

## Filming Art: Dichotomy & Resolution in Musical Comedy

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“Susanne takes you down  
To a place by the river.  
...  
And you think you maybe trust her,  
For she’s touched your perfect body  
With her mind.”

Judy Collins

With the advent first of film study courses in colleges and universities and now of whole curricula being devoted to the study of film, it is no longer necessary to be apologetic about the undertaking of critical thinking about film. The recent critical interest in the film reflects the fact that a surveillance of modern culture will leave little doubt that film has become in the twentieth century a principal, if not *the* principal vehicle for the dissemination of cultural values and of an ever increasing variety and quantity of information, as well as being an entry point into the world of art for the public at large for the first time in human history since the division of labor forced the majority to abandon attention to art in favor of employing themselves with more practical tasks. In fact one might say that film has become a kind of informal liberal education, which enables its audience to experience ideas and images now that were all but unavailable to most people only a few generations ago.

In contrast to this general recognition of the value of film, however, the musical film, as a sub-genre, has enjoyed relatively little attention until quite recently. It is generally recognized that “A tone of incredulous disdain still tends to

prevail” against the musical “even though the claims of other genres have long since been accepted.”<sup>1</sup> Viewed by many as light entertainment, in contrast to more serious films which present a modernism that requires a transmission of ideas and images in a more realistic and or more expressionist medium, the musical has had to be largely satisfied with being reduced to coffee table picture book presentations which merely retell the plot and serve as static reminders of the moving images while yielding little insight into their significance. And when any critical attention has been paid to the musical, it has been with a demeaning attitude that, unfortunately, even to this day still prevails in many quarters. Typical of this attitude is Gerald Mast whose appraisal of the musical film, at least of those done before the 1960’s, is that they were “unserious fluff,” with “no pretensions to psychological realism or serious human relationships” and whose “plots were almost invisible trifles to hold the musical numbers together.”<sup>2</sup>

Another fact to be considered when trying to explain the neglect of critical attention is that the musical film considered either as medium or message, for the most part, runs counter to the general thrust of modern art which is, as Arnold Hauser has pointed out,

a fundamentally “ugly” art, foregoing the euphony, the fascinating forms, tone and colors of impressionism . . . [and which] implies an anxious escape from everything pleasant and agreeable, everything purely decorative and ingratiating.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, as this essay hopes to demonstrate, the musical as a combination of “bell, book and candle,” that is, as a combination of musical, literary and visual art forms, is a modern entry point into the magical world of the arts for the general public and, as such, is not only decorative but ingratiating in the best sense of the word by making the domain of the aesthetic, with

all its implied significance, acceptable to an larger audience than any who have previously encountered the arts.

Regarding their implied significance, an investigation of the musical film, herein limited to its typical form, musical comedy, reveals that it conveys the essential message of all art, namely, that life as substance is dichotomized but that it, as process, strives in the direction of resolving that dichotomy. To illustrate the musical film's reflection of this fundamental art message I have selected the musical *Hello Dolly* and offer what I hope will be a sufficiently close analysis of the dichotomies and resolutions found therein to stimulate the reader to further consideration of this point of view. I do not contend that this film is the best example of the genre; only that it is both entertaining and highly representative of the genre at large.

Certainly I would be remiss if at the outset I did not mention a considerable debt to Rick Altman's groundbreaking and penetrating work analyzing the meaning and form of the musical film.<sup>4</sup> It seems to me that more than anyone else to date he has demonstrated that the musical film needs to be taken seriously. While I applaud the many fine details of Altman's analysis I do not share Altman's view, also espoused by others, that the basic message of the musical is essentially sociological in nature.<sup>5</sup> Still less palatable to me is the specific cultural significance seen in the musical by Roger Manville who claims that "The essence of the musical is the spirit that it evokes – the mystique of the American way of life."<sup>6</sup> While the musical, like any art form, certainly exists within a social and historical frame, to be understood properly the musical must be seen within the larger context of the general meaning of art. As such, the musical exemplifies and supports the idea that the principal function of all art is not limited to being either an illustration or an approbation of social mores. Rather it seeks to convey a most basic philosophical or psychological understanding of the rhythms of life wherever and whenever they are found.

