Singing to the Stars: Cosmic Symbolism in Broadway Musicals

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Singing to the Stars: Cosmic Symbolism in Broadway Musicals

by

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B.A. University of Colorado, 2011

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Theatre & Dance

2014
This thesis entitled:

“Singing to the Stars: Cosmic Symbolism in Broadway Musicals”

written by Rebecca Holley

has been approved for the Department of Theatre & Dance

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline
Human kind has long been fascinated by the stars. From the first instant our pre-historic ancestors looked up at the stars, they have wondered how they affect us. They have included these cosmic bodies in their artwork, and Broadway musical theatre artists have followed this pull. But, in a discipline that reads subtext and symbolism in every word, one has to wonder what this cosmic symbolism means. Does it only signify the setting and time of the musical (outside/inside, nighttime/daytime)? How does the use of the stars in the lyrics or libretto enhance the themes of the musicals? By examining the appearance of cosmic symbolism in Broadway musical theatre in relation to the long history of human fascination with the stars, this thesis aims to answer these questions, and to understand more fully the metaphoric role that the inclusion of the cosmic bodies can play in musical theatre.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

What do the international best-seller *Cosmos* (1985) and the hit musical *Les Misérables* (1987)\(^1\) have in common? At first glance: very little. One is a book explaining physics to the common man and woman, with an accompanying television series bringing that physics to life, while the latter is a sensational, sentimental pop-opera musical from Claude-Michel Schonberg, Alain Boublil and Cameron Mackintosh. But, placing them side by side (or rather *Cosmos* on the desk, while I listened to *Les Miz*) I began to see the connections. As Javert’s song “Stars” began to play in the first act, the commonality becomes apparent: both book and musical explore the fascination humans have with the little twinkling bodies they see in the night sky. Granted, the former focuses more fixedly on the science and math of the Big Bang and the physics of the cosmos, while the latter is concerned with morality and vengeance during a nineteenth century student uprising in Paris, however, they both question human existence, the stars in the sky, and human fascination with the celestial bodies. Upon realizing this connection, I was fascinated, and began noticing the allusion to stars everywhere, including in other musicals. I began to realize that this was an element of musical theatre to which I had never really paid much attention before, but that it was much more prevalent than I had ever realized. I started asking myself,

\(^1\) I use the date of the New York premiere here due to the fact that I will be focusing solely on the Broadway incarnation of each show. While I will be providing an outline of the production history for each show, I will not be focusing my discussions on prior productions that occurred outside the New York theatre district.
“why use the stars, why devote a song to them in Les Misérables? How is the cosmos used in several other musicals and plays, and what have scholars written about this relationship?”

In his book, Carl Sagan claims that “we are […] the remote descendants of the Big Bang, dedicated to understanding and further transforming the Cosmos from which we spring […] the local embodiment of a Cosmos grown to self-awareness […] starstuff pondering the stars” (12, 286). Psychologist Will W. Adams insists that “interaction between humans and environments is historically represented,” and in her Introduction to Art Literature and the Passions of the Skies (2012), Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka claims that human beings’ awe of the awesome and terrible manifestations they see in the sky influences their art and literature (ix). If, as these scholars claim, we humans are obsessed with our origins and the natural world around us, can theatre provide a unique insight into this connection between humans and the cosmos? What does this obsession mean for theatre artists, who create and put new works up on the stage for audiences to see? And, what messages are audiences getting from the resultant use of cosmic symbolism (a term that will be defined later in this thesis)?

Given the fact that on the Broadway musical stage, Annie Oakley’s “Got the Sun in the Morning and the Moon at Night” in Annie Get Your Gun, Paint Your Wagon’s Ben Rumson was “born under a wandering star,” the parents in Fiddler on the Roof lament with “Sunrise, Sunset,” the cast of Hair urge their audience to “let the sun shine in,” Evita’s Augustin Magaldi sings “On This Night of a Thousand Stars,” Javert looks to the “stars, in their multitude” for guidance in Les Misérables, Starlight Express’ Rusty and Pearl look to the stars for escape and comfort, and “the stars look down on” the miners of Billy Elliot: The Musical (Loewe 116; MacDermot 2; Behr 177; John and Hall 5), humanity’s obsession with its origins in the Big Bang is very present
in Broadway musicals, and deserves closer scrutiny. Musicals that play on Broadway often abound with cosmic symbolism. But what do we know about this symbolism? Does the appearance of stars in the libretto always mean fate? Do they serve as a replacement for using the word God in an effort not to alienate diverse audiences? Or, the most basic explanation, are they only there to give the time (daytime/nighttime), place (inside/outside), and mood of the scene? Can it be a mix of these? And what other meanings might this symbolism have?

Whether as audience members or theatre practitioners, there is a connection between humans’ obsession with their physical origins and the cosmic symbolism we cling to in our musical theatre. By turning to cosmic symbolism as metaphoric for human concerns, in their works, the creators of each of these musicals, whether consciously or unknowingly, relied upon the centuries-long relationship and fascination that humans have with their celestial kin in order to more vividly highlight the themes and messages of their works. Cosmic symbolism as an element of musical theatre literature has been vaguely studied if it has been discussed at all. If the songs are mentioned at all scholars tend to include them in general lists of the songs in the musicals and do not include any sort of discussion of what the symbolism of the stars adds to the musicals. For that reason, this thesis is a re-examination of the themes of the musicals in question, through a symbolic lens, in order to analyze the ways in which the creators use and benefit from the existence of cosmic symbolism in their works. Given the fact that humans have been mixing their art and the stars for centuries, and that there are a plethora of musical theatre songs that utilize the stars as metaphors, this neglect is concerning and needs to be remedied. By studying the use of cosmic symbolism in select musical theatre shows, we can gain an understanding of the ways in which musical theatre continues this tradition of mixing art and the
stars, but we can also gain a deeper understanding of the thematic uses of cosmic symbolism for future musical theatre pieces and their potential resonances with audiences.

**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

There are several terms that will be used within the body of this study; among them are the terms cosmic, astrology, symbolism, Broadway musical, nature literature, and secular humanism. As such, a discussion of their definitions and histories will serve as a basis for the later discussion of the role of cosmic symbolism in musical theatre.

To better understand the power of the cosmic symbolism used in Broadway musicals, it is imperative to understand the unceasing relationship and connection that we humans have with the cosmos as well as the ways that relationship has manifested itself in our art, literature and musical theatre across the ages. In his book *Cosmos*, physicist Carl Sagan talks about our connection to the beginning of the Universe: he claims that we as “starstuff” are the “remote descendants of the Big Bang” (Sagan 12). He discusses our millennia-long fascination with the stars; a fascination that inevitably led us to question: “What are the stars?” (Sagan 12). Nicholas Campion has pointed out that early humans would have relied on the stars to survive as the seasons shifted from winter to summer, and that humans’ connection with the sun and moon is “hardwired into our physical being” (Campion 4). In the fifth and fourth centuries, B.C.E., Plato introduced the idea of the Harmony of the Spheres, wherein everything in the universe moves in agreement or accordance, and the Sun, moon and planets move in perfect circles, or spheres, a trend that went on to permeate scientific thought. (Beasley 4; “Harmony”).

So, humans have a material connection with the bodies in outer space, but what does this have to do with our art, and more specifically, our musical theatre? As the ages have passed,
humans have continued to become more and more materialistic, advanced, and “fragmented” from the natural world of their origins; they have begun to rely upon cold empirical science that focuses less on meaning and more on facts (Marshall 400). However, both Marshall and Campion point out that meaning remains important to humans and they “cannot function without” it (Campion 29; Marshall 400). Finch and Elder add: “When you understand all about the sun and all about the atmosphere and all about the rotation of the earth, you may still miss the radiance of the sunset” (Finch and Elder 25). Eventually, we moved past being simply intrigued by the stars and relying on them for survival, to attempting to find meaning in their movements; at that moment, the original link humans had with the celestial bodies (in their mutual birth during the Big Bang) became symbolic, and astrology was born (Campion 1, 29). Scholars like Anna-Theresa Tymieniecka have pointed out that our relationship with nature “culminat[es within the] human creative endeavor,” that it is through our art that we explore our relationships to nature. Tymieniecka edited two books on the subject of the wedding of art and nature: Passions of the Earth (2001) and Passions of the Skies (2012). Indeed, extra-terrestrial bodies often appear in artistic and musical works. Holst composed a symphony called The Planets (1914-1916) wholly inspired by the celestial bodies; Constant Lambert created a ballet, The Horoscope (1937), inspired by the assumed influence the stars have on human lives; in the Tapisserie de Bayeux (1070-77), Matilda and the ladies of Duke William’s house included astrologers pointing out a comet in the sky as an omen for Harold II’s defeat in the battle; in Giotto’s The Adoration of the Magi (1303-06), Halley’s comet appears over the manger, marking the birth of the savior; in The School of Bruges’ Month of May (late 15th century), the sun chariot appears as representative of time passing; in Ludovico Cardi’s The Assumption of the Virgin
(1612) the moon appears as symbolic of Mary (Marshall xxxiii; Battistini 73, 97, 98, 123). King Louis XIV of France called himself the Sun King, using the image of the powerful, life giving sun and its trappings of mythology (Apollo as the Sun God) to symbolize his absolute power in France in the 17th century (“Louis XIV - Palace of Versailles”).

Cosmic symbolism, through its use of the natural world as metaphors for humans’ desires, fears and fascinations, can strike very strong chords with audiences all over the world, allowing for a deeper understanding of some of our universal fears regarding mortality and our place on Earth, and moving us in ways that are altogether different and more powerful than discussing those fears simply using non-metaphoric language. Both Marshall and Campion insist that meaning is just as important, if not more so, as measurement and empirical study. This powerful effect of cosmic symbolism is a result of the innate connection humans (as animals) have with the cosmic elements of the Big Bang, the seasons, the tides, etc., and it allows for a powerful visceral connection on top of the empirical explorations of our origins.

The term Cosmic is an adjective meaning “relating to the universe or cosmos” ("Cosmic") and it is most closely tied to the scientific field of cosmology. Cosmology is “the science or theory of the universe as an ordered whole, and of the general laws which govern it,” “that branch of metaphysics which deals with the idea of the world as totality of all phenomena in space and time” (“Cosmology”). The first half of the word “cosmos” means “the world or universe as an ordered and harmonious system,” “the opposite of chaos” and the second half, “ology,” means “an academic discipline or field of knowledge” (“Cosmos”; “Ology”); so cosmology is an academic field that studies the ordered system of the universe. Famous cosmologists include: Albert Einstein, Edwin Hubble, and Stephen Hawking. Cosmology,
however, is solely a scientific discipline and as such serves as a scientific reference for terms and theories alluded to throughout rather than as a methodology for the purposes of this thesis.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a symbol as “something that stands for, represents, or denotes something else (not by exact resemblance, but by vague suggestion)” especially a “material object representing…something immaterial or abstract, as a being, idea, quality or condition” (“Symbolism, N.”). Friedrich Nietzsche claimed that folk songs are a “musical mirror for the cosmos,” and that this “cosmic symbolism” found in music speaks universally to experiences felt mutually by all humans since the dawn of humanity (Nietzsche 43). Much like Nietzsche, I will be using the term cosmic to refer to a specific type of symbolism, in this case found in the lyrics of musical theatre productions. Cosmic symbolism will be considered a subset of nature literature that focuses on extra-terrestrial natural bodies (sun, moon, stars, Milky Way) and uses them as metaphors for human anxieties, desires and dreams. Not to be confused with astrology, cosmic symbolism is merely a literary device used to enhance the themes of the musicals, while it may utilize beliefs of astrology, it does not aim to propagate those beliefs, and certainly never takes those beliefs on as a cause. My examination of cosmic symbolism serves more to understand how the appearance of the stars can inform an understanding of the characters and their beliefs regarding religion and astrology than it does to bolster the field of astrology.

Since this thesis is about the various ways stars can be used in a musical, astrology serves as a reference for this thesis. Similarly to Carl Sagan, astrologer Peter Marshall claims that Astrology was born when early humans first looked for meaning in the canopy of stars looking down on them (401). While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment that humans began
looking for meaning among the celestial bodies, Astrology has certainly been around since at least 20,000 B.C.E. as indicated by the goddess of Laussel cave paintings found in France (Campion 10). Astrology is by no means limited to the European, Western peoples, as the Babylonians studied Astrology, so did the Chinese, and the stars have even been found in Algonquin Shamanic poems; however, Western Europe is where archaeologists have found the “richest remains” of cultures which studied the stars (Campion 8, 12, 14; Marshall 1).

Astrology once held the equivalent status that Astronomy (defined as “the law of the stars”) does today, and the words were, according to Peter Marshall, “used interchangeably,” but astrology has since faded into disrepute from the point of view of academics, similar to the field of Alchemy (Marshall xxxiii; “Astrology. OED Online”; Sobel; Campion 1-2). Franz Cumont calls astrology “the most persistent hallucination that ever haunted the human brain,” highlighting how vehement astrology’s critics can be (qtd. in Marshall xxxii). However, astrology continues to gather high number of supporters and, since the early 1900s we have undergone a “resurgence” of astrology in the West, the “greatest resurgence in astrology since the scientific revolution” (Culver ix, xiii). Vast multitudes of modern people still turn to astrology to know their fates and the fates of their endeavors in the business world, the political world (including two United States presidents), the gambling world, the love world, the diet world, the sex world, and “millions of people” regularly check their horoscopes in the papers (Culver xi, 214; Marshall xxxii-xxxiii). Astrology has even crept into our vernacular with terms like “starry-eyed youth” and “star-crossed lovers” (Marshall xxxii) and humans clearly still are very fascinated and dependent upon the cosmic bodies they can see in the night sky.
Astrology is the study of the effect that the positions of the stars and planets have on human personality, behavior and futures (“Astrology. Merriam-Webster.com”; Marshall xxxi). It is, essentially, the “search for meaning in the sky,” among the stars, planets, sun and moon (Campion 1, my emphasis). Astrology, then, is an attempt to understand the “human condition” by looking at the affairs of humans as compared to the “great and permanent cycles of the heavens” (Marshall 401). According to Peter Marshall, astrology assumes that “there is a spiritual and magical dimension to life” and is characterized by the use of symbolism (401). Using the words of Nicholas Campion, astrology “presents the sky as a source of awe, wonder and meaning” and as “a sacred canopy which shelters the earth below” (1). Jung suggested that the signs of the zodiac are actually “archetypal images” that are indications of the collective unconscious (qtd. in Marshall xxxiv). What astrology attempts to add to the world is meaning out of observations of the night sky, something that both Campion and Marshall have identified as important to humans in a modernized, materialistic world (Campion 4-5, 29; Marshall 400). Within the scope of this thesis, the importance of understanding what astrology is appears when the characters make mention of astrological signs in the lyrics or libretto. Cosmic symbolism is just as much influenced by the disciplines of cosmology as it is by astrology. The major difference between astrology and cosmic symbolism is that the former believes that the extra-terrestrial bodies influence human life; the latter is simply a literary device that may or may not use the tenets of astrology to reflect upon human anxieties and desires, but does not necessarily assume that celestial bodies actually influence human behavior. Rather, with cosmic symbolism, the stars serve more as a reflection of human concerns.
According to the Oxford English Dictionary online, the word harmony (meaning the combination of musical notes to achieve a pleasing effect) was first used by Chaucer in 1384 to refer to harmony in music; in 1605, Francis Bacon applied the term to science and the claim of science wherein each part of the world supports another ("Harmony"). The relationship between music and astrology goes back to Pythagoras who claimed that there is "music in the spacing of the spheres," (qtd. in Pruett 17). Johannes Kepler continued the use of the word harmony to refer to the movement of the celestial bodies, in his publication Harmonice Mundi (The Harmony of the World) between the years 1618 and 1621 in which he added his theory of a "divine harmony" (orchestrated by God) to earlier theories regarding the spheres (Duncan and Field in Kepler vii). This use of musical terms to refer to the movements and behavior of the heavens situates this thesis within a long tradition of melding art with the stars, and as it deals specifically with musical theatre it speaks directly to Pythagoras’ and Kepler’s use of the terms ‘music’ and ‘harmony’ to refer to the movement of the extra-terrestrial bodies. As musical theatre tends to resolve musically (harmony and melody agree) and thematically at the end of songs and shows, so too the early mathematicians and scientific thinkers thought the natural world should be ordered and explainable, with all the pieces moving in harmony.

