the credits with a graphically, and presumably intentionally, large gap between its two constituent words, *Love* and *Life* (fig. 6). The work is about the two—visually quite separate—concepts, if anything more about their estrangement than about their interaction as a compound. Appearing in varying constellations, separately and in combination, the two words function as verbal motifs in a way analogous to music. Sam's soliloquy is a case in point.

An analogous connection between the work's musical title and its conceptual theme is similarly evident in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Allegro*, from the year before *Love Life*. The self-defining title song, "Allegro," contains numerous musical allusions that serve to gloss a socially critical concept, as in lines such as these from the first verse:

We know no other way
Of living out a day.
Our music must be galloping and gay!
We muffle all the undertones,
The minor blood-and-thunder tones,
The overtones are all we care to play!

And the chorus:

Brisk, lively,
Merry and bright!
Allegro!
Same tempo
Morning and night!
Allegro!
Don't stop whatever you do,
Do something dizzy and new,
Keep up the hullabaloo!
Allegro! Allegro!
Allegro! Allegro!
Allegro! Allegro!

The title of Weill's "vaudeville" constituted a play on words even before it became *Love Life*. The original title, "Dish for the Gods," works on several levels, as David Kilroy makes clear in his wide-ranging study of the work's genesis and reception.[4] Both substantives are ambiguous. *Dish* signifies a literal and figurative comestible and, in vernacular usage, an attractive woman. *Gods* refers both literally to deities and figuratively, as theatrical jargon, to the audience, especially those in the gallery. Yet the phrase as a whole doubtless owes something to Shakespeare, who uses it in two of his historical plays. In *Julius Caesar,* Brutus says of Caesar: "Let's kill him boldly, but not wrathfully; Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods." In *Anthony and Cleopatra,* Anthony comments: "I know that a woman is a dish for the gods, if the devil dress her not." As such, the original title works not only as a literary reference but also as a bitterly ironic one, especially if one ties the Caesar allusion to one of *Love Life's* vaudeville acts, the one at the very beginning where the female lead, Susan, is cut in half as part of the magician's show. A dish fit for the gods, indeed!

What's more, the scene itself creates an internal reference. Susan's bifurcation in the world of theatrical entertainment mirrors in wry fashion her increasingly divided roles in "real" life.

SUSAN: Well, this is what I really am, isn't it? Split in two and severed in the middle? I'm half homemaker, half breadwinner, half mother, half provider; I'm over there a woman and up here a man.

Compared with the theatrical variety, then, her own personal vaudeville is hardly an entertaining matter. That is the point. The audience—"the gods"—are served two dishes: the vaudeville entertainment and the story of Sam and Susan. And it is the counterpoint between the two—the thematic resonances tossed back and forth between the show interludes and the cautionary tale of marital decay in the modern world—that generates the dramaturgical sophistication of *Love Life*. *Cabaret* would follow this precedent by juxtaposing the story of the Nazis' rise to power with satirical cabaret numbers.[5]

Frames such as these, playing two discrete levels off against each other, are hardly novel in Weill's works. They are the rule rather than the exception, a modus operandi established by his very first work for the musical theater, *Der Protagonist,* and employed in a variety of ways in most of the other works as well. The dramatic levels in the one-act *Protagonist* are in fact remarkably similar to those in *Love Life*. Both works adopt the Shakespearean precedent of the play-within-a-play—in the earlier work, the tragicomic pantomimes; in the later one, the vaudeville acts. And both exploit the opposition not so much to uphold the distinction between illusion and reality as to complicate it. In both cases, the play-within-a-play functions as commentary on the play proper, casting in a critical light the enacted parallels and disjunctions between art and life. It's as if Weill's "form problems" habitually pose themselves in terms of such oppositions, with the various frames—how the contrasting levels relate to each other and interact—representing the "different angles."

The oppositions are first and foremost structural and hence dramaturgical. Striking examples include the surreal ballet and film sequences in *Royal Palace;* the fashionable gramophone tango in *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren;* the lowlife boxing ring in the *Mahagonny-Songspiel;* the epic narration that articulates the neoclassicist frame in *Die Dreigroschenoper;* the choral commentary in *Die Bürgschaft;* pastoral milieu versus military state in *A Kingdom for a Cow;* the alternation (on separate stages) of scenes drawn from biblical tales and the story of a "timeless community" in exile in *The Eternal Road;* the spoken plot "proper" and the interspersed musicalized dreams in *Lady in the Dark;* traditional operatic arias and ensembles juxtaposed with Broadway production numbers in *Street Scene;* folk song versus filmlike melodrama in *Down in the Valley.* In each case, however, the frame has significant stylistic and, more broadly speaking, conceptual consequences.[6]

Of the works listed above, *Der Protagonist, The Eternal Road,* and *Lady in the Dark* stand out as radical implementations of dramaturgical counterpoint insofar as the opposition informing the structural levels seems at its starkest in these works. In each case, the second level presents an additional narrative layer that complements the first: the transition from "artificial" comedy to "real" tragedy in *Der Protagonist;* the parallels between ancient scripture and modern history in

The Eternal Road; the dramatically formalized contrast between the outer world of Liza's career and the inner world of her repressed emotions (her conscious versus her unconscious life) in *Lady in the Dark.* In terms of its conceptual implications, however, *Love Life* is not only comparable to its predecessors but arguably surpasses them.

The means whereby Weill's "vaudeville" becomes "a study," as Weill described it, and hence a prototype of the concept musical, are twofold. The dramaturgical counterpoint, as described, is one factor: Sam and Susan's marriage becomes an object of ironic commentary through juxtaposition with the vaudeville acts. The other factor is the expansion of the narrative structure, which Weill's earlier-quoted definition somewhat imprecisely describes as "the last 100 years." Time marches on for more than a century (157 years, to be precise) without Sam and Susan appearing to age in the least. In this way, they, too, become "objectified." Yet as time passes, not only does their marriage deteriorate, but society "progresses." Or does it? That's the human question that *Love Life* doesn't so much answer as pose, through its formal dialectic and historical plot structure. The "vaudeville" invites us to conduct the conceptual study ourselves.