I have also departed from Altman's excellent rendering of

the specifics of the medium by giving greater attention to some of the visual and musical aspects of the film and by introducing an investigation of what might be seen as the major literary constituent of the musical, namely, the poetry of the song lyrics.

In it sobering to recognize that since the 1970's the musical as a major film genre has been in precipitous decline. In its heyday, during the 1930's and 1940's, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, the largest, most start-studded, and arguably the most artistically conscious of the major Hollywood studios made the making of musicals its principal concern. With the disappearance of key talents at M-G-M, as well as with a shift in public taste toward a more lowbrow form of entertainment, the musical has all but vanished. This situation is to be much lamented because, while many current film genres with popular appeal continue to offer the public some attributes present in the musical, none capture the full richness and complexity of the process of life which I believe is the essential value of the musical as distinguished from other film genres.

What is that process? Simply put, it is the process that is familiar to the literary critic as basic Romantic ideology and to the philosopher as the Hegelian triad. If Blake's poetry might be used as one of the clearest examples of that triad, it is a process marked by thesis, "The Songs of Innocence," antithesis, "The Songs of Experience" and synthesis, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell."

In what follows I hope to persuade the reader that the musical comedy film is the Modern heir to this basic Romantic schema and, as such, is fully worthy of our serious attention.

*Hello Dolly*, the rather late musical comedy film entry (1969), seems to clearly evidence this schema. Based originally on Thornton Wilder's successful comedy *The Matchmaker* (1958) and later on the smash Broadway musical of the same name with words and music by Jerry Herman, the film is the story of

Dolly Levi, a widowed New York City matchmaker, who, under the guise of attempting to find a marriage partner for the successful Yonkers' businessman Horace Vandergelder, uses her wit and cunning to win him for herself.

As background to the opening credits and the playing of the overture, we are given a distant and spacious aerial view of a train moving its way besides a winding river. Where is it taking us? As the credits end, a painting of 1890's New York City first appears on the screen and then slowly metamorphoses into the live daytime action of the city, marked by many people engaged in a variety of daily activities. While the substance of these activities, which includes walking and street sweeping, is clearly realistic, one might even say prosaic, the form of their engagement, marked by a tightly unchanging dance rhythm with musical accompaniment, clearly indicates that we are not in the physical world of space and time as we know it. This is the fantasy world familiar in literature, the world of the imagination, the world of the artificial, the world of art, the Land of Oz, to which the characters of the "real"<sup>7</sup> world, who are in need of change, will come to be transformed and by that transformation be empowered to resolve the limitations which have resulted from their experiences in the physical world.

In the fantasy world, where sound controls image,<sup>8</sup> the camera begins to follow Dolly Levi (played by the singer-actor Barbra Streisand) as she weaves her way through the myriad activities going on about her. Moving fluidly through the crowd but with a quick and energetic dance step and dressed in a deep red period costume she begins to sing the first song of the film "Just Leave Everything to Me." The camera has already recognized Dolly as the central figure of the scene who weaves together the myriad activities of the fantasy world by her dance; and her role as the central creative figure of the fantasy world is now furthered by the lyrics of her song, performed powerfully yet with absolute control of pitch, tempo and dynamics. Quoted here at length because of their importance, they unmistakably

identify Dolly as a character of mythic dimensions.

- I have always been a woman who arranges things,  
For the pleasure and the profit it derives.  
I have always been a woman who arranges things,  
Like furniture and daffodils and lives.
- 5 If you want your sister courted, brother wedded,  
or cheese imported,  
Just leave everything to me.  
If you want your roof inspected, eyebrows tweezed,  
or bills collected,  
Just leave everything to me.  
If you want your daughter dated, or some marriage  
consummated,
- 10 For a rather modest fee,  
If you want a husband spotted, boyfriend traced,  
or chicken potted,  
I'll arrange for making all arrangements,  
Just leave everything to me.  
If you want your ego busted, muscles toned,  
or chair upholstered,
- 15 Just leave everything to me.  
Charming social introductions, expert mandolin  
instructions,  
Just leave everything to me.  
If you want your culture rounded, French improved,  
or torso pounded,  
With a ten year guarantee,
- 20 If you want a birth recorded, collies bred, or kittens  
boarded,  
I'll proceed to plan the whole procedure,  
Just leave everything to me.  
...
- If you want a law abolished, toenails sprayed,  
or jewelry polished,