Among the literary precursors to this thesis are the fields of nature writing and transcendentalism, which were early users of nature metaphors and symbols that recur in musical theatre’s use of cosmic symbolism. Robert Finch and John Elder, in their Norton Book of Nature Writing, introduce nature writing as “nonfiction prose” that focuses on a personal story about the

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2 It is interesting to note that the word ‘verse,’ as a verse in a song, appears in the word Universe, and while I have not found any research on that relationship as of yet, it is interesting to note yet another similarity between the Cosmos and music.
author’s interaction with nature (Finch and Elder 19). In most cases, the author has estranged himself from contemporary society and sought fellowship in the natural world. More than a scientific-literary genre and “cold science,” nature literature posed itself as an antidote to industrialism and urbanization by “restoring […] some of the warmth, breadth and piety into the world of ‘cold science’” (Finch and Elder 20). Some prime example are the writings of John Muir, Meriwether Lewis, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau, Charles Darwin, and Walt Whitman, among others, and it was triggered by Gilbert White’s letters (Foerster 75-76; Finch and Elder 20). Nature writing proved popular with writers in both England and America particularly during the 19th century (Finch and Elder 20).

Similar to the nature writing movement, Transcendentalism was a nineteenth century American philosophical movement, inspired by German thought, which broke away from the Congregational Church. The Transcendentalists sought a solitary, spiritual relationship with nature through their writing as a way to reconcile the Biblical stories with the emerging empirical results of science, and yet maintain some sort of reverence at the same time (Goodman; Harding 3). Many believed that they could not fully understand moral truths living in civilization, and that we could only understand them by finding ourselves in the wilderness (Callicott and Nelson 168). Famous Transcendentalists include Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller (Goodman).

Clearly, there is some cross over between the two fields and neither directly encompasses modern fictional theatre. However, many of the themes nature writers and Transcendentalists included in their writing are routinely resurrected in musical theatre. As such, for the purpose of this thesis, I will use the terms nature literature and nature symbolism to refer to novels as well
as plays that spend at least a portion of the work using the natural world as a metaphor for human anxieties, desires, concerns, struggles and fears. My use of this term can include the pastoral themes abounding in 19th century literature, as well as any appropriation of nature in theatre.

An understanding of some of the recurrent themes that appear when nature and cosmic symbolism are used in literature will better inform a discussion of cosmic symbolism within Broadway musical theatre. Robert Finch and John Elder note some common themes explored by nature writers, among these are: “an inordinate fondness for… the moon, night,” nature symbolism as relief and solace for human grief (27, 28). Richard Mabey identifies “the cycle of the seasons” and the abundance and extravagance of nature as integral themes (ix). Finch and Elder identify the escapist impulse that exists in the very act of writing about nature, much like the escape impulse that many Broadway shows impart to their audiences (21; Green, The World of Musical Comedy 7). In A Thousand Broadways (2009), Robert Pinsky and Brian Lebowitz discuss the symbolism of the stars in Our Town claiming that they represent “Wilder’s preoccupation with mortality, the vastness of time” (55). These themes appear to varying degrees in Broadway musicals, whether through the use of general nature symbolism (mountains, rivers, the land) as is the case in Show Boat, Oklahoma! and The Sound of Music (Knapp 128, 188, 238-39), or the more focused sub-genre of cosmic symbolism (sun, moon, stars). In either case, these themes utilize natural bodies as symbols and metaphors for human concerns and this symbolism is integral to emphasizing the main themes of the musicals.

As modern Western musicals tend to shy away from religion in their works, it is imperative to understand what secular humanism is and how it relates to musical theatre. The Compact Oxford English Dictionary defines secular as “not religious or spiritual” (“Secular”). In
his book *The Reverent Skeptic*, J. Wesley Robb points out that the word secular “refers to the affairs of this world in contradistinction to the world of the divine,” and with secularism, “man and nature constitute the whole of reality” (Robb 3, 5). Contemporary secularism takes many forms: materialist secularism, hedonistic secularism, pragmatic secularism, spiritual secularism, the last of which has the most influence on theatre artists (Robb 2-3). According to Robb, spiritual secularism emphasizes the arts (theatre, literature, music) as “the transcendent power of the human mind and spirit” to overcome the hardships and banality of everyday life. (Robb 3). Spiritual secularism is the realm into which most Broadway musical theatre falls as it believes in the powerful influence the arts can have in replacing the transcendence that was all too often provided by religions (Robb 3).

The second half of the term, humanism, traces its roots to the Renaissance and “places the highest value upon the human person and gives primary importance to man” and “turns from religious matters” to concentrate “its energies on ways of realizing human happiness in this world,” not the next (Robb 7; Kurtz 19). Robb goes on to define Humanism as:

(1) A concern for human good, both individually and collectively, and (2) a belief that man must resolve his problems alone and that there is no reality, above or beyond or outside of man, that can provide a resource or energizing power that will assist him […] Man and nature are all there is. (Robb 1-2)

A secular humanistic approach, then, believes that the world of nature can be understood through scientific inquiry, and doesn’t need to turn to an abstract religious context to be explained. Robb defines secular humanism as “an attempt to place life’s meaning within a totally human and naturalistic context” (3). However, since secular humanism does away with religion and focuses
on the human rather than on a deity, humans must look to something else for meaning in the absence of a religious guide. For this, secular humanists turn to art and literature. (Kurtz 20; Robb 9, 15).

So, secular humanism is a philosophy or a belief system that remains focused on humans and their power to control their own lives and destinies, and rejects the idea that a God influences their actions and journeys. But, what is secular humanism’s relation to the musicals discussed here and the field of cosmic symbolism? On their website, the Council for Secular Humanism identifies some of the ideas that Secular Humanism today incorporates; one of them is “A cosmic outlook rooted in science” revealing just how tied to the cosmic world secular humanism is and providing insight into the impulse in musical theatre to turn to the stars in the absence of God, in order to allow for universality.

Applying the term of cosmic symbolism to the Western musical theatre tradition requires a clear definition of what constitutes a Western musical. For the purpose of this study, I will focus specifically on Broadway musicals that include all the parts generally considered necessary for a musical: lyrics, libretto, composition, and dance (Lundskær-Nielsen 7; Maslon and Kantor 274). I will be narrowing my focus to book musicals solely, both integrated and concept, as the study of Jukebox musicals lies outside of this thesis due to their nature to form a plot around a pre-existing group of songs, rather than align the creation of the songs with the coinciding creation of the plot or concept (Maslon 314). Much like their audiences worldwide, these musicals that appear on Broadway are a diverse bunch: some originate from American-born librettists and deal with very American themes (such as the burning of Vietnam war draft cards in protest or the freedom and promise of the Wild West); others come from British lyricists
working with French storylines or historical biographies, and still others examine the angst of British youth growing up in the coal fields of rural England. Due to their varied thematic focus, they cannot all be considered quintessential American musicals, but they have nonetheless been very popular in America, both on Broadway, and in touring productions across the nation (Green, *The World of Musical Comedy* 103; Ewen 240; Green, *Broadway Musicals Show by Show* 130, 209, 224, 215, 254, 275, 361). Regardless of origin, all of these musicals have appeared on the Broadway stage and most have captured the attention of audiences and critics, whether for their astounding critical or popular success or their epic failure. The term I will be using throughout this thesis to refer to these musicals will be Broadway musicals, as they all at one point in time played to crowds in Broadway theaters in New York during the mid-to-late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The reason for this particular definition of Broadway musicals is that in this study it is more important to examine the musicals’ powerful use of cosmic symbolism, than it is to focus on where or from whom they originated, how American their themes are, or whether they became popular hits. In the end, the focus is on the cosmic symbolism, and the ways in which it is used to advance the themes, however flawed those might be.

Much the way that the transcendentalists pulled away from the church of their day, the nature writers wanted to put some reverence of nature back into their urban and empirical understandings of this world, and the astrologists are always looking for meaning in the stars, musical theatre has turned to the natural world, specifically the natural extra-terrestrial world, in an attempt to keep some of the concept of a bigger power in an otherwise god-less theatrical discipline. Not only do the stars serve to maintain awe and inspiration, but the cosmic symbolism
also serves as a secular replacement for the role played by God in traditional religions. After all, as J. Wesley Robb points out, “medieval cosmology placed God in Heaven above the earth at the center of the universe” up with the multitudes of stars, and in astrology, the stars have long been thought of as “gateways to another world,” as Peter Marshall points out (Robb 5; Marshall 401). Both Campion and Marshall point to the astrological idea that all religion originated from awe of the sky and worship of the sun; essentially “religion was solar in origin,” making cosmic bodies a very appropriate replacement for God, in musical theatre (Marshall xxxi; Campion 2).

SUMMARY AND METHODOLOGY

With an understanding of the scientific, literary and philosophical precursors to this project, we now turn to Broadway musicals. Throughout the course of this thesis, I will be focusing on nine musicals: Annie Get Your Gun, by Fields and Berlin, Paint Your Wagon, by Lerner and Loewe, Fiddler on the Roof, by Bock and Harnick, Man of La Mancha, by Wasserman, Darion and Leigh, Hair, by MacDermot, Ragni, and Rado, Evita, by Rice and Lloyd Webber, Les Misérables, by Schönberg, Boublil, and Kretzmer, Starlight Express, by Lloyd Webber and Stilgoe, and Billy Elliot: The Musical, by Hall and John. These musicals represent the epitome of how cosmic symbolism can be used to enhance thematic material. For each musical, I will first provide a background of its production history, plot, storyline, any characters central to the cosmic symbolism in the musical, and themes, so as to introduce the musical.

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3 I have left Lloyd Webber’s Jesus Christ Superstar out of this thesis due to the fact that it only contains one use of the cosmic symbolism (in the title song and in the title of the musical) and only highlights one theme of the musical: the theme of celebrity. While two musicals in this thesis deal with the theme of celebrity, they also use the cosmic symbolism to highlight additional themes such as the themes of seeking inspiration from the stars, and understanding mortality in relation to the perceived permanence of the stars, and are more fruitful for the purposes of this study.
enough so that the following discussion of the cosmic symbolism in relation to the musical, makes sense to anyone who may not be familiar with the particular show.

In looking at these musicals, I will examine the one or two songs in each musical that contain cosmic symbolism, and how that usage of metaphors and symbols therein informs the themes of the musicals. I will primarily be looking at the text of these songs, including both the cosmic symbolism in the lyrical phrases and, in select musicals, the ways in which the musical phrases accentuate that cosmic symbolism.\(^4\) While I will generally focus on the text and audio material (see footnote) of these musicals, in a few instances, I will discuss the ways that certain productions have embodied the cosmic symbolism physically on stage through light or scenic design, or even in the playbill. In looking at these designs I will be examining the ways in which they accentuate the cosmic symbolism of the lyrics as well as the powerful role cosmic symbolism plays in conveying the themes of the musicals.

While cosmic symbolism is a particular type of symbolism used in musical theatre, these musicals can be sorted into three sub-themes or sub-categories, within the greater field of cosmic symbolism: the first of these sub-categories is simple awe in the grandeur and beauty that is the cosmos, the second is cosmic bodies as guides and comfort for the characters in the musical, and the third is the anxiety regarding our own mortality compared to the seeming permanence of the cosmos. These three sub-categories appear throughout the Broadway musicals in question; some musicals embody more than one of the sub-categories, and some only embrace one. Each of these sub-categories will be explained more in depth in its respective section below. These three sub-categories are often used as metaphors and symbols in musical theatre, and they touch on

\(^4\) Whenever I do make reference to the musical phrases, I have used the original Broadway cast recording as my source material for what the musical sounds like.
some of humans’ biggest fears and anxieties about their place in the universe. The musicals are, however, unevenly distributed across the three sub-categories, with the majority of them landing within the category of comfort and guidance, and fewer appearing in the categories of awe, and time and mortality.

In Chapter Two: “Awe,” I start with the thematic category which has the most to do with human fascination in the beauty of the natural world and the charisma of celebrity. I look at three musicals that deal with the themes of celebrity and escapism, and how the cosmic symbolism is able to highlight their themes and the personalities of the main characters. *Annie Get Your Gun* then *Evita*, both utilize cosmic symbolism to reveal the nature of the title character, as well as the nature of celebrity. Then, I examine *Starlight Express* which utilizes cosmic symbolism in an escapist impulse. In Chapter Three: “Comfort and Guidance,” I discuss the most commonly used of the three sub-categories, the stars as comfort and guidance for humans, and its manifestation in several musicals. I analyze six musicals, including *Starlight Express, Man of La Mancha, Paint Your Wagon, Hair, Billy Elliot,* and *Les Misérables.* In this chapter, I look at the characters’ beliefs that the stars influence and watch over them as they live their lives, and I look at the ways in which this use of cosmic symbolism adds depth to the characters and their struggles. In Chapter Four: “Mortality and Time,” I explore the ways in which cosmic symbolism highlights and explores the human angst regarding mortality and the vastness of time as compared to their short existence. In *Les Misérables,* I look at the ways in which the cosmic symbolism highlights the mortality of the many characters who die throughout the musical. In *Annie Get Your Gun,* I look at how the stars reveal the mortality of the main character. And in *Fiddler on the Roof,* I look at how the passage of time relates to the characters in the musical, but
also relates more generally to the human condition and diverse audiences. At the end of this thesis, I hope to gain a much deeper understanding of the thematic depth cosmic symbolism can add to musical theatre and the ways in which it has highlighted the nature of the characters and their struggles, as well as the thematic material, of the musicals investigated here.
CHAPTER II

AWE

As discussed previously, one of the major facets of humans’ relationship with the stars is their fascination with the cosmic bodies they can see, their never-ending drive to understand them with their science, and the desire to reflect them with their art (Campion 5). The first of the three broad sub-categories of cosmic symbolism: Awe appears in musical theatre in two ways: first, awe and appreciation of the un-equalled beauty and grandeur of the cosmos and celestial bodies, and second, the tendency to associate people of great fame and renown with celestial bodies, a phenomenon often referred to as celebrity or stardom. The fact that this term “stardom” includes the word “star” could be a topic for investigation in itself, but the musical theatre productions discussed in this section provide a preliminary understanding of the relationship between celebrity and the cosmos. Annie Get Your Gun typifies both the first and second tendency, Evita embodies the second manifestation of cosmic symbolism, and Starlight Express exemplifies the first.

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN

With a story conceived and written by Dorothy Fields, her brother Herbert Fields, and supplemented by Irving Berlin’s music and lyrics (Suskin 53), Annie Get Your Gun opened in New York City at the Imperial Theatre in May 1946, to rave reviews (Bordman 552). The general critical reception was favorable, but most critics applauded Ethel Merman’s performance more than they applauded the literary accomplishment of the work. Louis Kronenberger criticized it for being “musically not exciting” and Ward Morehouse thought it had a “flimsy,”
“witless” book, Lewis Nichols thought the book “doesn’t get anywhere” (qtd. in Suskin 55-56). Nevertheless, the general consensus was that *Annie Get Your Gun* was entertaining: John Chapman referred to it as “good, standard, lavish” (qtd. in Suskin 55), and Lewis Nichols called it “an agreeable evening on the town” (qtd. in Suskin 56). Chapman concluded, however, that the show was not amazing (qtd. in Suskin 55). *Annie Get Your Gun* went on to play 1,147 performances before it closed in May 1949, becoming one of the four longest-running musicals of Broadway history to that date (Suskin 57).

Considered a musical biography and a star-vehicle, *Annie Get Your Gun* tells the story of “Little Miss Sure-shot,” Annie Oakley, the first professional woman sharpshooter, and her rise from a simple but content country girl to world fame and stardom with Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show. As the story traces her journey to success, it also traces her developing romance with Frank Butler, however, in the end, Annie chooses her love over her gun since she “can’t get a man with a gun” (Berlin 26) *Annie Get Your Gun* deals with the themes of stardom, fame, show business, and naivety, the last two of which tie in most with the cosmic symbolism.