The program booklet for the premiere production prefaced the detailed description of the piece's two "parts," which are divided into acts, scenes, and songs, with the following matter-of-fact note: "*Love Life* is presented in two parts, each consisting of a series of acts. The sketches, which start in 1791 and come up to the present day, are presented in the physical style of the various periods. The four main characters, Susan and Sam Cooper, and their children, Johnny and Elizabeth, who present the story, do not change in appearance as time moves on. The vaudeville acts which come between each sketch are presented in a set vaudeville pattern." Part 1 comprises ten separate acts, Part 2 just six. The dovetailing of "sketch" and "vaudeville acts," described here in dry, formalistic terms, suggests a plan that is at once carefully worked out and quite flexible. In fact, to quote Foster Hirsch's succinct account of *Love Life*'s genesis, "the musical went through more drafts, revisions, and out-of-town surgery than any other Kurt Weill project. . . . The road from original concept to opening night on Broadway was bumpy," with a "sizable discard section."[7]

One of Weill's most experimental pieces, *Love Life* was also the one most experimented with, from conception to realization. Its prolonged "tryout" process was no doubt a function of the casting process, also prolonged because of several failed attempts to fill the two principal roles and find a suitable director. Yet to talk here of "the production process" is really a misnomer. Elements such as casting and finding a director belong to a greater or lesser degree to the process of composition. And in *Love Life* that degree was, if anything, at the "greater" end of the spectrum. In other words, the traditional distinction between composition and realization, a distinction that became solidified in the nineteenth century,

hardly applies here. Instead, as in the discussion of stylistic matters, it seems more apt to apply earlier, eighteenth-century categories derived from theories of classical rhetoric. These are based not on a binary model (opposing "creation" and "reproduction"), but on a more nuanced division of the creative process into three stages: invention *(inventio)*, disposition *(dispositio)*, and elocution *(elocutio)*, with two further stages for actual presentation or performance.

The first term, invention, applies to the choice of material, the general plan of the composition worked out by the collaborators before its initial execution in a sketch; disposition refers to a preliminary draft that gives a clear indication of the outlines of the final form, reflecting the relation of parts to the whole; elocution is the final rendering, in this case an actual theatrical production. The distinction between composition and realization thereby collapses; production and creation go hand in hand. Continuing the parallel with rhetorical categories, "production" would also embrace the memorization of the work during the final stages of rehearsal *(memoria)* and actual performance *(pronunciato)*. Applying this model to Weill's musical theater allows the initial invention, the *Einfall* (or *Idee*, as the Busoni pupil might have said), to remain intact as an idea that informs the work, in a process of transformation, throughout its creation. Translated into Weillian terms, the invention, as an underlying theatrical concept, could be seen to correspond to the constantly reconceived *Urform*, a new solution to the "form-problems of the musical theatre."

The tripartite "invention-disposition-elocution" model fits particularly well Weill's conception of film at the time. A few weeks after *Love Life*'s premiere, Weill wrote to his agent, Irving Lazar, to report on the idea that he and Lerner were meanwhile developing for a movie called "Miss Memory."

> It was much more work than we had anticipated, because we wanted to present it as a complete story. We worked on a first draft all week, and yesterday we dictated all day until the synopsis was finished. By the way, when you discuss the picture, I want you to point out that all the scenes with Miss Memory will be treated musically, in song and dance and the kind of underscored dialogue which I am using so successfully in the theatre.
>
> To avoid any misunderstanding I want to make it clear, that "Miss Memory" is entirely the result of a collaboration and can only be negotiated as a joint effort of Alan and me, with no strings attached. We can either sell the idea in connection with a deal for the score (lyrics and music), or we can make a deal to write the entire picture (book, lyrics and music).[8]

The "idea" represents the initial invention, available in the form of a finished synopsis with general indications for the assorted uses of music. Not yet available is the actual score, the initial stage of a disposition, in whose elaboration Weill would necessarily have to be involved. That being the case, he would presumably

work hand in hand with the author of the book, likely to be Lerner, who would anyway be contracted to write the lyrics for Weill's music. The "elocution" would then rest with the film studio, the part of the process that Weill felt more often than not detracted from his conception. The theater, by contrast, tended to offer him more control in this vital third stage of the collaborative process.

Even though the stages were not so neatly delineated with *Love Life*, the model still serves a useful heuristic purpose. The genesis began with what Weill described as "an interesting idea which Lerner brought to me . . . and which we are investigating now."[9] From the start, it seems, the form was intended to be both "loose" and "American," as described by Lerner shortly after the premiere:

> Kurt Weill and I discussed the basic story idea first. We knew what we wanted to say. And then we talked and talked—for about two months before we figured out the form our story would take. That, from the writing standpoint, was the most important problem we had with *Love Life*—finding a way to tell our story. Finally, after discussing hundreds of notions, the idea of doing the show as a vaudeville found its way into our misty heads. We decided on it for a host of reasons. To begin with, we were telling a basically American story and we feel that vaudeville is a basically American form. Secondly, the form was loose enough to allow for any kind of invention.[10]

Lerner's "invention," as he called it, more or less accords with the "disposition" of the classical model, the process of creating the initial text of the work before it was ready to go into production. In this case, as Lerner recounted, "we spent almost a year on the actual writing of the show." This is where the distinction between the "disposition" and "elocution" becomes somewhat blurred. At this point, the authors had "assembled [the show] into what we fondly thought was its final form." But of course the "tryouts" in New Haven and Boston were just that, further stages of revision, which in this case would turn out to be uncommonly extensive, even by Broadway standards. Between the opening in New Haven and "the day—three and a half weeks later—when we opened in New York," Lerner recalled, "practically every scene in the play was rewritten and three completely new scenes were added."