- Just leave everything to me.
- 25 If you want your liver tested, glasses made, cash invested,  
Just leave everything to me.  
If you want your children coddled, corsets pulled, furs  
remodeled, or some nice fricassee,  
If you want your bustle shifted, bedding planned,  
or bosom lifted,  
(Don't by ashamed girls life is full of secrets and I keep  
'em)
- 30 I'll discretely use my own discretion,  
I'll arrange for making all arrangements,  
I'll proceed to plan the whole procedure,  
So just leave everything to me.

As the first four lines of the lyric indicate, Dolly has “always been a woman who arranges things” including the manmade, “furniture,” the natural, “daffodils,” and the wider field which embraces both, namely, “lives.” And these diverse activities are engaged in for the dual diametrically opposed purposes of “pleasure” and “profit.” As the provider of these activities Dolly identifies herself as the mother goddess<sup>9</sup> who has the power to assist in and nurture all activities.

These and the many other activities mentioned throughout the lyric which are diverse, often direct opposites, are placed together within one or two lines of the lyric and by that assembly they are identified as constituents of one unified reality. To cite just one example, the social business of romance: “If you want your sister courted, brother wed,” and the practical business of providing the physical necessities of life: “or cheese imported,” (line 5) are highly diverse activities which by their juxtaposition in the same line are resolved into a contiguous action played out on the same field. Dolly can provide all that is necessary for an enhanced existence in that field: personal and social services (line 7), psychological resetting or physical tone up (line 14), intellectual help or physique remodeling (line

18), biological testing, material objects made or economic services (line 25). In brief, then, Dolly is the provider of all physical, intellectual, social and emotional life needs. It is not going too far to say that the lyrics clearly indicate that Dolly is not only provider of the myriad of life's needs but that she is, par excellence, the arranger, the one who through dynamic action and the dynamics of her art, which in this instance is vocally the song lyric and visually her dance, brings all things into unified relation with each other.

Furthermore, the lyrics are an invocation of her powers by repeating the essence of her occupation three times. A third of the way through the song she notes "I'll arrange for making all arrangements" (line 12); and, again, two thirds toward the finish "I'll proceed to plan the whole procedure" (line 21). Then, finally, at the conclusion of the song she repeats these two and adds to it a third "I'll discretely use my own discretion" (lines 30-32). This variegated announcement made three times, by using that archetypal number, suggests both power and unity;<sup>10</sup> and this suggestion of unity is reinforced in the line by the use of related word forms (arrange-arrangements; proceed-procedure; discretely-discretion) in each of the three announcements of her power. Taken together, then, these poetic strategies give a tightly knit unity to the lyric which is reinforced visually in her dance as she weaves her way through the crowded streets, and by so doing unifies the fantasy world of New York City.

Before concluding comments on the first scene of the film I would like to add some thoughts about the meaning suggested by the name "Dolly Levi." As "Dolly" she is a living doll, the representative of a typically passive to-be-looked-at beauty, but as "Levi," named after the Old Testament tribe, she is the mediator, like them, between the ultimate ground of Being and man; and, like that ancient tribe, as can be seen later in this film, she can be ruthless, albeit in subtle ways, in the application of her power to achieve her objectives.

The second scene of the film introduces us to the world



of Horace Vandergelder (played by Walter Matthau, an extremely accomplished but non-musical actor),<sup>11</sup> the Yonkers' businessman whom Dolly has decided she wants to marry. Like Dolly, Vandergelder's name suggests his nature. Not only is the name typically Dutch, and we remember that the Dutch were the most noted businessmen and money handlers between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, but the name translates "of or for the gold" and thus identifies Vandergelder's only true interest and the essential nature of his personality.