“I Got the Sun in the Morning,” referred to as an “exuberant,” “up tempo song,” is sung in a ballroom among dignified and admiring investors in Act II of the musical (Green, *The World of Musical Comedy* 102; Patinkin 271; Bordman 552; *Annie Get Your Gun* 95, 97-98). The song reflects Annie’s fascination with the far-off celestial bodies she can see from earth, and, in the process, reveals her simple character. In the song, Annie’s got “the sun in the morning and the moon at night” which will “leave her satisfied,” and she’s “alright” with just these beautiful beings (Berlin 107). The fact that she is fine with just these celestial beings (and not diamonds or jewels) works to reveal her simple, backwoods character. Notice, Annie did not mention the
trees, the water or the land (all three of which can contribute to human survival in the wild\textsuperscript{5}). No, she mentioned two very near and powerful celestial beings, and likened these in value to jewels. Much like the 19\textsuperscript{th} century Transcendentalists’ obsession with recurring themes of the moon and the night, and the nature writers’ impulses to re-find reverence in nature, Annie Oakley is inspired by the bounty, profusion and beauty of the cosmos that she can see from Earth (Finch and Elder 27; Campion 1, 2; Wilson 82. “The Disenchantment of the Sky”). She goes on to explain that the sun provides for a “lovely day” and then at night, she can see the impressive beauty of the “Milky Way” (Berlin 107). Again, Annie is inspired by nature’s extravagance, indeed, sunrise may be the most dramatic event of the day and Annie does not fail to notice this grandeur (Campion 2). On top of this fascination with the natural beauty of the Cosmos, Annie symbolizes a simpler way of living with “no checkbook […] no banks” (Berlin 107). Here, Annie is simple and pure, devoid of the capitalism that corruptions the natural beauty of the earth and humans (Berlin 107). Annie is much like the idea of the untouched frontier that fascinates Americans and all she needs to thrive joyously is the beauty of the sun, moon, and Milky Way (Gatta 6).

Earlier in the musical, in the song “You Can’t Get a Man with a Gun,” an instance of cosmic symbolism effectively emphasizes Annie’s proficiency at sharp-shooting. In the song, Annie sings about how comfortable she is with a gun and uses the morning sun as an example of how she is empowered by having the gun. She sings “when I’m with a pistol […] I shine like the morning sun” (Berlin 26). Here Annie uses the image of the splendor, brightness, and power of

\textsuperscript{5} Granted, the sun is very life-sustaining and providing, but it is twice removed from humans, providing its sustenance through the plants and the water rather than directly. As such, it is not as near and present a source for survival against the elements and starvation, as the plants and the water can be.
the morning sun as an adjective to draw attention to how confident she is with a gun as opposed to how awkward she is with a feller: with a gun, she literally shines. This is one of the first songs Annie sings in the musical; in effect, the cosmic symbolism plays an integral role in revealing Annie’s character from the very beginning of her story.

Another major theme in *Annie Get Your Gun*, that of show business and stardom, provides illumination into the usage of cosmic symbolism in the musical. In the song, “There’s No Business Like Show Business,” Buffalo Bill and Frank attempt to convince Annie of the wonders of show business and fame. They talk about the process of becoming a celebrity: having your opening and “the next day on your dressing room they’ve hung a star” signifying that the performer has made it to fame and success. Here, the image of a star, a far off, dazzling, celestial being, vividly symbolizes the rise to fame that typifies show business and the fascination audiences have with celebrities. It is significant that celebrities are often referred to as stars, and this song, which would become the “unofficial anthem” of the show business industry, highlights the relationship between that celestial body and the fame of the human phenomenon to which it refers (Patinkin 269). Through the use of cosmic symbolism in “I Got the Sun in the Morning,” “You Can’t Get a Man with a Gun” and “There’s No Business Like Show Business,” the character of Annie gains depth and a weighty stature. As a result of the use of cosmic symbolism in “There’s no Business like Show Business” we understand the fantastic heights to which Annie has climbed by the end when she is a star, but due to the cosmic symbolism in “I Got the Sun in the Morning” we a reminded of Annie’s simple nature that she has managed to maintain throughout the musical, despite her fame. Also, as a result of the comparison between her gun
and shining like the sun, we understand more powerfully the relationship between her gun and herself.

**EVITA**

Conceived by Tim Rice and composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber, *Evita* began life as an album released in 1976 in England (Swain 317; Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 103). After achieving success as an album, *Evita* became a stage musical, and premiered at London’s Prince Edward Theatre in 1978 (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 103; Swain 317). Due to claims that the musical “glorified fascism” and depicted Eva Peron “too sympathetically,” Broadway producers were originally very hesitant about bringing it to America, however, after revisions, *Evita* transferred to Broadway the following year, 1979, to fantastic box office success worldwide and almost a full four year run in New York City (Wollman 103-04). Despite Walter Kerr’s less-than-ideal review, *Evita* went on to become a “smash hit” in New York City and win seven Tony Awards in 1980, including the awards for Best Musical, Best Book of a Musical, and Best Original Score. *Evita* played on Broadway for 1,567 performances, closing in 1983. *Evita* has numerous professional productions, including the most recent Broadway revival in 2012-13 (Steyn 166; Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 103-4; “Evita.” Internet Broadway Database).

Classified into numerous genres, Sheldon Patinkin referred to *Evita* as a “romantic musical spectacular;” and “history as musical;” Joseph Swain called it a “secular oratorio,” and a “rock musical” (Patinkin 451; Swain 316, 317, 331, 418). Whatever genre *Evita* is classified as, the music and lyrics work to tell the “dramatic” story of Eva Peron, the real-life wife of Argentinean dictator Juan Peron, and, what Elizabeth Wollman, Galt MacDermot and Stephen Trask have called her “meteoric” rise from her low beginnings as a common girl in a small town
to the role of a “saviour” and saint-like icon for the Argentinean people (Swain 316, 332; Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 103; Patinkin 451). While the British version of the musical appeared to be sympathetic toward its title character, the revised American version turned out to be what Lloyd Webber referred to as “very anti-Evita” to the point of feeling, according to Walter Kerr, “icy” towards Eva and depicting her story harshly (Lloyd Webber in Swain 330; Kerr in Swain 331). With the action commented upon by the revolutionary activist and one-man chorus, Che, *Evita* at first glance seems to be simply a “political editorial” about the events in Argentina in the 1940s and 50s (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 103; Swain 330). However, *Evita* also focuses on the themes of success and stardom, with an attitude more cynical than romantic toward Eva Peron and her rise to power (Swain 165, 316, 330). It is this theme of stardom and success that the cosmic symbolism of the musical highlights, and Elizabeth Wollman, Galt MacDermot and Stephen Trask’s use of the term meteoric to refer to Evita’s rise to fame is significant because they use yet another cosmic body to refer to Evita’s swift and brilliant rise. To begin with, the cosmic symbolism in the song “On this night of a Thousand Stars” is particularly illustrative of the themes of success and stardom, as well as the use of cosmic symbolism to advance those themes within a single song.

The beginning of *Evita* is unusual, as it starts with the announcement of Eva’s death (“A Cinema in Buenos Aires”), then follows with a “Requiem” for the late “spiritual leader” of Argentina (*Evita*). At this point, the audience is carried back to the beginning of her story in “On this Night of a Thousand Stars” (*Evita*). A tango, “On this Night” sets up not only Eva’s beginnings in squalor, but also her ambition to rise up the strata of society, using the men around her as rungs on her ladder to success. Che presents us with “Augustin Magaldi” a “Tango
singer…Who has the distinction of being the first/Man to be of *use* to Eva” [my emphasis] (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 103; *Evita*). Magaldi then goes on to sing about the stars and love, and in the process, foreshadows just how far Eva endeavors to rise, and just how high she will rise. The lyrics of the song are underscored by piano and acoustic guitar, which Joseph Swain points out is “reserved for occasions that call for some kind of […] pretense,” or agenda, as is the case in “On this Night” (322). Swain’s observation reveals Eva’s use of Magaldi for her upward ascent and the lyrics further reveal her goals and ambitions.

While at first glance “On this Night” seems to be simply a racy cabaret song designed to wow and seduce girls in the club, the song does have a two-fold meaning. In general throughout this song, and the next song “Eva and Magaldi,” the image of light takes a center stage position symbolically, especially when Eva’s family remind Magaldi that Evita “brightened up your out of town engagement” (*Evita*). Here, Rice utilizes the image of light, and more specifically starlight (when compared to the symbolism of the prior song), to stand for the presumably enjoyable tryst that occurred between Eva and Magaldi during his engagement in her small town, but in “On this Night” the symbolism goes even deeper to foreshadow Eva’s rise to power and her resultant fame.

Opening with the lyrics: “On this night of a thousand stars/I will take you to heaven’s door,” Magaldi’s song symbolizes Eva’s impending rise to superstardom (*Evita*; Bernstein in Swain 316). According to Bernstein, the stars, mentioned in the first line of the song, reflect not only Eva’s aim, to rise higher than anything she has ever known, much as the stars are higher than everything, but also her ambition to shine as brilliantly and be as enchanting as those celestial bodies that Magaldi mentions (Swain 316). It is significant, then, that she and Magaldi
meet during his song about a “night of a thousand stars” and she begins her ascent to the top that starry evening. The lyric about “tak[ing] you to heaven’s door,” foreshadows Eva’s heaven that she will find in Buenos Aires at the upper echelons of power with all the glitz and glamour she will enjoy later in the show (Evita; Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 103). Magaldi’s mention of the “twinkling stars” symbolizes the sparkling star that Eva will become; and, when he sings the words “through eternity” he foreshadows the immortality that she will achieve (Evita). As the Argentinean people became infatuated with Eva Peron, so also have musical theatre audiences the world over, with Rice and Lloyd Webber’s musical biography of her. In effect, small town Eva craves and welcomes the chance to shine in the big city (Buenos Aires) and the stars symbolize not only her fascination with fame and being a celebrity but also her upcoming rise to stardom and immortality which provides the action for Rice and Webber’s musical.

In effect, “On this Night” is integral to setting up the entire premise of the show by explaining where Eva originated and foreshadowing how far she will rise. However, “On this Night” is hardly ever mentioned in scholarly discussions of Evita as experts tend to focus on “Another Suitcase in Another Hall,” “I’d be Surprisingly Good for You” and “Don’t Cry for Me Argentina,” a neglect which I posit is due primarily to the relatively short length of the song (1:35) and its position in between Che’s introduction of Eva’s humble beginnings and her sung conversation with Augustin leading up to her confession, “I wanna be a part of B.A./Buenos Aires, Big Apple” (Patinkin 452; Swain 322-26; Evita). Compared to these other two numbers, “On this Night” appears to be simply a song that sets the scene of Eva and Magaldi meeting in a night club, however, “On this Night” is extremely important to revealing the role that cosmic symbolism can play in verbally establishing the motivation of a character, even if it is only a few
lines within the musical. As a result of the cosmic symbolism in the song, Eva’s motivations, ambitions and fame are more deeply understood.

Not only is “On this Night” integral to setting up the entire premise of the musical, but it is reprised later in the musical when Eva makes her second bid for power, using yet another man to get what she wants, and the cosmic symbolism appears again. During the announcements at the beginning of the “Charity Concert” Augustin Magaldi reprises his song “On this Night” as the audience cheers. At this point in the musical, Eva is a famous actress in Buenos Aires, but as August Magaldi finishes singing and Eva and Juan take over in sung dialogue, Eva continues her ascension to the upper rungs of power (Evita). She meets Juan Peron and tells him she’d “be good for” him, effectively triggering her rise to the next, highest, level of power (Evita). Again, the cosmic symbolism appears when Eva makes another bid for power, using another man to climb to the identity of saint and savior for the Argentinian people.

Finally, in She’s a Diamond Che sings off Evita’s fame, but alludes to the fact that Eva is already on a fall from power when he says “she’s slowing down…her fading star” (Evita). These lyrics come after we have learned of Eva’s illness and her impending fall into ill-health due to cancer. However, cosmic symbolism, which highlighted Eva’s rise to power, now foreshadows her fall from health, and her ultimate death.

Throughout Evita the cosmic symbolism serves as a metaphor for Eva’s celebrity, but in so doing it serves to provide her an element of immortality. By becoming famous, Eva earns a place in the hearts of the Argentinian people, the history books, and Lloyd Webber’s musical. Much like the fascination with Eva and her stardom, Starlight Express deals with themes of fascination, but in a very different way.
**STARLIGHT EXPRESS**

*Starlight Express* opened on Broadway in 1987 with lyrics by Richard Stilgoe and a score composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 140; Patinkin 478). Initially very popular in Germany and England, *Starlight Express* fell flat on Broadway, running only 761 performances and failing to recover its investments (Nemy; Patinkin 478, 507; Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 140). *Starlight Express* then toured around the country in 1989, and opened for a run at the Las Vegas Hilton in 1992 (Rosenberg and Harburg 28). The Broadway theater critics were less-than-impressed; Frank Rich called the musical a “confusing jamboree of piercing noise” that lasted “over two numbing hours” (C17). William Gale of the *Providence Journal* called *Starlight Express* “witless” and “numbing,” referring to the writing as “sentimental pap,” however, he did point out what he called “redeeming features” including Lloyd Webber’s music and Richard Stilgoe’s lyrics from time to time (1). Calvin Woodward noted that *Les Miserables* was running at the same time, overshadowing *Starlight Express* (1). Despite achieving wild popularity in Germany and England, *Starlight Express* failed to recoup its investments on Broadway.

Stephen Holden considers *Starlight* to be an “eclectic” “pop ‘opera’” that includes music from such disparate genres as rock and country (Holden). He goes on to suggest that *Starlight* follows in the tradition of the Disney-on-Ice spectacles (Holden). More importantly, Andrew Lloyd Webber himself described *Starlight* as a family show aimed at children who love trains (Irving Azoff in Holden; Rich). The musical has a cast of twenty-three actors in the characters of train cars and engines (Nemy). The story begins when a child’s train set comes to life, and focuses on Rusty, a steam engine that is rather past his prime, and his attempt to win a race across the United States (as revised for the Broadway premiere) against Electra, an electric
engine, and Greaseball, a diesel. All three of the leads are gendered male trains, and the female trains in the musical are all “subservient” (Rich). From time to time, the voice of the little boy, identified as “Control,” cuts into the music, announcing the parameters of the race. The cast all wear roller skates and the main action of the musical consists of them skating around the multi-level train-track set as, what Martin Starger, one of the producers for Starlight Express, has called a “metaphor for train movement” (qtd. in Holden). It is John Napier’s costuming that really helps the cast to embody trains, as the women are dressed in corsets, miniskirts and kneepads that appear metallic and the men wear codpieces and kneepads that also resemble metal; Frank Rich referred to the costuming as “robotic” and Sheldon Patinkin used the term “futuristic” (“Starlight Express.” IBDB; Rich; Lloyd Webber and Stilgoe 6-13; Patinkin 478). The motion of the skaters, combined with the mechanical design of the costumes that makes it clear the actors are playing train engines. In fact, to hear Sheldon Patinkin discuss Starlight, the skating is what made the show anything, since the original-cast recording is “badly missing” it (Patinkin 478).

Among the themes of Starlight Express are the themes of the underdog triumphing despite all odds, believing in yourself, and finding inspiration in yourself (Green, Broadway Musicals Show by Show 276). Andrew Lloyd Webber claims the show is “a whole fantasy that is about fun and nothing else” and Holden has pointed to the fact that “its producers and creators talk more about the marketing of the show than about its meaning” (Holden). Perhaps that is because the creators really did only intend to focus on making the show fun but, whichever the case may be, the cosmic symbolism contributes immensely to the show being transporting. Scholar Thomas Hischak’s usage of the term “allegorical,” to refer to Starlight Express, points to
the spiritual, inspirational elements of the show and fellow scholar, Stanley Green’s usage of the word “fable,” highlights the lesson of believing in one’s self that the musical also emphasizes (Hischak 706; Green, *Broadway Musicals: Show by Show* (276). The sheer fact that the title of the musical and of the enchanting midnight train includes cosmic symbolism (in the word starlight) points to the integral role of cosmic symbolism in the musical.

In “Starlight Express” at the end of Act I, the song serves as a child-like midnight dreamland escape, a getaway from the mundane wait for sleep to come, that appeals directly to children, and to the inner child in adults. Rusty sings “and though you count every sheep, you get the feeling that sleep is gonna stay away tonight” appealing to anyone who has ever lain in bed vainly waiting for sleep (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*). He then provides the solution to this banality by stating: “That’s when you hear coming; that’s when you hear the humming of the midnight train” which serves as a fantastical escape from the prison of sleeplessness (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*). Rusty pleads with the midnight train to take him everywhere just so he can say he’s been, but bring him back before daylight; Rusty’s plea highlights the escape that he seeks from the Starlight Express (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*). Rusty is in effect awed by the Starlight Express and the distant, arguably imaginative, realms to which it can take him.