The protracted period of casting had influenced the work's shape quite significantly, particularly as far as the principal parts of Sam and Susan Cooper were concerned. The producer, Cheryl Crawford, had approached two leading ladies from other Weill shows—Gertrude Lawrence, from *Lady in the Dark*, and Mary Martin, from *One Touch of Venus*—and Weill and Lerner had asked Ginger Rogers, star of the screen version of *Lady in the Dark*, before Nanette Fabray joined the show. As Kilroy notes, the casting of Fabray as Susan and Ray Middleton, a Julliard-trained baritone, as Sam occasioned the insertion of "two new solo numbers in both parts of the show for each of the two protagonists . . . specifically tailored to suit Fabray and Middleton."[11]

The tryouts in New Haven and Boston, in turn, revealed the necessity of cuts: the show was far too long. Two of the main sources for reconstructing the genesis of *Love Life,* the theater programs and the orchestra parts, both reflect frequent changes, whether cuts, additions, or reorderings.[12] Once the show opened in New York, however, the form of the show, its "elocution," appears quite settled; the order of numbers listed in a sample of programs from October, November, and December remains the same. The copy of the holograph piano-vocal score that Weill gave to Lerner "as a token of my affection" closely reflects this version, too.[13] Three of the cut songs are included at the end of the holograph score: "Susan's Dream," "There's Nothing Left for Daddy," and "Locker Room"—just some of the copious material left, so to speak, on the cutting-room floor, as the work developed from abundant disposition to actual performance.

If Weill's own works provide ample examples of contrapuntal musical frames, as detailed above, *Love Life*'s particular narrative structure has more immediate and obvious antecedents in American spoken theater of the time, notably Thornton Wilder's *Our Town.* Wilder's Pulitzer Prize–winning play from 1938 offered a much-invoked example, one that other writers seemed to follow and critics admired. In his review of the premiere of *Allegro,* for example, *New York Times* critic Brooks Atkinson compared *Allegro* with *Our Town.* Rodgers and Hammerstein, Atkinson wrote, "have composed a musical play without any of the conventions of form. . . . For at least half its length it is a work of great beauty and purity, as if 'Our Town' could be written in music."[14]

Atkinson's reservations had to do with the second act, which begins with the economic crash of 1929 and deals, as Atkinson observed, "with materials that cannot be recollected through the golden haze of sentiment, for the period after 1929 belongs all too graphically with recorded time." These aspects, he felt, "do not belong in the old legend." Above all, he thought they possessed "a hackneyed moral overtone." (Similar objections would, in turn, be raised regarding the socially critical aspects of *Love Life.*)

Weill, for his part, had met Wilder in 1938, the year of *Our Town*'s publication, in the hope of a possible collaboration, and he continued to think that the celebrated playwright was, as he wrote in 1945, one of "the guys to work with."[15] After studying the completed draft of *Love Life,* the show's producer, Cheryl Crawford, wrote to Weill: "I feel you are prepared now to do something which has long been in my mind—an opera on 'Our Town.'"[16] Wilder was just the kind of leading playwright, like Brecht, Kaiser, Anderson et al., whom Weill liked to seek out as an equal partner.

Of special relevance here is what the theorist of modern drama Peter Szondi identified in *Our Town* as "the epic *I*" of the narrator and the dramatic "play of time."[17] The two are closely linked. Central to the play's unconventional structure, the way in which it creates a window onto the events of thirty-five years,

is the presence of the pipe-smoking Stage Manager. He is the omniscient guide, providing continuity between the three acts, which he refers to, in act 2, as "Daily Life," "Love and Marriage," and, with reference to act 3, "I reckon you can guess what that's about." He not only sets the scene in his avuncular way, framing the theatrical space and time, but, like a *conférencier,* he also acts as an intermediary between audience and action, providing perspective as well as inviting personal introspection; he even joins the cast to play two of the characters, the minister in the wedding scene and Mrs. Morgan. Weill and Anderson's *Knickerbocker Holiday,* from the same year as *Our Town,* has a similar figure in the guise of "the author" Washington Irving. Here, however, Weill and Anderson more likely drew on earlier European models for such a device, whether on Weill's own work with Brecht or his earliest musical influence in this regard, Stravinsky, whose *L'histoire du soldat* and *Oedipus rex* use narrators.

Wilder, who attended German school in Hong Kong when he was nine and studied in Kiel as a young man, was no doubt indebted to European models of epic theater, and to a few German playwrights in particular, including Brecht and Piscator. He visited Berlin twice before the Second World War, in 1928 and 1931, and dedicated his first collection of plays to Max Reinhardt. German writers have been especially inclined to note the parallels between Brecht and Wilder. For example, while extolling Brecht as a classic, Max Frisch, an admirer of Wilder, described Wilder's techniques as a "glorious imitation" of Brecht.[18] In particular, there are "a great number of similarities" between Brecht's *Mother Courage* and Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth,* as Charles H. Helmetag has observed.[19] Yet one also needs to take into account the very different purposes that each of these celebrated playwrights pursued in his work. As Helmetag puts it, "Brecht and Wilder of the thirties and forties were kindred spirits in choice of form and theme, though not, obviously, in ideology."[20] Brecht himself was equivocal about the matter: he may have had, as Eric Bentley wrote, "paranoid suspicions" about Wilder having copied his epic techniques, but he also admired Wilder; he considered him "the ideal translator" for his *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan,* for example, and he added *The Skin of Our Teeth* to his own repertory at the Berliner Ensemble.[21] Balancing these various factors, one might say that anything Weill took from Wilder could be seen as a debt repaid for Weill's own influence (principally via his collaborations with Brecht) on the American playwright.