Inside his upstairs lodgings at his emporium in the rather rustic suburb of New York City, Vandergelder sits in his black suit, receiving a shave from his barber and, at the same time, having an argument with Ambrose, his niece Ermengarde's boyfriend. Tied down yet unable to rest he makes his barber nervous as he squirms in the chair and hurls insults at Ambrose because he is "a fool" of an artist who, according to Vandergelder, doesn't make any money from his useless occupation. When Ambrose leaves, Ermengarde enters and tries to persuade her uncle to reconsider his attitude towards marriage to Ambrose, but Vandergelder ignores her protestations of love and promises that she will never marry "that fool of an artist."

Ermengarde leaves crying and Vandergelder goes downstairs to his store to make preparations for his departure to New York City where he believes Dolly will introduce him to his intended bride. Once in the store he stamps on the trap door to the cellar where his two young store clerks, Cornelius and Barnaby, are working. They too are labeled "fools" and "incompetents" by Vandergelder and he treats them with the same disdain he treated Ambrose, his niece's boyfriend. He then warns them to look after the store while he goes to town to meet his intended bride and, before he leaves, with gruff voice he sings a song that describes what he is looking for in "a sweetheart, a mistress, a wife:"

It takes a woman, all powdered and pink

To joyously clean out the drain in the sink;  
 And it takes an angel with long golden lashes  
 And soft Dresden fingers for dumping the ashes.  
 5 Yes, it takes a woman, a dainty woman,  
 A sweetheart, a mistress, a wife.  
 Oh yes, it takes a woman, a fragile woman,  
 To bring you the sweet things in life.  
 The frail young maiden who's constantly there  
 10 For washing and bluing and shoeing the mare;  
 And it takes a female for setting the table  
 And weaning the Guernsey and cleaning the stable.  
 Yes, it takes a woman, a dainty woman,  
 A sweetheart, a mistress, a wife.  
 15 Oh yes, it takes a woman, a fragile woman,  
 To bring you the sweet things in life.  
 And so she'll work until infinity.  
 Three cheers for femininity.  
 ...  
 And in the winter she'll shovel the ice  
 20 And lovingly set out the traps for the mice.  
 She's a joy and treasure for practically speaking  
 To whom can you turn when the plumbing is leaking.  
 To that dainty woman, that fragile woman,  
 That sweetheart, that mistress, that wife,  
 25 That womanly wife.  
 Oh yes, it takes a woman, a husky woman,  
 To bring your the sweet things in life.  
 Oh yes, it takes a woman, a dainty woman,  
 A sweetheart, a mistress, a wife.  
 Oh yes, it takes a woman, a fragile woman,  
 To bring you the sweet things in life.

Comic due to its juxtaposition of the joy of feminine fragility and daintiness with demeaning physical labor, a sympathetic response from the audience for Vandergelder or his point of

view about what is of value in life is intentionally ruled out. Sung first by Vandergelder alone and then with a group of common laborers outside his store, during the latter part of the song Vandergelder himself literally stands shoulder to shoulder with a workhorse – an obvious but cleverly used reminder that that is exactly what Vandergelder is looking for in a wife.

The lyrics of the song reveal that it is Vandergelder who is the fool since he has no appreciation of any of the immaterial qualities that ‘it takes’ to be a wife. Yet the qualities of the ideal wife stated by the lyric, namely being both a doll-like fragile beauty and a competent jack-of-all-trades, while not related in the subordinate way that they are in this lyric, are precisely the qualities that we have come to recognize in Dolly Levi. And while her beauty is not a prerequisite for her competence, but rather exists side-by-side with it in an easy partnership, it is Dolly who, as the film progresses, will win Vandergelder by her beauty, her abilities and by a certain hidden power which will only come to light as the story progresses.

It is now possible to pause the relating of the plot in order to bring into bold relief the several dichotomies present as they appear in the plot, setting, characters and language of the first two scenes of the film. These dichotomies gravitate around the two major and equally delineated characters, Dolly Levi and Horace Vandergelder, and constellate themselves most especially around their sexual identity as man and woman. Because the musical gives equal attention to both constituents of the dichotomy Altman contends that the key to understanding the musical is to appreciate that, unlike other story forms, it has a “dual focus,”<sup>12</sup> wherein each of the two constituents focused on is a mirrored opposite of the other. Thus, the musical highlights dichotomy as the essential form that pervades all aspects of life when viewed as substance in a way that the more generalized opposition found between protagonist and antagonist found in literature only does in a more suggestive and perhaps less telling manner.