Adding to the awe that Rusty feels toward the Starlight Express, Frank Rich described John Napier’s set and David Hersey’s light design of the moment by using the words “a nocturnal celestial blur” (C17). His word choice is significant because it reveals that the light and set design combined to resemble the stars in the night sky shining down on Rusty in the same instant in which he appeals to the Starlight Express for rescue from the boring state of lying in
bed and waiting for sleep. Here, through the title of the song and through the images that appeared on the stage, cosmic symbolism was invoked twice. Rich points to the transportive quality of the design as he claims that the effect that Hersey and Napier achieved was able to obliterate the “dehumanizing harshness of the set and, for that brief instant” render the show “transporting” (C17). According to Rich, this moment of cosmic symbolism embodied not just in the text but also in the design, was able to awe the audience, or at least himself, in spite of what he viewed as an evening “otherwise […] about the prevention of traffic accidents” (C17). Rich’s review highlights a moment so powerful that it was able to move him, despite his distaste for the show. The moment, coupled with the lyrics of song, allows for cosmic symbolism to be used twice in the same instant in the musical, to the entertainment benefit of the audience. The transportive number “Starlight Express” takes place right before intermission, and is a very exuberant, enchanting ending to Act I.

In Act II, the song, “Next Time You Fall in Love,” also includes cosmic symbolism that embodies the theme of awe and grandeur. Both Pearl and Rusty sing, “Next time you fall in love, it better be with me, the way it used to be, back then, that’s when we touched the starlight” (Starlight Express: The Original Cast). Here, the stars become symbolic of the powerful, joyous, heights to which love can transport two lovers. The use of the cosmic symbolism here gives the emotional feelings of being in love a symbolism that is more physical than emotional, similarly to the role of cosmic symbolism in Evita; it gives the image of actually reaching up and touching the stars because love has caused one to soar that high, an impossible but powerful image that highlights how happy Rusty and Pearl once were.
The design of the Playbill for the Broadway incarnation of Starlight illustrates the transportive role of cosmic symbolism in the musical. The playbill features a beam of light curving from the lower right hand corner, to the left hand side, and up to become a rainbow colored star in the top center of the program, an image which Stephen Holden has referred to as “a supernova…a star shooting out from infinity to announce the title” (“Starlight Express.” Playbill; Holden 3). Such a design seems inspired more by images from science fiction and rock and roll shows than from traditional Broadway productions and serves to highlight the excitingly transportive character of the musical.

The design vividly highlights the cosmic symbolism in the musical by using a cosmic phenomenon (that of a supernova) and, in case anyone missed the scientific reference, an image from science fiction, to cue the audience into the cosmic symbolism that permeates the musical. While audience members could arguably still miss the connection, the fact that such an image appeared on the cover of the production program reveals how central cosmic symbolism is to the musical and its themes; after all, it is a supernova (or spaceship entering warp-speed) that was featured on the program, not a train engine.

CONCLUSION

From the awe in the beauty of the sun and moon that highlighted Annie Oakley’s naïve and simple nature, to the cosmic symbolism that foreshadows Eva Peron’s rise to celebrity and

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6 The image to which I refer here, is the image of Star Trek’s original Starship Enterprise jumping into warp speed and leaving a rainbow tail behind it as it zips away to unknown adventures. It is interesting to note, here, that two critics who reviewed the original production of Starlight Express used science fiction references in their reviews: William Gale referred to the costumes as “Star Wars costumes,” and Frank Rich entitled his March review of Starlight Express: “Broadway; Theatre; The Empire Strikes Back,” effectively referring to the title of Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back. (Gale 1; Rich, “Broadway; Theatre; The Empire Strikes Back” 1).

7 Here, I think of the rock and roll posters from bands such as Pink Floyd and Journey from the 1970s and 1980s.
immortality, and ending with *Starlight Express*’ use of the stars as entertaining and transcending, cosmic symbolism provides all sorts of enlightenment, wonderment, and pure enjoyment in these musicals in which it is used. All three use the stars to stand for lofty heights: in the first two, the cosmic symbolism highlights the fame that the two characters will achieve when they move from their low-beginnings to the revered status they achieve as celebrities; in last of the three, the lofty height that is symbolized by use of the cosmic symbolism is the joyous pinnacle to which love can transport lovers. All three contain characters who are fascinated with extra-terrestrial bodies, but in each, different facets of the characters’ personalities emerge. In *Annie Get Your Gun* Annie’s fascination with the celestial bodies above her highlights her simple character her confidence with a gun, and the fascination and awe people tend to have with regards to celebrity “stars”. The cosmic symbolism in *Evita* highlights her ambitious character and foreshadows her rise to fame. In *Starlight Express* the cosmic symbolism works more to highlight the escape impulse humans (and trains like Rusty) seek from the banality of routine and the awe that the stars, and musical theatre, can provide. Not only does cosmic symbolism offer awe and enjoyment but it also offers a potential explanation to many of the big answers in life and solace for hardship and suffering, to which the next section’s discussion of cosmic symbolism will be devoted.
CHAPTER III

COMFORT AND GUIDANCE

The centuries-long discipline of astrology inspires this section with all of its assumptions that by looking at the positions of the stars, we can predict the futures of humans. Nicholas Campion has pointed to the astrological tendency to think of the stars as “messengers, guardians, and protectors” (4). Peter Marshall points out that these celestial bodies then offer “a path of transformation” and “can lead us from the confusion of everyday life to a deeper understanding of ourselves and our place within the universe” (399). Now something more of a comedic entertainment, there are still people who believe that the stars’ position at one’s birth influence the kind of character that person will have as well as her/his goals, aspirations, and motivations. There are still others who believe that the position of the stars on any given day will have an influence over the kind of day one has, fantastic or disastrous. Astrology is a great example of humans putting their faith and belief in the stars’ power to impact their destinies, rather than taking complete responsibility for their lives. Akin to the religious impulse to put moments of pain and struggle in to the hands of a “higher power,” astrology-followers put their lives in to the hands of a higher power.

Astrology also assumes that there is a connection between the celestial bodies and the human bodies below, a connection that Marshall referred to as the “microcosm” mirroring the “macrocosm,” similarly to Sagan’s claim that we are “starstuff” (Marshall xxxi; Sagan 286). In this view the lonely “I” can see itself as part of the whole, as “We” (Marshall 399). As such, astrology can offer a feeling of cosmic community; in effect it carries with it a comforting idea
that we belong. These impulses are reflected in Western musical theatre through the cosmic symbolism that appears in them.

**STARLIGHT EXPRESS**

As discussed earlier, *Starlight Express* provides for a night of visual spectacle and entertainment; and espouses the themes of holding true to one’s self and finding inspiration within one’s self as well as highlighting the spiritual drive to seek comfort from a force outside ourselves. Significantly, both themes are embodied by the Starlight Express train engine and the cosmic symbolism of that “midnight train” (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*).

Late in Act I, the song “Starlight Express” presents the midnight train as a source of comfort and spiritual guidance for Rusty. The Starlight Express explains how and when it can be helpful and comforting, stating it in terms that appeal universally, to children, adults, and trains:

> How many times have you found/Though you were firm on the ground, /Still the world around you sways?/You notice all that you’ve got/Does not add up to a lot/And the way ahead’s a maze./You’ve used everything inside you,/so maybe it’s time you tried/ to find a brand new power. (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*)

Rusty then joins the Starlight Express singing: “a light to brighten up your darkest hour” (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*). The way that these lyrics are phrased appeals to anyone who has ever, at any point, felt lost, and they use cosmic symbolism to reveal the midnight train’s source of guidance. This source of guidance is symbolized by “a light” that can help Rusty through times of doubt and hardship, which is similarly symbolized by the image of brightening up the darkness (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*). The singer goes on to tell Rusty that “Starlight Express hears your distress,” suggesting that the midnight train will come
as a comfort when its believers are in “distress” (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*). In the song, Rusty further reveals the comfort he seeks from the midnight train when he tells the Starlight Express, “I don’t want you to go,” and later begs, “don’t abandon me” (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*). Rusty’s appeal to the Starlight Express not to abandon him reveals the solace that he feels he receives from the midnight train’s existence and presence in his life. Here, the Starlight Express becomes a metaphor for comfort through the cosmic symbolism of starlight, lightness and darkness; however, it also plays a spiritual role in Rusty’s life.

On top of providing comfort, the Starlight Express also serves as a secular humanist replacement for a more traditional religious deity. The voice of the midnight train opens the song, telling Rusty to “only believe, son…the starlight express will help you” (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*). Here, the Starlight Express suggests two things at once: first, that Rusty has to believe in the Starlight Express, and secondly, that it will be able to guide and help him so long as he believes. The Starlight Express, here, takes on the feel of a divine presence, of a father that will keep an eye on his “son,” Rusty, and guide and comfort him, if he will only believe. While it’s unclear whether Rusty is actually Starlight Express’ son, the relationship is more symbolic, as is the relationship between the Christian God and his children. Indeed, when the Starlight Express reminds Rusty that “Starlight Express hears your distress,” it reminds Rusty that the midnight train is constantly watching over him. Further, the Starlight Express tells Rusty, “it’s time you tried to find a brand new power” (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*). While the Starlight Express will later tell Rusty he needs to be able to find inspiration within himself, here, the Starlight Express alludes to the fact that Rusty might need a power of inspiration and guidance outside of himself to ultimately help him in finding self-inspiration, and
suggests itself as that new power. Much like an omnipotent God, or the canopy of stars in the night sky, the Starlight Express is always watching over the trains below and comforting and guiding them when they are at their “darkest hour.” By using the image of the stars, and of starlight, *Starlight Express* replaces the traditional God with the image of a fantastical “midnight train” that is the inspiration to guide us.

In Act II, the song “I Am the Starlight” highlights the themes of looking to one’s self for inspiration, and believing in one’s self, again through the guidance of the cosmic and imaginative Starlight Express. The song opens with a reprise of the Starlight Express musical motif first heard at the very end of Act I (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*). Accompanying the musical motif, Rusty whispers “starlight express,” in a way so quiet and reverent that it is almost prayer-like. It is significant that the character named Starlight serves as a guide for Rusty as he is named after a cosmic body and cosmic symbolism again highlights the human tendency to turn to something bigger than itself for guidance, in this case the Starlight Express in the form of the engine Starlight. Rusty’s turning to an outside power for guidance and encouragement reveals itself when he asks Starlight, “are you real, yes or no? Starlight Express please answer me ‘yes’ (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*). Rusty really wants the Starlight Express to be real, since it is a powerful source of guidance and comfort to him.

The Starlight Express not only guides and comforts Rusty, but it encourages and inspires him by telling him “only you have the power within you, Just believe in yourself,” and therein lies the other major theme of the musical: that of looking to one’s self for inspiration (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast;* Richard Stilgoe 65). The Starlight Express’ assurance is underscored by very powerful, encouraging, major key music that crescendos into forte right
before Starlight begins singing, and continues in forte, highlighting the theme of self-inspiration and motivation Starlight points out throughout the song (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*). Later in the song, Starlight reminds Rusty that he himself is “no more no less, I am you and only you [Rusty]” at which point the music crescendos triumphantly and Rusty boldly sings, “I am the starlight, I can achieve anything” (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*). In this very powerful moment, the image of Rusty becoming the starlight is a metaphor for him being able to win the race and do “anything” he wants to, which Starlight has been reminding him of throughout the entire song. In the same instant, the song highlights Rusty’s impulse to turn to something bigger than himself for guidance, and also emphasizes the importance of believing in one’s self and looking to one’s self for inspiration and motivation. Using a universal theme, Stilgoe has used the imagery of starlight to symbolize Rusty’s need for guidance, comfort and inspiration from a power outside himself.

The comforting role of the Starlight Express to Rusty is embodied and reinforced every time it is reprised throughout the show. The Starlight Express musical motif makes reappearances at least five times: in the Overture, in “I am the Starlight” as previously discussed, after Rusty wins the race in “Race: The Final,” in “Only He” as back-up to Pearl’s lament, and after Rusty is “welcomed” as “king of the track” (*Starlight Express: The Original Cast*). These reappearances are significant because Rusty, and the audience, are periodically reminded of the awe-inspiring, guiding and comforting influence that the Starlight Express can provide.

**MAN OF LA MANCHA**

First conceived for television and then modified for the Broadway stage (Wasserman 9), *Man of La Mancha* opened off-Broadway in November 1965 at the ANTA Washington Square
Theatre and later moved to Broadway’s Martin Beck theatre in 1968 (Hischak 468). The show initially received a lukewarm reception, however, interest grew, audiences flocked to see the show, and *Man of La Mancha* ended up becoming very popular with a cast album that became a national best-seller, and a national tour that lasted over three years (Wasserman 13; Green, *Broadway Musicals, Show by Show* 215). “The Impossible Dream” became the hit song of the 1965 season and one of the most popular musical theatre songs of that decade. *Man of La Mancha* went on to run 2,328 performances before closing in 1971, putting it on the list of longest running musicals, and has been revived several times throughout the years in 1977, 1992, and 2002, including a movie version in 1972 (Flinn 468).

The critical reception contained both positive comments and negative comments, but the positives tended to outweigh the negatives. Howard Taubman of the *New York Times* stated that “*Man of La Mancha* rates far more plusses than minuses” and he used the words “charm, gallantry and delicacy of spirit” to describe the show; Brooks Atkinson thought it was “one of the most imaginative theatre events of the decade” (Taubman 52; Atkinson in Green, *The World of Musical Comedy* 401). These reviews reveal the positive nature with which New York critics received the newest adaptation of Miguel de Cervantes’ novel, however, Stanley Green does point out that the reviews were not all favorable, and some criticized this rendition of Cervantes’ novel (Green, *The World of Musical Comedy*).

Referred to as a musical play and total theatre by John Bettenbender, *Man of La Mancha* is a highly romanticized re-telling of the Cervantes epic novel (Wasserman 16, 23; Flinn 437; Hischak 467). The show opens with the imprisonment of Cervantes and his manservant in an Inquisition prison (Wasserman 32). The other prisoners there put him through a mock trial, to
which he offers as evidence, one of his books: the story of Alonsa Quijana, who imagines himself to be the legendary knight Don Quixote, and rides around achieving “impossible” tasks, slaying windmills, and honoring his Dulcinea (Wasserman 35, 40). Cervantes himself plays the role of Don Quixote and he assigns various other roles from his “charade” to the other prisoners in his dungeon (Wasserman 40). At the end of his tale, when Alonso/Don Quixote lies dying from begin jolted back into sanity and Aldonza/Dulcinea comes to remind him of his quest, the Inquisition returns to collect Cervantes and his manservant, and “The Quest” rises to a powerful finale as they are led from the dungeon (Wasserman 125).

An “affirming show” Man of La Mancha is a tale that emphasizes vision and faith, and highlights the theme of the unconquerable spirit: if the spirit is not stifled the possibilities are endless (Green, The World of Musical Comedy 400). Dale Wasserman, the librettist of Man of La Mancha, has pointed to the show’s “espousal of illusion as man’s strongest spiritual need” (11). The musical embodies Don Quixote’s innocence and faith (Green, The World of Musical Comedy 400). John Bettenbender, in his introduction to the libretto, discusses “the need of man’s spirit for an ideal” and Don Quixote’s ability to transform the “real into the ideal” (qtd. in Wasserman 18). The cosmic symbolism is integral to idealizing and highlighting this indomitable courage and the spiritual element of Man of La Mancha, and not only in regards to the musical’s hero: Cervantes/Don Quixote. As John Bettenbender suggests in his Introduction to the libretto that the musical “asserts the value of truth over facts” and “awakens something in us that we had all feared lost” in this time of “skeptical doubt” (qtd. in Wasserman 24). When he published his book The World of Musical Comedy in 1968, the same year Man of La Mancha moved to Broadway, Stanley Green pointed out that “idealism and morality are among the very
qualities our age is most in need of,” pointing to what Bettenbender also hints at: that *Man of La Mancha* fulfills the secular humanist urge to find meaning in art in the absence of religion (Green, *The World of Musical Comedy* 401).