The fact remains that, in the late 1930s and 1940s, *Our Town* was the successful, Pulitzer Prize–winning example of innovative, unconventional theater in the United States, the American version of Epic Theater. For all their differences, musical theater works such as *Love Life* and *Allegro* reflected commonalities, sharing not only Wilder's interest in "epic" narrative techniques but also some of his thematic concerns.

One of the principal thematic similarities is what the Narrator in *Our Town*

calls "citification," variously captured in the generational divides of that play, in *Allegro*'s title song, and in the breakdown of family communication in *Love Life*. The Cooper family, for example, is disunited by radio in the contemporaneous era of mass media: each of its members wants to be alone to listen to his or her favorite show. This is clearly a facet of *Love Life*'s central theme, the human cost of technological progress. In *Our Town* that kind of alienation is really only a side issue. More central here is the making strange via epic commentary—and hence the making special—of the commonplace. Wilder put it succinctly in the preface to *Three Plays* (1957): "It is an attempt to find a value above all price for the smallest events in our daily life. I have made the claim as preposterous as possible, for I have set the village against the largest dimensions of time and place."[22]

Both *Our Town* and *Love Life* give the audience ample occasion to view the fate of the principal characters dispassionately, as generalized cases, and hence to compare these cases to their own lives. Yet although both create dramatic frames to this end, the perspectives adopted are utterly different. In *Our Town*, the connection between the "epic *I*" and the "play of time" is of the essence, leading from the portrayal of act 1's single day, via act 2's marriage and its enacted prehistory, to the simultaneity of multiple temporal planes in act 3, as the dead revisit themselves as the living. All this—existentially quite mind-boggling—complexity is negotiated by the Stage Manager, whose all-knowing perspective leads Emily to precipitate the gloomy conclusion with her question "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?—every, every minute?" The Stage Manager provides the blunt answer: "No."

The audience at once enjoys the Stage Manager's perspective and is given pause to reflect, having witnessed the suggestive tale of small-town life. However cautionary the tale may seem, it is nonetheless anything but preachy. (The Stage Manager, after all, only *plays* the minister.) Wilder's epic theater, an antidramatic play of temporal levels, is more sentimentally metaphysical than it is critically didactic. A play of time, certainly; but "Wilder's philosophy lacks the historic dimension," to quote Francis Ferguson's penetrating comparison of Wilder and Brecht as allegorists.[23]

Brecht's plays, by radical contrast, not only tend to be historical in nature but are informed through and through by a philosophy of history, something also true of *Love Life*, albeit not by a Brechtian one. Like Brecht, Lerner and Weill explore the contradictions between industrial capitalism and human relations, between the political and the personal. But unlike Brecht, they do not imply, still less offer, any concrete political solutions. The question that *Love Life* poses—will Sam and Susan find reconciliation? ("Can we make it?" asks Susan at the end)—requires facing personal reality ("We've got to!" answers Sam) beyond the world of illusion, beyond the world of the minstrels. Social relations have plainly affected their extensive past. How those relations will affect their future remains,

of course, unclear. The tightrope on which they nervously approach each other at the end could be read metaphorically as an allusion to Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra,* in particular to the passage in the Prologue where Zarathustra helps the fallen tightrope-walker overcome his superstitions. Will Susan and Sam, by implication, remain in their current stage of consciousness or achieve a more advanced stage?[24]

Insofar as there is a narrator in *Love Life,* it is not so much the entertainment figures like the Magician at the beginning or the Minstrels at the end, but Sam and Susan themselves, taken out of their immediate lives into the two vaudeville acts that frame the show. After complaining about being "split in two and severed in the middle," Susan lays the blame squarely in Sam's court: "Every single thing that's happened to us and the children for the last hundred and thirty odd years has been your fault." Their argument elicits the flashback, all the way back from 1948 to 1791. "A hundred years ago," Susan says, "it was beginning to slip." "A hundred and fifty years ago?" Sam asks and then supplies the answer: "We had it then, Susan." And Susan agrees. This is the "decent existence" that Susan says "wasn't perfect but at least it made sense." Each succeeding sketch involving the protagonists documents the "slip"; everything enacted takes place in the knowledge of this inevitable decline. All talk of the "industrial age" in terms of "real progress"—a "chance for every man to improve his lot," as one of the inhabitants of Mayville, Connecticut, remarks in the 1791 scene—necessarily has ironic connotations for Sam and Susan's century-and-a-half-long marriage. We know in advance that it will founder. If it's Sam's fault, that's not because he "set out to change" things, as Susan claims at the retrospective outset, but because of the circumstances, which Sam is forced to go along with.

This is quite different from the Stage Manager's recital of details of small-town life at the beginning of *Our Town* and his forecasting of Dr. Gibbs's death in 1930, or indeed from Wilder's one-act play *The Long Christmas Dinner* (1931), "which represents," as the stage directions tell us, "in accelerated motion ninety Christmas dinners in the Bayard household."[25] Whereas Wilder opens a window onto existential issues raised by the play of time, creating through the montage of episodes in *The Long Christmas Dinner* what Szondi calls "a secular mystery play about time,"[26] Lerner and Weill repeatedly raise the question of both historical and personal agency, urging us to consider the connection between technological progress and the institution of marriage. There is an intimate connection, they suggest, which they conceive in terms of a historical dialectic. In both *Our Town* and *Love Life,* the play of time occurs through an "epic" laying-bare of dramatic mechanisms and conventions: in Wilder's play, through the interventions—the "epic posture," as Szondi calls it[27]—of the Stage Manager, who literally sets the stage for the dramatic action, splicing together a series of scenes that document the themes of life, love, and death; and in *Love Life,* whose contrast between

"narrative time" and "narrated time" outstrips *The Long Christmas Dinner* by some sixty years, through the mixing of historical vignettes that document a dialectic of technological progress and personal estrangement with vaudevillian entertainment. Whereas Wilder's anachronisms and use of the same characters in various historical periods reveal human experience to be more or less the same irrespective of time or place, *Love Life* seems to be suggesting that historical circumstances play a decisive role. It is a perspective that recalls the theme of *Die Bürgschaft*.