In the song “The Impossible Dream,” Don Quixote refers to the stars with regards to his heroic quest and his impossible ideals and goals, and the stars serve as bright symbols of inspiration and motivation. At the beginning of the song, the hero, Don Quixote, sings about how his goals are “impossible,” “unbeatable,” “unbearable,” “unrightable,” and all around impractical; he finishes his two stanzas with the phrase, “to reach the unreachable star” (Wasserman 86). This far-away cosmic body has become, for Don Quixote, symbolic of how impossible his dreams and goals are, but it also serves as a powerful inspiration for him. The stars, magnificent and unattainable cosmic bodies, serve both as inspiration and motivation for Don Quixote; he continues to be inspired to remain on his quest and improve the world even though it may be as futile a task as reaching for the stars. Don Quixote’s claim that he remains upon his quest so that his “heart will lie peaceful and calm” when he is laid to his rest and so that the world will be better for his striving “to reach the unreachable star” hints at his aim to make a change in the world that will last after his death. In effect, he is striving for an immortality through the change that will live on after he has expired, and the symbolism of reaching for an unreachable star hints at the impossibility and the inspiring quality of Don Quixote’s quest.

“The Impossible Dream” serves as Don Quixote’s manifesto, but its reprisal twice in Act II, make it more than just Don Quixote’s: it also serves as inspirational for both Aldonza/Dulcinea and the prisoners. At the end, as Cervantes/Don Quixote is led out of the dungeon by the guards, the prisoner who has been playing Aldonza/Dulcinea begins singing Don
Quixote’s manifesto and the prisoners join in as the music swells louder than, and “overwhelms,”
the Inquisition motif (Wasserman 125). This “swelling” number with all the prisoners singing,
ends the show, and serves as an uplifting, motivating conclusion that reminds not only
Aldonza/Dulcinea and the other prisoners that they too must reach for the stars, but that the
audience should try to achieve the impossible in order for the “world to be better,” and that this
impossible dream can overcome the injustices of the world (like those of the Inquisition) and live
on long after the humans who made the change possible (Wasserman 125-26, 86).

**PAINT YOUR WAGON**

Following in the footsteps of *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Paint Your Wagon*, created by
composer Frederick Loewe and librettist/lyricist Alan Jay Lerner (Patinkin 297), premiered in
November 1951 at the Shubert Theatre in New York (Suskin 529; Green, *Broadway Musicals,
Show by Show* 152) containing songs that, in Stanley Green’s words, evoke a “genuine flavor of
Americana” and that capture the “robustness and vitality…that is so much a part of […]
American heritage” (*The World of Musical Comedy* 301). While the musical was considered, in
the words of Steven Suskin, a “flawed, near-miss” and an artistic failure, it did go on to play 289
performances on Broadway, running eight months and closing in July 1952 (Suskin 471;
Patinkin 297; Ewen 9). The musical was made into an (albeit drastically revised) movie in 1969,
staring Lee Marvin, Clint Eastwood, and Jean Seberg (*Paint Your Wagon. Film*).

*Paint Your Wagon* tells the story of a wand’rin’ “grizzled, old” prospector, Ben Rumson,
living with his daughter in a California Gold Rush boom town during the 1850s. The musical
traces the history of the mining camp called Rumson Creek, from its beginning strike, through its
boom days and ultimately to its decline as the vein runs out and miners leave for the next big
find (Ewen 206). The musical opens with a montage of miners heading to the most recent strike, Ben Rumson’s strike at the place he then named Rumson Creek. As the musical continues, it reveals and explores the hardships of living in a mining camp: including the lack of women in the mining camp, the loneliness the miners endure, the harsh solitude of the weather in the California mountains, change and the passage of time, and young love. The musical closes with a reprise of “Wand’rin’ Star” and the reunion of Julio and Jennifer (Lerner and Loewe 134-40).

The cosmic symbolism in *Paint Your Wagon* deals most directly with the themes of change, time passing, and the character of the miners generally, and Ben Rumson, specifically.

*Paint Your Wagon* (1951) features the song “Wand’rin’ Star,” which David Ewen has referred to as almost having the quality of an “authentic American folk ballad” (206). The song and the musical depend upon cosmic symbolism to inform first on the personality of the main character and then expands that personality type to refer more broadly to all gold miners in general (Green, *Broadway Musicals, Show by Show* 152; Green, *The World of Musical Comedy* 301). The song “Wand’rin’ Star” appears for the first time in the middle of Act II; Jen has returned home from school, and she and her father have been reunited. After explaining to Jen that the gold has run out and everyone is leaving for other strikes, Ben explains to Jen “I’m moving’, too. I’ll go on to another town and try again. Some folks ain’t never meant to have a home. I guess I’m one of ’em,” whereupon he begins to sing, “I was born under a wand’rin’ star,” “Searchin’ but for what I never will know” (Lerner and Loewe 116). Rumson’s figure of speech here suggests the influence of astrology’s assumption that the star one is born under affects one’s character throughout life. Rumson seems to have an idea that the stars can have an
influence on him and that they are the reason he feels so restless, and wanders from mining camp to mining camp.

Perhaps, as nature writers have suggested, Rumson’s allusion to a “wand’rin’ star” points to an attempt to find a home, which Rumson is never able to find as he is “Achin’ for to stop and always achin’ for to go” (Lerner and Loewe 116; Finch and Elder 20). The usage of the word “aching” here turns an emotional issue into a physical pain suggesting that for Rumson, his inability to stay put might be deeper than just psychological ennui, but might be felt in the body. When he also claims that, “To settle down can drive ya mad/But movin’ on is worse,” he reveals his angst about staying put, but also his concern over the need to stay put (Lerner and Loewe, 116). Here we get the image of a character who is conflicted against his nature, but ultimately unable to alter his character. Rumson is caught in a limbo between restlessness and the need to belong somewhere, and his restlessness is highlighted by the cosmic symbolism in the song. However, his turning to the stars as an explanation for his nature reveals his desire to seek responsibility for his restlessness outside himself. Instead of trying to understand why he feels restless, he just concludes that it is the stars’ fault, and not his. Here he assumes two things: one, that the stars can have an effect on him, decreeing his path through life, and two, that it is not his fault that he is the way that he is. In this instance, the stars serve both as guiding bodies and as a comfort, albeit a deluded comfort, for Rumson. In turning to cosmic symbolism as an explanation for his nature, Rumson holds the stars responsible for his actions and any results of his actions. Underscoring the cosmic symbolism of the chorus throughout the song, there is a beat that sounds like the clop of a horse plodding on, always at the same tempo (Paint Your Wagon: Original Broadway Cast). This is significant since at the same time that the audience is
learning about Rumson’s restlessness through his words, they are getting a sense of consistency from the music which suggests that his restlessness won’t be resolved, and that he will always be following that “wan’drin’ star” at the steady tempo of the horse plodding along determinedly.

The musical ends with the Ben’s anthem “Wand’rin’ Star,” but in this reprise the cosmic symbolism is broadened to include the other miners (including Steve, Jake, Cherry and Salem) in the musical. In the reprise, the miners sing “Wand’rin’ Star,” suggesting that the miners who are looking for the next “rainbow up the trail” share the restless spirit exhibited earlier in the musical by Ben Rumson (Lerner and Loewe 132). Ben Rumson, however, is finally able to stay somewhere, telling Jennifer, “I can’t leave. I wouldn’t be happy anywhere else” (Lerner and Loewe 133). Ben Rumson does point out that it isn’t that he doesn’t want to leave, but that it is out of his control: he says he “can’t” leave, not that he doesn’t want to. The final image called for in the libretto, a “panorama of the entire West” with “wagons and people” “on the move,” embodies and repeats the restlessness that was highlighted by the cosmic symbolism earlier in “Wand’rin’ Star” (Lerner and Loewe 132). The final image allows the theme of restlessness to continue in the other miners, who haven’t put down stakes, and suggests a common tendency of restlessness all over the gold country, as the “panorama” of the west appears with the wandering miners.

Not only does Ben Rumson’s character use the metaphors highlighted by the cosmic symbolism, but Jennifer also invokes the stars when she sings “starlight go away, fade away […] Sunrise come again” (Lerner and Loewe 48). Here, she is also restless in wanting to see her beloved Julio again and, like her restless father, repeats her plea to the cosmic bodies more than once throughout the song. While her begging for the stars to complete their journey across the
sky hints at the passage of time, these lyrics have more to do with Jennifer’s impatience than with any broad theme about mortality and the vastness of time.

Early in the musical, Julio invokes cosmic symbolism when he sings the song, “I Talk to the Trees,” wherein he reveals his impulse to turn to the stars for comfort when he feels lonely. By singing to the stars, Julio follows the impulse of astrology (that other musicals, like Billy Elliot, also follow) to believe that the stars care about human suffering and loneliness. He tells Jennifer that “he talk[s] to the stars/But they never hear,” revealing the stars’ indifference toward his loneliness (Lerner and Loewe 38). Granted, in this instance, he is discovering that human contact is more fulfilling than communing with the faraway stars, but in admitting that he talks to the stars, he reveals his tendency to turn to them for comfort when he is lonely.

While Paint Your Wagon has a very bleak outlook on the nonexistent aid and comfort the stars can provide, and men’s faith that the stars cause men to wander aimlessly from gold strike to gold strike, other musicals, such as Hair, take a more positive view of the support humans can receive from the stars.

HAIR

Following in the footsteps of Paint Your Wagon, Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical continues the practice of using cosmic symbolism to advance its themes and messages. Opening on Broadway at the Biltmore Theatre in April 1968, with book and lyrics written by Gerome Ragni and James Rado, and a stellar score composed by Galt MacDermot, Hair became a hit (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 43, 45; Bordman 654). Critics loved the score, and Clive Barnes of the New York Times was impressed that the show was relevant to the events of the day: the first Broadway musical in a long time “to have the authentic voice of today rather than the
The show received its fair share of criticism, especially with regards to what people saw as the “subversive propaganda” against the war (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 55). And, in a surprising twist, the intellectual portion of the Left thought that the show was too simple and didn’t accurately express the Left’s sentiments (Rado in Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 56). *Hair* ended up being a huge commercial success with the Broadway premiere followed by tours, an original Broadway cast recording that soared to number one on the charts, and multiple songs that became Top 40s hits, including “Aquarius/Let the Sunshine In,” and “Good Morning Starshine” (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 53; Patinkin 399).

*Hair* follows Claude Bukowski, a middle-class young man, and his hippie friends in Greenwich Village in a disjointed storyline that is more vignettes than a traceable plot (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 47). They experiment with drugs, question the Vietnam War, and explore Eastern versus Western religions (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 47). In the end, Claude decides not to burn his draft card and goes to the war, where he is killed (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 47). The final scene of the musical finds his friends mourning his death in “The Flesh Failures,” and then singing the uplifting song “Let the Sunshine In” (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 47, 72).

*Hair* is a concept musical, as it de-emphasizes plot in favor of emphasizing a central theme, or concept, while also integrating song and dance into that theme (Patinkin 8; Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 46). Rado and Ragni were interested in trying to capture the essence of the 1960s counterculture movement and, as Rado has pointed out, in “depicting a specific group of people at a particular point in time,” (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 47; Patinkin 398-99;
Rado in Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 46-47). There are many thematic elements that pop up in *Hair*, including: spirituality, astrology, mysticism, drug experimentation, sexual experimentation, Eastern religions, the civil rights movement and race relations, class issues, women’s equality, the generation gap, the Vietnam war, community, self-identity, self-expression, and mortality (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 44, 47, 72, 54; Albea Williams in Patinkin 399; Marjorie LiPari in Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 59). Cosmic symbolism ties in most closely to the appearance of astrology as a moral guide and the theme of community. In and among the themes of American counter-culture in the 1960s, *Hair* employs cosmic symbolism to comment on humans’ traditional turning to the cosmos for comfort, support, and guidance.

The musical opens with the “soul-infused” song “Aquarius,” in which a hippie soloist appeals to the stars, and planets and sings about their presumed impact on the course of humans’ lives (MacDermot, Ragni, and Rado 2; Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 52). The singer claims that, “When the moon is in the seventh house/and Jupiter aligns with Mars/Then peace will guide the planets and love will steer the stars” and it will be the “Dawning of the Age of Aquarius” (MacDermot, Ragni, and Rado 2). In other words, this singer, and the cast who soon join in, subscribe to the teachings of astrology, believing that the celestial bodies affect the trajectory of life on Earth (Campion; Wilson. "All My Sons." 225–226). As soon as the Age of Aquarius begins “Peace will guide the planet,” not because the human players decide it, but because of where the moon, the planets and the constellations are situated in relation to one another, an alignment as much based upon human decision or intelligent design as any other natural phenomenon are. In effect, the singer is suggesting that humans are pulled along in the tide of the cosmos and that they go whither the stars trigger them to go, including towards peace or war.
However, in using the specific astrological age the soloist does, she highlights the direction that
the hippies want the world to be pulled by invoking the famed “Age of Aquarius,” which Peter
Marshall claims was to be the “age of perfected manhood,” characterized by “unprecedented
 technological advance […] freedom, understanding and brotherhood” (Marshall 352; Culver 73).
However, as Culver points out, the date the Age of Aquarius is predicted to begin varies from
1781 AD to 2010 AD and even as late as 2705 AD, and so could very well have been in the
1960s, as the Hippie soloist of Hair suggests (Culver 80, 76; Marshall 125). Later in the musical,
the song “Good Morning Starshine” reinforces the idea that the stars guide humans along a
predestined path when Sheila and Dionne sing, “Good morning starshine/You lead us along,”
again suggesting that we small humans are led by the celestial bodies (MacDermot, Ragni and
Rado 171).
Throughout the musical, since the fate of the world is out of their hands, the cast
experiments with multiple drugs, and frolics throughout the East Village; perhaps this freedom to
frolic allows the cast to experiment with the other themes of the show, however, I would argue
that this surrendering of responsibility is more than simply a plot device; it reveals a human need
for comfort, guidance, and assurance in a social, political and natural world that average,
individual humans have little, if any, control over (Lewis 2; Kimmel 64). This notion, that we
who live on this earth are not completely responsible for our fates or the world’s fate since the
stars are clearly in control, can be particularly comforting, especially during such a turbulent
period as that of the Vietnam War. Much like musical theatre, often adhering to escapism, this
reliance on, and belief in, astrology can be seen as an escape attempt from humans’
responsibilities for the earth, and this notion that the stars are responsible is comforting.
Cosmic symbolism also emphasizes the themes of community that *Hair* espouses and in so doing serves as a powerful, comforting force for the characters within the musical. In “Aquarius,” the tribe joins the singer in hailing the Age of Aquarius by singing the same lyrics through harmony, and when they do the entire community is joined in singing. To move from a soloist singing, to the tribe singing, and then to continue the musical with the tribe singing and frolicking together highlights the theme of community. The fact that the tribe shared hand microphones in the original 1968 production, rather than using individual body microphones, further enforces this theme of community by connecting each singer for at least a few seconds as they hand off the microphone to another (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 54). Later, in the “sweet, soft” optimistic “Good Morning Starshine,” *Hair* embodies the “as above, so below” astrological belief in the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm that Peter Marshall discussed in *World Astrology* (Bordman 659; Marshall xxxi). Sheila and Dionne look up at the sky and sing: “Good morning starshine/The Earth says hello/You twinkle above us/We twinkle below” (MacDermot, Ragni and Rado 171). This lyric, from one of the final songs in the musical, also aligns nicely with Carl Sagan’s claim that we humans are “starstuff,” and with Marshall’s claim that we are “descended from the stars” (Sagan 286; Marshall 399). In highlighting our kinship with the celestial spheres, the lyrics establish a feeling of community not just among the hippies on the stage, but between the hippies and the stars above them to which they have been singing throughout the musical.

It is also significant to note that in the original 1968 production, the audience and the band were included in this feeling of community. At the very beginning of the show, some of the cast members were lying in the aisles as the audience entered the theatre, blurring the line
between performer/Tribe member and audience member (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 48). The cast sang the final, “rousing anthemic” song “Let the Sunshine In” directly to the audience (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 72) and by ignoring the traditional fourth wall, further blurred the line between audience member and cast member, and imparted a message that included all the bodies in the space, cast members and audience members (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 47). Elizabeth Wollman, Galt MacDermot and Stephen Trask point out that the link between cast members and band members was also sufficiently blurred as the band was “never relegated to the orchestra pit” and instead shared the stage with the actors (Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 52). The use of cosmic symbolism, in “Good Morning Starshine” takes the theme of community one very large step further than the sharing of space and microphones, by enlarging the community to include the entire cosmos: actors, band, audience and stars. Also, the fact that “Aquarius” became what Sheldon Patinkin termed the “anthem of a generation,” further highlights the community that was formed between audience members of that specific generation, and the themes of the show (Patinkin 399). The show so powerfully emphasizes the themes of community, that the generation which the show embodied onstage became inseparably identified with the song, itself full of cosmic symbolism.

In “What a Piece of Work is Man,” near the end of the musical, the musical recycles Shakespeare’s famous verses from Hamlet, singing it instead of speaking it; in so doing, the musical uses the symbolism of the sky, the “firmament,” to highlight the secular humanist view, that J. Wesley Robb pointed out, to look to “man and nature as constitute[ing] the whole of reality” and his ability to figure things out without the intervention of a religious God (Hair; Robb 3, 5). The song sings of “what a piece of work is man, how noble in reason” hinting at the
secular humanist impulse to rely on reason as the basis of knowledge, and man’s ability to perceive that knowledge without the intercession of a deity (Hair). The song even goes so far as to compare humans to angels and gods, essentially suggesting the belief that the human mind and spirit do indeed have the transcending power that religion, and God, used to solely possess (Hair). The cast then go on to demand “how dare they try to end its beauty” bringing to mind the themes of peace and boycotting the Vietnam War (Hair).

Singing Shakespeare’s words, the cast refer to the sky as “this brave overhanging firmament/This majestical roof/Fretted with golden fire,” (Hair) The use of the term “firmament” is significant because it has historically been associated with the heavens “where God dwells” (“Firmament”) but as the cast of Hair are also discussing the majesty of man, the firmament in this invocation is more empty of God and full of fire than it is religious. Again, the cast of Hair use cosmic symbolism to situate man within the grand scheme of the cosmos, or, the “firmament.” Hair’s use of Shakespeare’s words glorifying man questions the hopeful aspirations of “Aquarius,” as well as the inaction of the hippies throughout the musical. As Hamlet is unable, throughout much of Shakespeare’s play, to take action against his uncle, so the hippies avoid taking action throughout the musical. However, while the hippies don’t actually take action by the end of the musical, by the end of the musical, there has been a significant shift in the belief they have towards the dawning of the Age of Aquarius, claiming that their “eyes are open” (Hair).

The final song of the musical, what Elizabeth Wollman, Galt MacDermot and Steogeb Trask have referred to as a “rousing anthemic” number, “Let the Sunshine In” again uses cosmic symbolism to drive home the theme that the stars can provide comfort.
mourning for Claude’s death and other Vietnam War dead, “Let the Sunshine In” serves as an uplifting reminder of how humans should treat one another and live their lives. The performers repeat the line, “Let the sunshine in, let the sunshine in/The sunshine in” twelve consecutive times at the end of the song. While serving as an uplifting send-off to an otherwise melancholy ending, this imagery of letting the sunshine in also suggests that the community (all of us cosmic inhabitants) needs to let the warmth and beauty of the sunshine into their hearts. Here, the invocation of the warmth of the sun becomes symbolic of loving one another, living peacefully with each other and allowing the beauty of the sunshine to fill our hearts so that the Age of Aquarius can finally begin. The musical closes with this powerful message and this compelling reminder, through cosmic symbolism, to let ourselves be guided and comforted by the stars and their community with us, but to avoid complete inaction, as the stars did not successfully intervene on humanity’s behalf in the musical, as the cast believed they would. As such, in Hair, the Tribe has turned from a blind faith in astrology and the Age of Aquarius, to a form of astrology that focuses more on how humans can look to the celestial bodies for inspirations by which to live their lives, without avoiding action in the hope that those celestial bodies will inevitably show us the path. The use of cosmic symbolism in select songs in the musical reveals this journey that the characters take throughout the musical and reveals some of the fallacies and failings of astrology especially with regards to its prophesying of the Age of Aquarius.

*BILLY ELLIOT: THE MUSICAL*

* Billy Elliot: The Musical was adapted from Stephen Daldry’s movie *Billy Elliot* (2000) and made into a musical for the London stage, with original songs composed by Elton John, and the book and lyrics written by Lee Hall. It opened first in London’s West End before
transferring across the pond to New York’s Imperial Theatre, in 2008 (Green, *Broadway Musicals: Show by Show* 361; Lampert-Gréaux 39; Gardner). *Billy Elliot: The Musical* employs the use of cosmic symbolism to further enhance its themes of “solidarity” and has ridden to fame, wowing audiences the world over, dazzling many critics, and winning awards: 10 Tony Awards, in fact. While Elizabeth McPherson bemoaned Elton John’s music for not being “memorable,” David Spencer criticized it for sending a “rudimentary message,” and David Sheward referred to the music as being “so-so,” I see the cosmic symbolism in *Billy Elliot* as something vastly interesting and worthy of further study, incorporating multiple layers and levels of symbolism (*Ballet Dance Magazine*; *The Internet Magazine*; *Back Stage*).

*Billy Elliot* tells the “gritty,” emotional story of a young boy growing up in 1984, in an industrial town in Northern England during the leadership of conservative Margaret Thatcher and the resulting social turmoil that led to the working class miners walking out on strike from the coal mines. Amidst all of this, young Billy Elliot discovers that he has a passion for ballet despite the social expectations that he participate in boxing, and grow up to be a strong, masculine miner (Cox 46; Rodosthenous 289). Throughout the course of the musical, while Billy’s father and brother fight the political tides threatening to overwhelm them, Billy struggles to fight the social stigmas threatening to overwhelm him (Rodosthenous 279, 287). While there are many themes touched on in *Billy Elliot*, perhaps one of the most iconic is the theme of solidarity, of community, and of the loss of community in the face of broad economic changes (Rodosthenous 277, 279). While it is exactly this theme of conformity that Billy rails against, this ideal of solidarity has much to do with the overall plot of the musical, and also has the most to do with the cosmic symbolism in *Billy Elliot* (Rodosthenous 287). It is this theme of solidarity that will
frame the following discussion of the cosmic symbolism in *Billy Elliot*, which highlights the struggles and desires of the miners and community members in the musical, who are trying to survive while finding themselves, according to Lee Hall, “caught in the hurricane of economic change,” and bereft of “hope and self-respect” as a result (Hall 28; Rodosthenous 279).

The cosmic symbolism found within the opening song, “The Stars Look Down,” ultimately gives some hope back to this community of blue collar men, serving as a guide and confidant to the struggling miners, and integrating itself fully into the action of the musical (Zoglin). Referred to as a “hymn,” and as a “stirring anthem,” “The Stars Look Down,” opens the musical, and sets up the premise of solidarity that permeates the show (Hall 26; Willis 78; Rodosthenous 279; *Billy Elliot: The Musical*). The beginning of the song discusses how the men will “stand shoulder to shoulder” and they will “stand together […] as one” (John and Hall 4). Not only are the men standing together as one, but they point out that, “The stars look down” on all their hardships: hunger, bruised and bleeding hands, lungs full of coal dust, broken hearts, pain, etc. In this instance, the stars are an ever watchful presence, and the fact that this is the first song in the musical, suggests that the stars will be looking down upon the action that will ensue over the course of the story and will be standing alongside the men as they stand up for their rights as workers.

Later in the song, the men remark on how the stars have the ability to “know our history […] look down upon our past […] and see our future” suggesting that the stars are omniscient when it comes to the lives and existence of human kind (John and Hall 5). This song reflects the human desire to have nature, and more specifically the celestial bodies, care about their struggles and achievements; it is not so much about guidance, but about comradeship and understanding.
The fact that the song begins before the men walk out on strike, together and “shoulder to
shoulder,” and continues after they have walked out, reveals that this yearning for
comprehension from the stars serves as a through-line for the entire miner vs. politician conflict
through which Billy’s community is suffering, supporting them from the beginning and through
to the end (Billy Elliot: The Musical).

Not only do the stars watch what is happening below them, but they serve as guides to the
inhabitants below. The men claim that “the stars look down and give us vision, to see the light,”
suggesting that while the stars seem to be an ever constant presence with these toiling miners,
they are also providing some sort of illumination on the correct course of action for the abused
workers (John and Hall 8). This illuminating guidance supplied to the miners by the stars feeds
into the feeling of the song as a “hymn,” and George Rodosthenous points out that there is the
sense that the men are “fighting the good fight against the forces of darkness” (279). Then, right
before marching out, the men remark upon how the “stars are our redemption and so we know,”
hinting that the stars will guide and deliver them from their hardships (John and Hall 7;
“Redemption”). After Billy’s solo in the middle of the song, which further hints at the theme of
solidarity and “never walk[ing] alone” under the stars, the men again highlight not only their
need for hope, but what they perceive as the stars’ role in leading them to that renewed hope:
“the stars will lead to where light shines again” (Wolf; John and Hall 12).

While the lyrics serve to highlight the theme of solidarity, the music underlining the
lyrics also serves to draw attention to the stars’ role in supplying solidarity. Whenever the men
sing of their hardships: “through the hunger, through the night and through the fear, through the
fight and years of hardship…” or “though our hands are bruised and bleeding, and our lungs are
full with dust, and our hearts are near to breaking,” the music has a somber, subdued feel, and is kept at a “moderately slow” pace, effectively evoking the feel of a sedate hymn (John and Hall 3-4, 6-7). However, when the miners begin to sing of the comfort that the stars afford to them, the music turns to using eighth notes in place of quarter notes, moving the melody along more quickly and evoking a more determined, driven feel of an anthem, under the lyrics: “and the stars look down on the mean and hungry, and the stars look down and show the way, and the stars look down, and we’ll stand together…” (John and Hall 5, 8-9; Billy Elliot: The Musical). As the miners march “all out together,” the previous balance between strings and brass becomes a very exuberant phrase dominated powerfully by the horn section (Billy Elliot: The Musical). Finally, as the song climbs to its finish, separate parts build on top of each other: “when we stand as one,” and “all out together;” these are repeated, in crescendo, as the drums, horns and orchestra also rise in intensity. At the end, the cosmic symbolism of the lyrics, underscored by the diverse nature of the composition, soars to a fantastic, rallying finish, highlighting the solidarity that the men are striving for, and which they think the stars are emblematic of (John and Hall 12).

The fact that the song, when performed, runs over seven minutes long hints to the importance of the song to the thematic elements of the musical. The cosmic symbolism in “The Stars Look Down” not only provides emphasis for the struggles, desires, and pains of the struggling community, but provides an explanation for what Richard Zoglin terms the “powerful emotional connection” felt by audiences who see Billy Elliot and the “material’s power to stir an audience to the core” that Matt Wolf pointed out (Zoglin; Wolf).
**LES MISERABLES**

As a musical dramatization of Victor Hugo’s novel, *Les Misérables* has soared to worldwide appreciation, and contains a fantastic example of the thematic enhancement cosmic symbolism can give to a musical. First released as a concept album in France in the 1970s by lyricist Alain Boublil and composer Claude-Michel Schonberg, *Les Misérables* opened in Paris for its first live audience in 1980 and ran for 108 performances (Swain 391; Behr 51). The production snagged the interest of Cameron Mackintosh, the legendary producer, who decided to bring *Les Misérables* to London (Steyn 265). After considerable revisions, *Les Misérables* opened in London at the Barbican in 1985, directed by RSC veteran Trevor Nunn, and with English lyrics by Herbert Kretzmer (Behr 71, 106; Patinkin 474, 478-79). *Les Misérables* then moved to Broadway, where it opened on March 12, 1987, won the Tony Award for Best Musical, Best Book of a Musical, and Best Original Score, among others, and ran until 2003, 6,680 performances in total before it closed (Swain 391; Patinkin 479, 519). *Les Misérables* has played to audiences around the world, achieving vast popular success, and recently made into a feature film from Universal Pictures in 2012 (Eyre and Wright 345).

The English incarnation of *Les Misérables*, which is the version this paper will focus on, has been referred to as a “romantic pop opera,” and a “dramatic pop opera,” (Patinkin 28, 478). When critics and scholars discuss *Les Misérables*, they most often condemn the show’s “sentimentality” and its lack of dance as reasons that it cannot be considered a “great musical” of the traditional Broadway genre (Patinkin 28; Swain 390-91; Jerome Minskoff in Steyn 185; Steyn 292). For the purpose of this study, the term “concept musical” is most applicable, due to the musical’s focus on portraying a moral debate regarding the ideas of good and evil, the theme on which the cosmic symbolism in *Les Misérables* has the most influence.
Les Misérables follows primarily the story of Jean Valjean for twenty years of his life, starting with his release from a work prison, his subsequent breaking of parole, his gift of redemption from a priest, and the resulting moral change that happens in him. The narrative then jumps to Valjean’s new identity as Monsieur Madeleine, a business owner and the mayor of Montreuil-sur-Mer, where he takes pity on a dying woman, promises to care for her daughter and inadvertently alerts Inspector Javert to his illegal new identity when he refuses to let another man be condemned in his place for his past crime of breaking parole. Finally, the narrative jumps forward ten years to Valjean’s life in Paris with the daughter he has adopted, leading up to and during the Paris uprising of 1832 (Behr 175; Swain 390). Valjean’s beloved daughter, Cosette, meets and falls in love with Marius, the soldiers fight to suppress the student uprising, and Jean Valjean saves both Marius and Javert; as a result; Javert commits suicide out of disgrace and Valjean dies an old man after Cosette and Marius are happily married and the sprawling musical comes to an end (Patinkin 478).

The themes of the musical are as vast and monumental as many of the characters in the narrative. As Boublil has pointed out, the musical has a lot to do with “the eternal truths about human nature and our beliefs in God” which is a very nice summation of the themes of the musical (Eyre 344). The musical focuses greatly on good versus evil, and what is considered moral behavior and amoral behavior, as well as our place in the vast universe and sweeping flow of time (Swain 387-88). Two of the main characters, Valjean and Javert, advocate conflicting moral philosophies, so much so that Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright used the word “saintly” to refer to Jean Valjean and “villainous” to refer to Javert (344). While these two terms tend towards the absolute, they do highlight the oppositional moral positions that the two conflicting
characters have. Joseph Swain points out that even though Valjean is perceived as the good guy, he is a “renegade parolee,” and Javert, despite the musical coloring him as the villain, is simply adhering to the established laws designed to keep civility and order (388). In other words, neither character is a two-dimensional caricature. Thematically, the musical sets up three contradictory views of morality, or religion as the language of the musical terms it, and these three views are embodied and played out in the characters of Valjean, Javert, and the innkeeper Thénardier and his wife (Behr 78). The characters vary in their definitions of what constitutes good and bad moral behavior: Jean Valjean leans towards a New Testament Biblical definition of what it means to be a good person in the eyes of God, and emphasizes forgiveness and redemption, while Javert leans toward a Jewish Biblical definition, believing in punishment for the committed crime, and finally, the Thenardiers kill off God completely in their belief: it’s a “Dog eats dog world” where God “don’t interfere/Cause he’s dead” (Behr 78, 187; Lundskaer-Nielsen 63).

Javert’s definition of morality comes out most clearly in his song “Stars,” which was one of the songs added when the musical was revised for the English stage (Swain 392, 394). “Stars” follows in the footsteps of astrology, using the cosmos as a mirror to reflect Javert’s ideal social order. The cosmic symbolism is used in a powerful way to enhance the themes of the musical and the ideology of Javert that it should be considered the epitome of a musical’s ability to utilize cosmic symbolism to enhance meaning. In this discussion of the cosmic symbolism in Les Misérables, I will be focusing primarily on Javert’s ideology. Following, I will engage with Jean Valjean’s ideology, with regards to its relationship and contradictions with Javert’s beliefs.

The song “Stars” provides a good look at Javert’s “unforgiving” theology, and the metaphor of the stars is particularly useful and needed in Javert’s inner-dialogue (Lundskaer-
Javert starts the song with a mention of Valjean, a “fugitive running” from justice “out in the darkness” (qtd. in Behr 177). Darkness here serves dual purposes, in that it is nighttime, but also that by Javert’s moral definition, Jean Valjean is in the wrong and therefore in the amoral darkness that covers the city. The lyrics also use the term “light” to symbolize order and justice, and the term “darkness” to stand for chaos and a lack of justice. The stars replace the amoral darkness with moral “order and light,” just as Javert attempts to right the unjust world of criminals (by his legal definition) with legal order, and the stars support Javert’s unwavering hunt for Valjean and what he sees as justice.