The concept of a "love life" is tainted in advance. Our foreknowledge, gained from the opening vaudeville, colors the meaning of the ensuing sketches to the point of subversion—a dramatic irony that applies in particular to the musical numbers. Consider, for example, Sam and Susan's duet "Here I'll Stay." On the face of it, read as a self-contained number, this touching ballad expresses romantic commitment. Sam sings in the first verse:

> Susan, this is all I'm searching for
> A place to live with you forever more
> A sign that says it's Samuel Cooper's store
> There is no other world awaiting me
> That meadow is as far as I can see.
> My heaven is no higher than that tree.

In the first part of the forty-measure refrain, the contentment seems qualified, tinged with a certain melancholy resignation:

> There's a far land I'm told
> Where I'll find a field of gold,
> But here I'll stay with you.

The eight-measure bridge passage, however, rejects the lure of the "field of gold":

> For that land is a sandy illusion!
> It's a theme of a dream gone astray.

The point of the conclusion of the refrain is to reconcile the apparent opposition between illusion and reality:

> And the world others woo
> I can find loving you,
> And so here I'll stay.

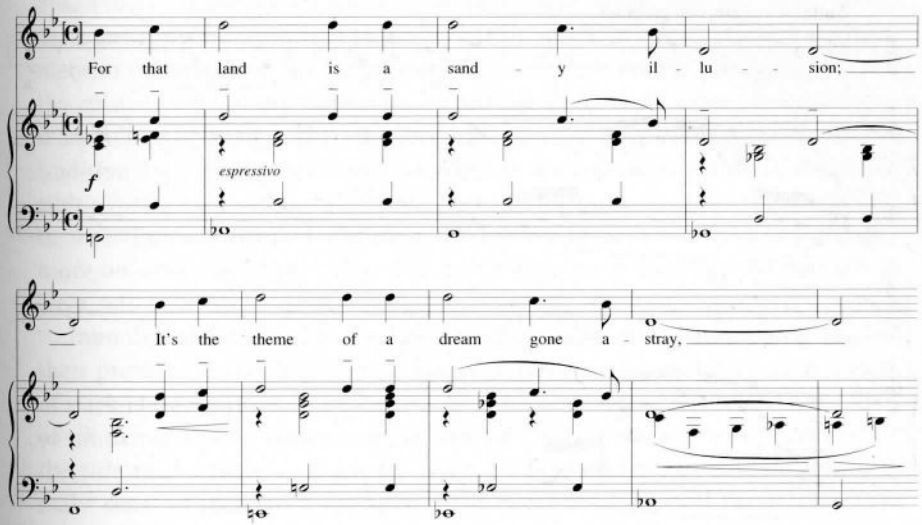
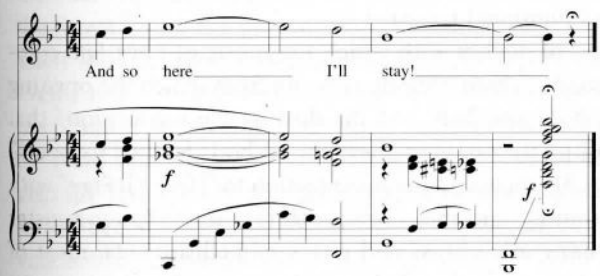
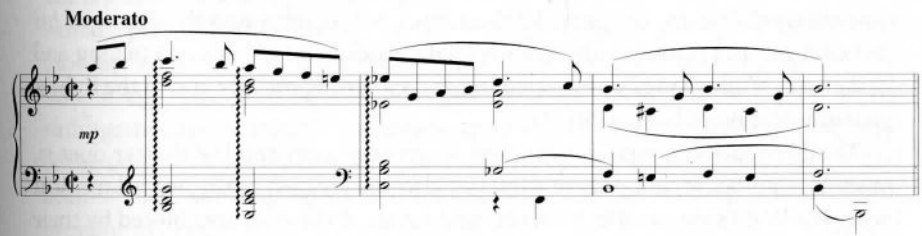
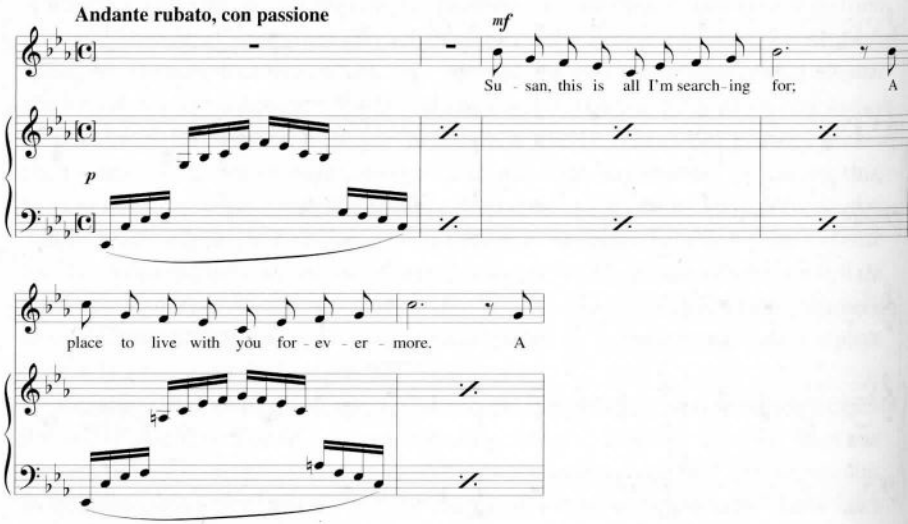
But in the context of the scene, following their vaudevillian prologue, the lyrical moment is contaminated by the epic sweep of the whole; we know as Sam and Susan sing that they won't stay "there"; the gradual process of estrangement will lead them to grasp at all manner of "sandy illusions," symbolized in the bridge

by the chromatically downward-shifting bass line and the attendant lack of tonal stability, including the ambiguously "floating" augmented chord under *illusion* (ex. 71). Melodically, against this shifting bass, the bridge comprises two short identical phrases that reproduce the internal rhymes (*land/sand-y* and *theme/dream*) on the same note (d") before falling down an octave (to *illusion* and *astray* respectively). Its division into two melodically identical four-bar phrases makes the bridge even more perfunctory than a single eight-bar section. Following this, by way of extreme contrast, the melody then climbs a tenth by step, diatonically, before resolving as part of the perfect cadence on "Here I'll Stay." The cadence itself is prepared by a minor secondary dominant on *Here,* sustained for a full six beats—a signature Weillian sonority that echoes as a pitch collection Wagner's so-called Tristan chord. "Here," the music seems to be indicating, is less a place than it is a romantic feeling (ex. 72).

Hearing the duet in the context of the show complicates the opposition of reality and illusion: reality will threaten feeling, life will impinge on love. Sam and Susan's pledge to stay "here" proves to be a vain wish whose fulfillment remains in question, even at the end: "it's the theme of a dream gone astray." *Love Life*'s central, ultimately unanswered question—concerning the compatibility of life and love—recurs throughout the piece as a kind of leitmotif that is both verbal and musical.

This dramatically ironic context prompts consideration of significant differences among three notated versions of the song: Weill's manuscript piano-vocal score, the full score, and the separately published piano-vocal sheet music. Although the sheet music furnishes sufficient information for the kind of formal and harmonic analysis presented above, it conveys nothing of the song's deployment as a duet and as instrumental reprise—nothing, that is, of the discrete setting of Sam's and Susan's respective stanzas or of the instrumental introduction contained in the other sources, and nothing (needless to say) of the instrumentation, including a transformed "sonic image" (to use Weill's expression) for Susan's strophe.

The introduction in the sheet music, marked "Moderato," is utterly different from the version in the show. A four-measure piano vamp, it could be pressed into service for any number of popular-song arrangements (ex. 73). The melodic contours, seemingly unrelated either to the succeeding verse or to the chorus, outline an octave descent to the tonic B♭ that commences after the pickup with an expressive appoggiatura on the downbeat (the appoggiatura figure is repeated in the second half of the second measure). The accompanying broken chords outline a simple approach of the tonic harmony via secondary dominants and a dominant minor-ninth, and the arrival itself lingers with chromatic oscillations. In Weill's piano-vocal score, in contrast, there are just two measures, which do no more—and no less—than arpeggiate what appears to be the tonic harmony

EXAMPLE 71. *Love Life,* "Here I'll Stay" (bridge)

EXAMPLE 72. *Love Life,* "Here I'll Stay" (conclusion)

EXAMPLE 73. *Love Life,* "Here I'll Stay" (opening, sheet music)

EXAMPLE 74. *Love Life,* "Here I'll Stay" (opening, autograph piano-vocal score)

of E♭ with the all-important added sixth and ninth, but in fact turns out to be a pentatonically inflected subdominant (ex. 74).

It is the same collection of pitches with which the music of *Love Life* commences in the second scene, the same swelling sonority from which the opening ensemble piece emerges. It carries over into the duet as a musical motif that identifies Sam while recalling the opening question: "Who is Samuel Cooper?" The full score orchestrates this version of the introduction to "Here I'll Stay" with strings and clarinet, continuing into the chorus with rich-toned lower-register saxophone writing and many extra brass and string embellishments, most of which are not reproduced in either the piano-vocal score or the sheet music. Just as the latter's introduction turns out to be the link in the duet between Sam's chorus and Susan's verse, so Susan sings the music reproduced in the sheet music, albeit with different words. Sam's verse exclaims *(Andante rubato, con passione):* "Susan, this is all I'm searching for" (continuing the theme of *his* identity). Susan's is more reflectively lyrical: "Since I was old enough to long and harken to a tender song," as reflected in her contrasting melody and in the lighter instrumentation of her chorus.[28]

The difference between the sheet-music arrangement and the theater duet is, in short, significant, not only in itself but also with regard to the overall musical design of Weill's vaudeville. Both text and music of the duet are colored by their role within the whole. Both have "motivic" connections to other parts of the show.

The dramatic context of the sung words renders the "sandy illusion" that Sam and Susan resist doubly ironic. The basis of their own arrangement, the "here" where their feelings are committed to stay, is hardly stable. While expressing commitment to the reality of their situation, their romantic duet is subtly tinged with the epistemology of the "Liebeslied" from *Die Dreigroschenoper:* "love lasts—or it doesn't." Although in this case love ends up inevitably diminished by life, the traditional reminiscence of the duet during the reprise sequence of the finale adds a further, untraditionally ironic note. It's the same song, but the people and their feelings are different. For their love to survive, Sam and Susan will need to move on—not stay "here." Their life, along with the circumstances of society at large, will have to change accordingly.