Javert then goes into the chorus where he speaks directly to the celestial bodies in the night sky above him: “Stars in your multitudes,/Scarce to be counted,/Filling the darkness/With order and light./You are the sentinels,/Silent and sure/Keeping watch in the night” (qtd. in Behr 177). Javert’s use of the stars as his metaphor is very significant for multiple reasons. His mention of the stars as “sentinels,” ”filling the darkness/with order and light” suggests that their “order” is a comfort and a guidance for Javert (Finch and Elder 28). The stars and their “order” support Javert’s belief that there is a natural moral order of justice that must be sought. (qtd. in Behr 177; Lundskaer-Nielsen 63).

Javert tells the stars, “You know your place in the sky,/You hold your course/And your aim./And each in your season/Returns and Returns/And is always the same” (qtd. in Behr 177). The stars “knowing [their] place” highlights and supports Javert, secure in his place as an enforcer of justice. His mention of the stars “hold[ing] their] course/And […] aim” reflects Javert’s thoughts about staying on his “course” and “aim” of chasing the fugitive Valjean. Javert then goes on to mention “And each in your season/Returns and returns/And is always the same”
Holley 63

(qtd. in Behr 177). The fact that Javert mentions that the stars are “always the same” ties directly in with his consistency in pursuing Jewish Biblical justice, as the legal punishment for crimes is supposedly “always the same” for the crime, regardless of the motivations of the perpetrator, (which in Valjean’s case were arguably noble, as he was stealing bread to feed his sister’s starving kid, in a harsh economic climate). Finally, at the very end of the phrase, he ties the stars to Lucifer’s fall in Biblical times claiming, “and if you fall [the stars] /You fall/In flame,” which is a very apt observation of the fiery deaths of cosmic in nature, as well as symbolically tied to the end retribution Javert seeks for Valjean’s crime, and Javert’s overall “Old Testament vengeance” (qtd. in Behr 177; Lundskaer-Nielsen 63; Inglis 169).

Not only does cosmic symbolism play a pivotal role in “Stars,” but it reappears in Act II, both in lyrics and in music, to the benefit of once again providing a deeper understanding of the character of Javert. When Javert stands on the brink of the bridge, contemplating his suicide, he sings about the stars once more before plunging to his death: “And the stars are black and cold,/As I stare into the void” (qtd. in Behr 188). Javert’s words reminds the audience of his unwavering belief in vengeance that has ultimately led him to his downfall. Javert then proceeds to end his life because he of his inability to live in a “world that cannot hold” according to his moral definition of good and bad (qtd. in Behr 188). Musical composition also plays an integral role in highlighting the role cosmic symbolism plays in providing depth to Javert’s character (qtd. in Behr 188). As Javert contemplates suicide he sings the same musical composition that Valjean sings in Act I when he contemplates the Bishop’s redemption; in Javert’s reprise the musical motif, the music is basically identical throughout the song, save for one very important aspect (*Les Misérables*). After Javert has jumped in to the water, the musical leitmotif from
“Stars” that underscored the lyrics “Stars in your multitudes…Silent and sure/Keeping watch in the night/Keeping watch in the night,” re-plays as he plunges to his death, bringing back to mind the song “Stars” that reinforced Javert’s moral ideology so effectively earlier in the show, and reminding the audience yet again of his motivations that have led him to his end (Les Misérables; qtd. in Behr 177). However, unlike Valjean, Javert is unable to change and must throw himself to his death rather than live in “a world that cannot hold” (qtd. in Behr 188).

Without the song “Stars,” as Trevor Nunn has stated, Javert is just “a cypher, a shadowy figure, and without it there is no tragic dimension to his suicide” (atd. in Behr 87). The cosmic symbolism in “Stars,” is thus integral to fully understanding Javert as a character, and the conflict between Javert and Valjean that drives a large portion of the musical.

CONCLUSION

Opening with Starlight Express’ use of cosmic symbolism to highlight the themes of self-inspiration and to provide comfort and guidance in the secular absence of a deity, and concluding with the stars in Les Misérables serving as a comfort and guide to Javert and his unwavering quest, the role of cosmic symbolism has proved instrumental to assuaging the pain, suffering, and fears of several characters in musical theatre. Whether it is the unemployed, struggling miners of Billy Elliot, or Man of La Mancha’s Don Quixote and his impossible quest, or the hippies of Hair attempting to secure a world of peace and community, or Ben Rumson of Paint Your Wagon looking for an explanation for his restless nature, the cosmic symbolism of these musicals reveals the characters’ tendencies to turn to the stars when they run into hardship. Not only does the cosmic symbolism inform upon the characters’ fears, but it ties these fears into the
central themes of the musicals revealing the need for community and inspiration that permeates the human condition and the condition of the characters of these musicals.
CHAPTER IV

MORTALITY AND TIME

Thus far, cosmic symbolism has stood as a metaphor for human fascination with the beauty and power of nature, as well as a guide and comfort for human anxieties and struggles. A third sub-category of cosmic symbolism, the celestial bodies as metaphors for human fears regarding mortality within the vastness of time and the presumed permanence of the cosmos, proves to be the most esoteric and the most poignant. Peter Marshall has pointed out that this theme is a recurrent theme in astrology where astrologists attempt to understand the “human condition” within the “great and permanent cycles of the heavens” and astrology often “teaches us” that life is a preparation for the afterlife (Marshall 400, 401). This theme of time and mortality tends to appear more in non-musical plays\(^8\) than it does in musical theatre. Perhaps exclusion is due to the tendency of musical theatre to avoid more weighty themes in its desire to entertain and serve as a temporary escape from the seriousness of life, however, this theme does appear from time to time on the Broadway musical theatre stage, and provides a fascinating glimpse at the power of cosmic symbolism to provide understanding of one of human kind’s biggest fears in life: the fear of dying and of doing something worthwhile while alive.

*Hair* itself hinted at this theme of time and the permanence of the universe in its method of performance that placed actors sleeping in the aisles as audience members entered the theatre so that, according to director Tom O’Horgan: “you never quite knew when the show started [...]

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\(^8\) As in Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*, Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons*, Melanie Marnich’s *These Shining Lives*, Karen Zacarias’ *Legacy of Light*, Tom Stoppard’s *Arcadia* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Octavio Paz’s *Rappaccini’s Daughter*, Rick Elice’s *Peter and the Starcatcher*, Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, to name a few.
As if it were going on forever” (qtd. in Wollman, MacDermot and Trask 48). Also, the existence of the infinity symbol as a replacement for the dot on the ‘I’ in the title on the poster, and the design of the poster (two hippie heads, one upside down the other normal way up, connected at the chin, and arranged like an infinity sign) point to the themes of time and the infinite quality of the cosmos.

Annie Get Your Gun highlights this cosmic theme of mortality in the song “I’ve Got the Sun in the Morning and the Moon at Night.” At the very end of the song, Annie claims she’s “got no heirlooms for my kin/made no will but when I cash in/I’ll leave the sun in the morning and the moon at night” (Annie Get Your Gun). This quote, near the very end of the song, brings to mind not only Annie’s mortality, but the “vastness of time” and the constancy of the Cosmos laid in opposition to the brief stint that Annie, and other humans, will spend alive on Earth (Pinsky and Lebowitz 55; Kimmel 66). Annie Get Your Gun thus highlights several of the themes that recur throughout nature literature in general, and musical theatre specifically.

Jonathan Larson’s Rent also hints at the powerful use cosmic symbolism can have with regards to the themes of mortality and time, and how best to live life. Roger’s song, “One Song Glory,” uses cosmic symbolism to highlight his shortened mortality when he sings “one song before the sun sets […] on another empty life” (Rent). Here, Roger is dreading his death as a result of AIDS and he uses the image of a sunset to stand for death and for the end of life. He continues in the song singing later “truth that rings true, like a blazing fire, an eternal flame” hinting at the immortality he seeks in writing a great song (Rent). Again, he repeats the image of the sunset as a symbol for his death: “before the virus takes hold […] like a sunset” (Rent). Throughout the song, as Roger sings of his death, he sings “time dies;” he is not talking about all
time dying, it refers to his time dying and the short time he has left to accomplish something.

This instance of cosmic symbolism ties into other instances of cosmic symbolism in the musical (“Over the Moon”) and the theme of mortality and death, as exemplified when Angel (a name which rings with heavenly and religious connotations) sends Mimi back from the grave saying “turn around girlfriend, and listen to that boy’s song” (Rent). When Mimi does wake up, gasping, she says she “jumped over the moon” resurrecting the cosmic symbolism used in Act I in Maureen’s performance. Rent’s use of cosmic symbolism to highlight its characters fears and confrontations with their own mortality resonates with similar themes in other musicals, most notably Les Misérables and Fiddler on the Roof, both of which deal with the passing of time and human mortality.

LES MISERABLES

One of the pivotal themes in Les Misérables is the theme of time and mortality and the march of time forward as humans suffer and die. A plethora of main characters die: Fantine, Eponine, Gavroche, Enjolras, Javert, Valjean, and an equal number of songs deal with death: “Come to Me,” “A Little Fall of Rain” “Bring Him Home,” “Dog Eats Dog,” “Javert’s Suicide,” “Turning, Turning,” “Empty Chairs at Empty Tables,” and “Finale” (Boublil in Behr 172, 184, 186-188, 191). In Act II, after the uprising has been quelled, the Thenardiers sing, “Dog Eats Dog,” while they scavenge amidst the corpses left after the fight on the barricade; they find a watch and “take it off the boy” pointing out that, “his heart’s no longer going/and he’s lived his little time/but his watch is ticking yet” (qtd. in Behr 187). Their reference to the death of the boy and the continued ticking of his watch sharply contrasts the seemingly immortal nature of time and the “little time” that mortal humans live. Two songs later, the women of Paris sing,
“Turning, Turning,” about the “same old story […] turning, turning, turning through the years […] minutes into hours and the hours into years […] round and round and back where you began” (qtd. in Behr 188). Their lyrics are underscored by a repetitive circular musical composition that emphasizes the circular, repetitive nature of the march of mankind forward through time: generation following generation since the dawn of humanity. They point out that “nothing changes:” people die and their loved ones mourn, and the world keeps turning. Then, in “Empty Chairs,” Marius confronts directly his mortality and the death of his comrades who are “dead and gone” by the time he sings the song, and he expresses the guilt he feels for surviving (Boublil in Behr 188).

Songs such as “Empty Chairs at Empty Tables” and “Turning, Turning” exemplify the theme of mortality, death, and the passage of time that weaves its way through Les Misérables, but, it is Javert’s earlier song “Stars,” that provides the clearest example of the theme of the vastness of time marching forward against human mortality, using cosmic symbolism to do so. Javert’s turning to the stars for comfort also includes a reference to mortality when he says: “And each in your season/Returns and returns/And is always the same” (qtd. in Behr 177). In Javert’s reference to the seasons, he reflect the thematic focus nature writers often have on the cycle of the seasons, and yet, he also alludes to the relative permanence of the stars as compared with humans’ mortality within the “vastness of time” (Mabey ix; Pinsky and Lebowitz 55; Itkonen 127). The image of the stars returning and returning, always the same, gives a feel of the relative permanence of the cosmic bodies (lasting billions of years) as opposed to human life-spans (lasting decades). This mortality to which Javert refers in his song lyrics can be incorporated into the design elements, as evidenced by the summer 2013 production of Les Misérables at Flat
Rock Playhouse in North Carolina. During the song “Stars,” Javert stood on stage with an inky black backdrop behind him (Gans; “Les Misérables Production Photos”). As he sang, white lights lit up behind him on the backdrop, not one at a time, but all together, brilliantly and brightly, to the effect that they resembled hundreds of stars glowing in the night sky. With the bright individual lights of the stars set against the black background, the design gave an impression of the backdrop stretching into a space far more vast than the stage on which Javert was singing, and perception of the back wall disappeared entirely. The back of the stage seemed to stretch into eternity, and the focus on time and mortality of Javert’s lyrics was heightened and highlighted. The design element of incorporating the image of stars onstage added to the theme of time and the vastness of eternity in an interesting and illustrative way, and also aids in illuminating the role cosmic symbolism can play on stage through the use of design elements as well as lyrics.

**FIDDLER ON THE ROOF**

Inspired by the short stories of Sholom Aleichem and the paintings of Marc Chagall, Bock and Harnick’s *Fiddler on the Roof* opened at the Imperial Theatre, on September 22, 1964, after tryouts in Detroit and Washington (Bock v; Lambert 139, 140, 141, 170; Suskin 207).

Directed and choreographed by Jerome Robbins, *Fiddler* would go on to take the world by storm, fascinating New York audiences and critics alike, winning the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award and touring the United States and then the world to much success (Suskin 207-210; Ostrow 33; Lambert 138, 173). At the Tony Awards the following year, *Fiddler* won the award for Best Musical, as well as nine other awards. In 1971, *Fiddler* became the longest-running musical on Broadway up to that point, holding the record for eight years until *Grease*
surpassed it in December 1979 (Lambert 138; Bordman 638). Over the course of the next fifty years, several successful revivals would be launched on Broadway, as well as a film version starring Topol (Lambert 138). Clearly a very popular, and universally appreciated musical, *Fiddler* includes several thematic elements that all interrelate with each other throughout the course of the musical, and which are all enhanced to varying extents by the cosmic symbolism found within the musical.

According to the Introduction to Joseph Stein’s libretto, *Fiddler* tells the story of a Jewish family (Tevye, his wife Golde, and their five daughters) living in a shtetl in 1905 Russia and their struggles within the changing tides of modernity “on the eve of the revolutionary period” (v). While Tevye and his family are Jewish, and the musical does focus in on several specifically Jewish aspects, it also includes many themes that apply specifically to the human condition in general, and as Sheldon Harnick himself has said: the story “just happened to be about Jewish people. What *Fiddler* did was show that basically Jews are just like everybody else” (qtd. in Hillman-McCord 73). The librettist for the show, Joseph Stein, asserted similarly that the Jewishness “is only the particular vehicle chosen” to express the “struggle to maintain an ethnic way of life,” which itself is a universal concern (qtd. in Swain 286). While the musical is about Tevye’s Jewish identity, it has farther reaching universal themes that speak to non-Jewish audiences, as well as Western and non-Western audiences (Lambert 176-177). Some of the themes with which *Fiddler* grapples are: ethnicity, tradition, community, change, modernization, nostalgia, the enduring spirit of human kind, and, according to Harnick, “the dissolution of a way of life” (Swain 286, 416; Lambert 151, 157, 158; Steyn 16, 85; Hillman-McCord 66, 73, 75, 84; Harnick in Lambert 145; Harnick in Hillman-McCord 67). Perhaps the biggest theme of the
musical, that of change and adapting versus holding fast to time-honored traditions, brings up the question of what does a person choose to let go, and to what does he tenaciously hold on? Tevye and his family, as well as the rest of the community, find themselves struggling with these questions, and it is this theme of change, moving forward, and letting go that the cosmic symbolism in “Sunrise, Sunset” sheds light on.

Referred to by Ostrow as “a contemplative waltz,” and by Phillip Lambert as “sentimental,” “Sunrise, Sunset” employs the use of cosmic symbolism to highlight the passage of time, human mortality, and the spirit which endures in spite of hardship and change (Ostrow 34; Lambert 153). “Sunrise, Sunset” takes place during the wedding scene, and serves as a metaphor for not only the changes that parents and children go through as the children grow up and the parents grow old, but also the passing of the years and human mortality in light of the celestial bodies that outlast generations of human beings (Bock and Harnick 89; Lambert 149, 153; Ostrow 34; Hillman-McCord 81-83; Bordman 637). The scene begins with Tzeitel and Motel together under the wedding canopy, apart from the group of community members (as written in the stage directions of the libretto). As Tzeitel and Motel perform the wedding ritual, at first Tevye and Golde, and then the gathered community sing “Sunrise, Sunset,” led by the father and mother of the bride (Tevye and Golde). The lyrics create an image of Tzeitel and Motel as children, and yet we see them before us as adults: “Is this the little girl I carried?/Is this the little boy at play?” and “Tzeitel in a bridal gown…stand[ing] in the center” with Motel (Bock and Harnick 89; Hillman-McCord 83). This image of two children growing up, getting married, and preparing to move out of their parents’ houses, drives home the theme of a “dissolution of a way of life,” in this case a huge change from the life that the parents and children have known
since the children were born, to a new role for both parents and the newlyweds (Harnick in Lambert 145). The fact that the men and women of the community join in singing with Tevye and Golde hints at the human condition and the many and varied changes through which all parents and children go, as the children grow up. On top of this theme of change, the lyrics also highlight the aging and passage of time that the parents and children have experienced “overnight” (Hillman-McCord 83; Bock and Harnick 90).