Even though long-range connections outlined above serve as unifying devices, their prevalence and importance should not be overstated. *Love Life* is a work of stark juxtapositions, more hetero- than homogeneous. It thrives on the kind of musico-dramatic coherence that emphasizes the dichotomies indicated by the title rather than its apparent harmony. Sam and Susan are challenged to make sense of their marriage against the expansive historical panorama of 150 years of American history. And the music reflects that panorama, not just the contemporaneous setting of 1948. Weill himself stressed this stylistic heterogeneity in a newspaper piece he and Lerner published in the *New York Times* on 4 October 1948, three days before the premiere. Published under the title "Two on the Street," with the heading "Collaborators Stage a Scene Aimed at Explaining Their Musical Play," the article takes the form of a conversation among Lerner, Weill, and "a man" who "comes by and stares at the theatre marquee" outside the Shubert Theatre, Boston, where the show's tryout took place. On being told by Weill that the show "tells the saga of 150 years of American home life but also the love life of two people and the gradual changing of their personalities as life becomes more complex," the man wonders how that is possible. "With vaudeville," Lerner answers. "Isn't that simple?" Weill asks rhetorically. The man then remarks, "(Wiping his forehead) I don't know. Is it like a lot of little plays strung together?" Weill explains: "Not exactly. One sketch is a musical play, one is an American ballad, one is a straight comedy, one is a satire, one is danced, one is a musical comedy, one is dramatic. All different styles." (Weill's "American ballad" presumably refers to the "Love Song" sung by the Hobo in the penultimate scene of part 1; "satire" to the Punch and Judy episode; "danced" to "Green Up Time"; "straight comedy" to the cruise scene; "musical play" to the suffragettes; and "dramatic" to Sam's scena.) These "styles"—the theatrical genres of the sketches—vary just as the "physical style of the various periods" does. And both of these shifting "styles" are complemented by the various musical idioms brought to bear.

Because Susan and Sam's story takes the form of a historical "study of mar-

riage," to use Weill's description, it is not merely a lesson to be learned by the couple alone, but one with seemingly broader, more didactic implications. The question mark hanging over the chronicle's conclusion leaves the audience with something to think about: the present is their own, Sam and Susan's unknowable future something in which they are all implicated.

How did the lesson go down? Already at the tryout, Elliot Norton of the *Boston Post* (14 September 1948), while praising *Love Life* as "perhaps the most mature musical play the American stage has yet produced," predicted that it "will create controversy and perhaps indignation." He proved to be correct. He likened the work to *Allegro,* "which delighted some of us and infuriated others. . . . It's a dream of a show," he went on, "about the American dream: sentimental, hopeful, satirical, ironic, and even bitter." On the same day, Norton's counterpart at the *Boston Daily Globe* echoed this prescient evaluation almost exactly: "This is a show bound to arouse diverse opinion, for it is at once sentiment and acid satire, serious and gay, reality and fantasy, and touched over with something of the moralistic preachment of *Christopher Blake* and *Allegro.*" It's as if the two Boston critics had compared notes before going to press.

The critical reception of the premiere, even more than the tryout, was decidedly mixed. Brooks Atkinson of the *New York Times,* generally sympathetic to Weill, dismissed the book while praising the music. *Love Life,* he wrote in a review of 8 October 1948, "is an intellectual idea about showmanship gone wrong. Vaudeville has nothing to do with the bitter ideas Mr. Lerner has to express about marriage." The show "gets lost in some strange cerebral labyrinth, and the pretense that is vaudeville is a pose." But he thought that Weill "has never composed a more versatile score with agreeable music in so many moods—hot, comic, blue, satiric and romantic." Group Theatre cofounder Harold Clurman, writing for the *New Republic* (8 October 1948), described *Love Life* as "an educated musical" but felt that "its multiple ingenuity is overstrenuous."

Critical assessments hinged largely on whether the lack of conventional plot structure was seen as a virtue or a vice. William Hawkins, critic of the *New York World-Telegram,* wrote on 8 October 1948 that the show "tries too hard for comfort to be different," even though he considered it "wicked to discourage novelty in the theater." His ultimately conservative verdict: *Love Life* "suggests that theatrical conventions like unities of time, place and subject were developed over the years for pretty good reasons." George Freedley of the *New York Telegraph,* by radical contrast, saw virtue in the work's sophistication, while recognizing that it "may keep it from the wide popularity of simpler musicals. . . . For many of us," he continued in his review of 9 October, "it is sheer delight. [Producer] Cheryl Crawford, always an innovator despite a canny knowledge of where her feet are, has given us a show which is iconoclastic in every direction."

In the end, *Love Life*'s innovations may have limited its acceptance among

theatergoers expecting more traditional, less challenging fare. Weill and Lerner were no doubt aware of that, as their "Two on the Street" interview suggests. Yet both of them would surely have been gratified to know that later composers, such as Sondheim, would happily enter that "cerebral labyrinth" and draw on the same unconventional aspects for their own reforms of the musical theater.

In his biography of Weill, Ronald Taylor remarks that "the story-line that Lerner laid out almost precluded a convincing coherence in a musical score, Weill's or anyone else's, and would rather have lent itself to the medium of film—time-splits, flash-backs, techniques part realistic, part surrealistic."[29] Taylor has a point. The historical panorama that *Love Life* presents does indeed recall the even larger time frame of Weill's movie *Where Do We Go from Here?*, which takes the viewer from the wartime present of 1944, via the era of George Washington (roughly contemporaneous with the historical starting-point of *Love Life*), all the way back to the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. Work on film in general, a potent aesthetic influence on Weill's work throughout his career, and on *Where Do We Go from Here?* in particular, left its mark on Weill's conception of the "vaudeville." Yet in suggesting an affinity between stage and screen, Taylor does not consider two crucial factors. The first is the composer's own involvement as committed collaborator in laying out the "story-line" of *Love Life*. The second is the question begged about "convincing coherence"—a question often raised in the early reception of the piece. Seen in the broader context of Weill's ideas about the reform of musical theater, *Love Life* represents the birth of the concept musical out of the spirit of cinema.