The song talks of the passing of the days and years by mentioning the repeated, recurring phases of the sun: “Sunrise, sunset, Sunrise, sunset, Swiftly flow the days,” “Sunrise, sunset/Sunrise, sunset/Swiftly fly the years/One season following another” (Bock and Harnick 89). The repeated image of the sun moving across the sky, flowing across the sky from sunrise to sunset is invoked, and by being invoked, multiple days of our (the audiences’ and the characters’) all too short lives seem to pass before our mind’s eye as we imagine the sun literally passing from one side of the sky to the other. In fact, more than a decade seems to pass, as Golde and Tevye talk about their children growing into adults and moving from one phase of their life and into the next.

Not only are the phases of the sun repeated throughout the song, but the musical phrases are extremely repetitive: the chorus melody underscoring the lyrics “Sunrise, sunset/Sunrise, sunset” consists of four notes which rise and fall twice in a row, using the same notes both times. This repetition underscores the cosmic symbolism of the cycle of the seasons and the passage of time, and gives the cycle of the seasons a flowing, repetitive feeling, as if the years are turning and the seasons are returning. So, not only in the lyrics is there a sense of the years going around, but the music echoes this with a circular, repetitive melody. The fact that the lyrics and the music
give us a feeling of flowing repetition while the parents talk about their sons and daughters as they were as children at the same time that their children get married in the background, highlights the passage of time as set against the fleeting mortality of parents and children.

In effect, “Sunrise, Sunset” highlights our mortality, our limited existence on this earth, and the changes that all parents and children under go through life, and utilizes them for all their emotional, and universal, worth. However, the fact that the song ends with the chorus: “Sunrise/Sunset…Swiftly fly the years/One season following the other/Laden with happiness and tears,” suggests that despite the changes, the community of Anatevka, like the sun which never fails to rise, will go on, will survive and will endure, even if only in the hearts and traditions of its members as they are split asunder and go their different directions into the wide world at the end of the musical (Lambert 151). The fact that the song “Sunrise, Sunset” shares musical themes with the final, resolute song of the musical, “Anatevka,” when, according to Norman Nadel, the “hope comes through like sunlight [sic],” links together the image of the ever-recurring sunrise with the desire for the human spirit to survive and continue onward despite the changes in parental/filial relationships, the violence enacted upon a group of people by another group of people, or the physical destruction of a community (Lambert 168; Nadel in Hillman-McCord 76, Hillman’s emphasis). By linking the cosmic symbolism with this final moment, Bock and Harnick have tied together the struggle of humanity to survive, with the ever-present state of the sun in the sky which endures long past a single human generation, making “Sunrise, Sunset” not only a powerful, emotive vehicle, but also an integral contribution to many of the central themes that weave the musical together.
Some scholars claim that *Fiddler* is an integrated book musical, marking the end bookend of the Golden Age of musical theatre; others contend that it is more of a concept musical, heralding in the new trend in musical theatre (Steyn 127; Lambert 180; Swain 416). While there are merits to both sides of the debate, I side with those who consider *Fiddler* an integrated book musical (Rosenberg and Harburg 125; Taubman in Suskin 209), wherein all the components (music, choreography, book, lyrics) lace together to further the story and all are necessary to telling the story, just as the cosmic symbolism in “Sunrise, Sunset” is integral to furthering the story. Considering bits universal appeal and popular success around the world, the cosmic symbolism in *Fiddler* allows audiences to connect with this otherwise specifically Jewish show, and hence, is very important to the musical. The symbolism effectively tugs at the heartstrings of anyone who has ever had a parent, or had a child, or gone through the changes of growing up; the cosmic symbolism, in essence, reaches out and speaks to all humans.

**CONCLUSION**

Inspired by the large, profound questions regarding how we fit into the grand scheme of the universe and what our purpose is, this section on time and mortality examines the role of cosmic symbolism in illustrating the terrifying anxieties humans and musical theatre characters face as mortal beings. Hinted at in *Annie Get Your Gun* and *Rent* this theme of the passage of time and its stark contrast to human mortality appears through the cosmic symbolism in *Les Misérables* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. *Les Misérables* uses cosmic symbolism to highlight the relative permanence of the cosmos as opposed to the relatively short existence of the characters in the musical. The cosmic symbolism is extremely significant considering a good number of the central characters die (Fantine, Eponine, Enjolras, Gavroche, Javert, Valjean) and so their “little
lives” are set against the stars in their “multitude” (Behr 178). Fiddler on the Roof uses the image of the sun, repetitively tracing its path through the sky, to symbolize the passage of time and children growing up, but also parents growing older and marching closer to the grave. The repetitive nature of “Sunrise Sunset” echoes Les Misérables’ “Turning, Turning” and highlights the repetitive nature of life as well as the themes of mortality into which the songs tie. Not only does the cosmic symbolism highlight these fears that permeate humanity, but, at the same time, they highlight the themes of the musicals and allow for a wider audience to be able to identify with these common fears, as death and aging unite all humans.
CHAPTER V

FINALE

The stars in their multitude look down on the earth and on the Broadway musical stage. Whether or not they influence our forward march through time is a question still up for debate among astrologists. But, whatever the stars’ relationship with humans, humankind has represented the stars and other cosmic bodies for thousands of years in art, and Broadway musical theatre is no exception. Cosmic symbolism abounds in musical theatre, and the use of the celestial bodies as mirrors and as symbols for human concerns and anxieties manages to highlight and reinforce the themes of Broadway musicals in which they appear.

Among the concerns that cosmic symbolism often grapples with is the amazement humans have with the cosmic bodies they can see from their terrestrial home. This fascination can take two different manifestations: direct fascination with the stars and cosmic bodies above, as well as translating that fascination into a fascination with celebrity figures on earth, and thinking of them as stars to be idolized and adored. In Annie Get Your Gun, the cosmic symbolism reflects the first fascination more than the second and allows for a deeper understanding of the simple, naïve and endearing character of Annie Oakley and her skill with a pistol; however, the musical also touches on the human anxiety regarding mortality and death as opposed to the seeming eternity of the cosmic bodies seen in the morning and night sky over Earth. Annie Get Your Gun also delves into the correlation between being an adored celebrity and the brilliant cosmic bodies in the night sky. Evita continues the use of the stars as metaphors for celebrity; in the show, the cosmic symbolism is emblematic of Eva Peron’s stunning rise from low-birth to power and acclaim as wife of the leader in Argentina as well as the awe she
receives from her people who adore her. *Starlight Express* sees the stars as an opportunity for both transportive awe and symbolism for the spiritual needs humans find themselves feeling. The cosmically titled midnight train serves not only to remind us that we can look inside ourselves for inspiration, but that we can also look above us for motivation, and it stands in as a secular replacement for the comfort and guidance received from God.

Cosmic symbolism also engages with the idea that humans can receive comfort and guidance from the cosmic bodies they see above them; this subcategory often, but not always, includes the beliefs of astrology that humans are not solely responsible for their actions, and that they are, in fact, influenced by the stars. However, some musicals that fall into this category merely suggest that the beauty of the cosmos can be uplifting and inspiring for their characters. The unreachable star in *Man of La Mancha* serves as this sort of inspiration, this time for the impossible quest of making the world a better place and the unconquerable nature of the human spirit. *Paint Your Wagon*’s Ben Rumson offers the first appearance of the tenets of astrology in musical theatre whereby he claims that his restless nature is a result of being born under a specific star, and in so doing, he uses cosmic symbolism to highlight his, and all other miners’, tendency to drift from strike to strike. This tendency to turn to astrological understandings of humans’ relationship with the stars becomes epitomized in *Hair* wherein the characters invoke the astrological Age of Aquarius and the peace that comes with the idea that humans are not completely responsible for their actions and the fate of the world. The musical also epitomizes the idea that Carl Sagan pointed to when he claimed that we, as “starstuff” have more than just an emotional relationship with the celestial fireballs: we have an origin relationship as well. *Billy Elliot*, the most recent incarnation of cosmic symbolism on Broadway of the shows studied here,
highlights the stars as a comfort to humans and as guides for human endeavors; in the musical the men not only look up at the stars, but the stars look down on them, giving the stars a very palpable presence in the miners’ lives. *Les Misérables* effectively embodies the ways in which cosmic symbolism can provide a deeper understanding of a character in a musical, as well as that character in relation to the themes of the musical. In the musical, the stars serve as metaphors for Javert’s worldview and also provide a backdrop of eternity against which the mortality of the characters, Javert included, is played out. As a result, cosmic symbolism is instrumental in highlighting the themes of justice, opposing religious worldviews, and mortality that the musical promotes.

Finally, cosmic symbolism often embodies imagery that reflects the passage of time and in so doing deals with some of human kind’s most deep seeded and potent anxieties: the anxiety regarding death and mortality. This theme of death and mortality is embodied effectively in *Fiddler on the Roof*, which shows the passage of time and aging of children, *Les Misérables*, where Javert contemplates the seeming permanence of the cosmos in relation to his and, many of the characters’, mortality, and in *Annie Get Your Gun*, where Annie alludes to her own death and the record that will be left of her in relationship to the seeming eternal existence of the sun and moon. This theme of mortality and the passage of time is essential in *Fiddler on the Roof* where it provides for a universal understanding of the parental-child relationship, as well as the swift passing of life when viewed within the seeming permanence of the cosmos.

As we have seen, cosmic symbolism always appears in these musicals through the lyrics of the songs and in many even in the song titles themselves, however, there are several other ways that the cosmic symbolism can be highlighted. These methods have been another form of
literary manipulation, but they have also be done through music, and through production elements. For some musicals, such as *Billy Elliot* and *Evita*, the particular location of the cosmic symbolism in the musical is significant, as it serves to set up the struggles and ambitions of the characters, and then to propel those struggles and ambitions forward. In several musicals, starlight, moonlight, and other celestial forms of light, becomes colluded with knowledge and wisdom, allowing for an illumination of the human tendency to search for guidance in the stars; *Starlight Express*, *Les Misérables*, and *Billy Elliot* all do this. Also, the use of repetition, of both lyrics and musical motifs, often aids the cosmic symbolism in highlighting the themes of the musicals, particularly in *Hair* and *Fiddler*.

Several shows, particularly *Billy Elliot*, *Paint Your Wagon*, and *Fiddler on the Roof*, use music to underscore the cosmic symbolism in such a way that the cosmic symbolism is highlighted. *Billy Elliot* is characterized by a shifting from a sedate, somber tone to a determined, rousing mood. *Paint Your Wagon* underscores the miners’ restlessness with the repetitive clopping of a horse. *Fiddler* uses repetitive musical phrases to emphasize the repetition in the lyrics. *Starlight Express* emphasizes the Midnight Train’s message of self-reliance and self-inspiration with forte dynamics in the musical score accompanying the lyrics. Some of the musicals, including *Evita*, *Man of La Mancha*, *Paint Your Wagon*, *Les Misérables*, and *Starlight Express* effectively use leitmotifs and reprises to re-highlight the cosmic symbolism, and to either allow for a deeper exploration of the character, or to broaden the cosmic symbolism so it becomes associated with other characters in the musical and speaks to the anxieties that connect many of the characters in the musical.
In a couple very powerful instances, cosmic symbolism has been incorporated into the production elements on the stage, to the benefit of strongly highlighting the cosmic symbolism in the song. Flatrock Playhouse’s 2013 production of *Les Miserables* utilized lighting effects set against a dark background, to invoke the image of a starry night sky, as Javert sang “Stars”. The original Broadway production of *Starlight Express* effectively used lighting and scenic elements to add to the transportive quality of the cosmic symbolism of the lyrics. Also for *Starlight Express* the inclusion of cosmic symbolism on the cover page of the playbill further re-enforced the cosmic symbolism existent in the musical. Whatever the methods, as many musicals utilize several, for incorporating and highlighting the cosmic symbolism in musical theatre, the use of cosmic symbolism proves to be a powerful vehicle for expressing the themes and characters of the musicals.

The fact that six of these shows broke the record for longest running musical, points significantly to the appeal that these musicals have with audiences, and perhaps this popularity is due to the themes the cosmic symbolism helps enhance. Three of the shows opened in the 1960s (*Fiddler*, *Man of La Mancha*, and *Hair*), and I wonder if this prevalence of cosmic symbolism in that time period speaks to the decade and what was happening in America, in the fields of astrology and cosmology, and the political attempts to beat Russia in putting a man in space, and then on to the moon. This query is far outside the scope of this thesis, due to my focus more on the text of these musicals than on their reflection of contemporary life, but it might reveal new insight into the influences of science on the development of the American musical. Two of the musicals (*Starlight Express* and *Evita*) were composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber, albeit with different lyricists, and although they are not his most popular musicals (*Phantom of the Opera*...
and *Cats*), it is interesting to note that Lloyd Webber has had the tendency to gravitate toward musicals that use cosmic symbolism (including *Jesus Christ Superstar*, which lies outside the scope of this project). Perhaps this is due to the choice of subject matter that tends to result in lavish spectacles, characterized by sentimentality and powerful music. Regardless, Lloyd Webber’s musicals tend to often feature cosmic symbolism as a means of reinforcing the thematic elements of the musicals.

Yet, we are left wondering if cosmic symbolism is actually integral to the musicals or if the stars are just an ornamental addition to the lyrics. With regards to most of the musicals in this study, cosmic symbolism serves to the advance either the thematic material of the musical or the nature of a character or two within the musical; for example, in *Evita*, Eva Peron’s resourceful nature would not be nearly as evident without the song that Augustin Magaldi sings and which foreshadows her arduous climb to the top of Argentine society. Without its cosmic symbolism, *Starlight Express* would lose its element of spirituality that is so powerfully uplifting, and would descend into the dehumanizing spectacle of which Frank Rich spoke. *Man of La Mancha*’s Don Quixote and his impossible quest would not be nearly as inspiring without the stars symbolizing the lofty heights to which the simple squire aspires. The genetic, parent-daughter connection between Ben Rumson and Jennifer in *Paint Your Wagon* would not be nearly as apparent without the use of cosmic symbolism to highlight their shared restlessness and they would seem exceptions to the rule rather than the norm in Gold Rush California if not for the recurring motif of wandering and restlessness embodied by the cosmic symbolism in the lyrics, and mirrored by the other miners at the close of the musical. Many of the themes of *Hair*, including the themes of community, peace and the influence of astrology, would be significantly weakened, if not lost,
without the cosmic symbolism that permeates the musical. Without the stars, *Les Misérables’* Javert would be starkly one-dimensional and would risk appearing simply as a villain with few redeeming qualities. In contrast to a one-dimensional Javert, Jean Valjean could not help but seem to be a pure hero with none of the dimension that makes his character so rich. Without the song “Sunrise, Sunset,” *Fiddler* would be less widely appealing to wide audiences who are perhaps more modernized than the traditional proclivity of the Jews in Anatevka. These musicals truly integrate the cosmic symbolism into their themes and their characters, making the cosmic bodies that appear in the musicals more than just decoration.

In a couple of the musicals in this study, cosmic symbolism serves more to comment powerfully on either the story that proceeds to unfold, or on the field of musical theatre in general. The stars in *Billy Elliot: the Musical* set up the entire plot and thematic premise to the musical; without them there could still be a song about solidarity, but it would not be so emotionally gripping and powerfully inspiring. Finally, without the cosmic symbolism in *Annie Get Your Gun* the anthem of the show business industry would be markedly different and Annie’s character would not be so rustic and pure. Whether or not the cosmic symbolism is fully integrated into the musicals, it does have a potent influence on the natures of the characters and the thematic materials of the show, to the extent that it allows for a powerful way of driving home the themes of the musicals.

Cosmic symbolism in Broadway musicals can accomplish so much more than simply establishing the time, place, and mood of the musical; it can transport the audience to a fantastic place of entertainment and awe, it can inform deeply on characters in the musical, adding to their depth and to the depth of the themes of the musicals, cosmic symbolism can reflect the teachings
of astrology and some of the biggest anxieties humans have regarding their existence in the world, and it can provide a secular stand-in for God. Indeed, cosmic symbolism is often instrumental in highlighting and emphasizing the important themes of the musicals and in providing a deeper understanding of the central characters in the musicals; as such, it deserves to be noticed and studied more often than as uncomplicated decorative elements of the libretto and lyrics.
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