3. Letter to Irving Sablosky, 24 July 1948; copy in WLRC.

4. David Kilroy, "Kurt Weill on Broadway: The Postwar Years (1945–1950)" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1992).

5. For a discussion of the parallels between *Love Life* and *Cabaret,* see Kim H. Kowalke, "Today's Invention, Tomorrow's Cliché: *Love Life* and the Concept Musical," "*. . . dass alles auch hätte anders kommen können*": *Beiträge zur Musikgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts,* ed. Susanne Schaal-Gotthardt, Luitgard Schader, and Heinz-Jürgen Winkler (Frankfurt am Main: Schott, 2009), 175–93.

6. In her typological study *Il musical di Kurt Weill (1940–1950): Prospettive, generi e tradizioni* (Rome: Edizioni Studio 12, 2006), Marida Rizzuti makes the case for a "third genre" between musical and opera in the works composed during the decade 1940–1950, positing a "hybrid form" that she presents not as a mere "contamination" of different genres, but as a "fusion" of them. (The original subtitle of Rizzuti's Master's thesis. was "Fusione di prospettive, generi e tradizioni," Università degli Studi di Pavia, 2005.) By contrast, the concept of dramaturgical counterpoint being proposed here embraces a wide range of mixed-genre solutions from all three decades of Weill's career and emphasizes the book-specific nature of the constitutive elements.

7. Foster Hirsch, *Kurt Weill on Stage: From Berlin to Broadway* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 279–80. A comparable case could be made for *Happy End,* whose book underwent a radical transformation from initial conception through opening night. Materials housed in the Elisabeth-Hauptmann-Archiv (Akademie der Künste Berlin) include multiple versions of the play's script that document this transformation.

8. Weill to Irving Lazar, 24 October 1948; copy in WLRC.

9. Weill to Maxwell Anderson, 25 July 1947; copy in WLRC.

10. Alan Jay Lerner, "Lerner's Life and Love Life," *PM,* 14 November 1948; quoted in Kilroy, "Kurt Weill on Broadway," 213.

11. Kilroy, "Kurt Weill on Broadway," 233. Middleton had played Irving in *Knickerbocker Holiday.*

12. The orchestral parts are preserved in the Irving S. Gilmore Music Library of Yale University as part of the Papers of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya, MSS 30.

13. The holograph is located at Harvard University: Weill, Kurt, 1900–1950. [Love life. Vocal Score]. [S.I. : s.n., 1948?]. Loeb Music: Mus 865.13.610.

14. Brooks Atkinson, "*Allegro:* A Fragment of the American Legend," *New York Times,* 2 November 1947.

15. Letter to Lenya, 18 May 1945, in WLE, 460.

16. Letter from Cheryl Crawford to Weill, n.d.; copy in WLRC.

17. Peter Szondi, *Theory of the Modern Drama,* ed. and trans. Michael Hays (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 1987), esp. 83–91. Szondi's two sections devoted to Wilder are called "The Epic *I* as Stage Manager" and "The Play of Time."

18. Max Frisch, "Brecht als Klassiker," *Weltwoche* (Zurich), 1 July 1955; quoted in Charles H. Helmetag, "Mother Courage and Her American Cousins in 'The Skin of Our Teeth,'" *Modern Language Studies* 8, no. 3 (1978): 65–69, here 65.

19. Helmetag, "Mother Courage and Her American Cousins," 68.

20. Ibid.

21. See Donald Haberman, "'Preparing the Way for Them': Wilder and the Next Generations," in *Critical Essays on Thornton Wilder,* ed. Martin Blank (New York: G. K. Hall, 1996), 129–37, esp. 130.

22. Thorton Wilder, *Three Plays: Our Town, The Skin of Our Teeth, The Matchmaker* (New York: Harper, 1957), xii.

23. Francis Fergusson, "Three Allegorists: Brecht, Wilder, and Eliot," in Blank, (ed.), *Critical Essays on Thornton Wilder,* 68; originally published in *Sewanee Review* 64 (1956): 544–73. Because it lacks a historical dimension, Fergusson goes on to say, the "intellectual freedom" of Wilder's philosophy "is therefore in danger of irrelevancy, pretentiousness and sentimentality."

24. The allusion is bitterly ironic in its implications. As Nietzsche (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* trans. Adrian Del Caro [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 11–12) writes,

> After a while the shattered man regained consciousness and saw Zarathustra kneeling beside him. "What are you doing here?" he said finally. "I've known for a long time that the devil would trip me up. Now he is going to drag me off to hell: are you going to stop him?"
>
> "By my honor, friend!" answered Zarathustra. "All that you are talking about does not exist. There is no devil and no hell. Your soul will be dead even sooner than your body—fear no more!"
>
> The man looked up mistrustfully. "If you speak the truth," he said, "then I lose nothing when I lose my life. I am not much more than an animal that has been taught to dance by blows and little treats."
>
> "Not at all," said Zarathustra. "You made your vocation out of danger,

and there is nothing contemptible about that. Now you perish of your vocation, and for that I will bury you with my own hands."

When Zarathustra said this the dying man answered no more, but he moved his hand as if seeking Zarathustra's hand in gratitude.

25. Thornton Wilder, *The Long Christmas Dinner and Other Plays in One Act* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1931), 3.

26. Szondi, *Theory of the Modern Drama*, 91.

27. Ibid., 85.

28. For an extensive, multiperspectived reading of "Here I'll Stay," see Kilroy, "Kurt Weill on Broadway," 284–316.

29. Ronald Taylor, *Kurt Weill: Composer in a Divided World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 312.