Outlined as follows ten dichotomies are seen to pervade all the elements, character, plot, setting and style (vocal and pictorial), of the film:

	<i>Dolly Levi</i>	-	<i>Horace Vandergelder</i>
1. sex:	female	-	male
2. objective	love & pleasure	-	business
3. personality	dynamic	-	static
4. mode of action	fluid	-	spastic
5. vocal sound	smoothly	-	gruffly
	professional	-	amateur
6. costumed in	red	-	black
7. social role	seeks to be a	-	seeks to be
	provider		provided for
	democratic	-	autocratic
8. social manner	friendly	-	insulting
9. place inhabited	fantasy world:	-	real world:
	aesthetic	-	pragmatic
	bright	-	dark
	outside	-	inside
	cosmic	-	chaotic
10. movement	from the fantasy	-	from the real
	world to the		world to the
	the real world		the fantasy
			world

These dichotomies are reinforced when, immediately after Vandergelder concludes his staccato rendition of "It Takes a Woman," Dolly sings, to a slower tempo, legato, and with more attention to gradual changes in dynamics – in other words, more romantically – a shorter version of the same tune. The lyrics, however, as well as the setting for her performance are diametrically different from Vandergelder's. Against a background of what looks like a preview of *Sunday in the Park With George*, a park filled with people moving slowly to different

pleasurable free-time activities, Dolly sings:

It takes a woman, to quietly plan  
 To take him and change him to her kind of man,  
 And to gently lead him where fortune can find him  
 And not let him know that the power behind him  
 Was that dainty woman, that fragile woman,  
 That sweetheart, that mistress, that wife.

Like Vandergelder's song Dolly's version also conveys ambiguity in the kind of woman that it takes to be a wife. However, where Vandergelder conceived that ambiguity as a dual nature of doll and workhorse, focusing only on the physical attributes of the wife, Dolly's song focuses on the wife's psychological characteristics which are an ambiguous combination of feminine fragility and a powerful ability to guide and nurture her marriage partner. It is this unseen power, a kind of godlike creative ability, unanticipated, unsuspected and, until the moment when he is enlightened and converted, unwanted by Vandergelder, that will win him over by story's end.

What is also important to note here is that the stark opposition that characterizes Dolly and Vandergelder is softened in this lyric by the nature of the prophesied resolution. That resolution will consist of a change in Vandergelder after he has ventured to the fantasy world, New York City, where he hopes to meet (and indeed will meet) his bride. But that change will not mean the abandonment of the things he originally held to be of value. It will not mean the surrendering of 'profit' to gain love. Under the guidance of Dolly, the mother goddess with the power to nurture, Vandergelder will be led, as the lyric indicates, to a place "where" material "fortune may find him" as well as to a recognition of the immaterial and unseen "power behind him" which propels him to that fortune. Thus the romantic style in which the song is sung by Dolly, the medium, perfectly resonates the message of the song, to wit:

the familiar romantic resolution via a marriage of opposites.

Another essential feature of the musical is its repetition in the presentation of its resolution of dichotomy. Altman and others have made the point that the musical reinforces its message of life-process as resolution by mirroring that resolution outside the dual focus of the main characters. Thus, the subordinate characters, Vandergelder's niece, Ermengarde, and her boyfriend, Ambrose, as well as Vandergelder's workers, Cornelius and Barnaby, are not simply present as sounding boards to delineate Vandergelder's or Dolly's personality. Their destinies do play an integral role in the working out of Vandergelder's problems, but they also reinforce the essential message that the musical conveys, namely, that there is a resolution to life's dichotomies, because they are, in their own right, individual constituents of reality who, like Vandergelder himself, will be nurtured and brought to their full potential by the guiding hand of Dolly. They will be told by Dolly in which direction to move and they will be tutored by her in that most basic art symbolizing life as process, namely the dance. Like Shiva, the Hindu dance-master god, Dolly will destroy and create. She will destroy by thwarting Vandergelder's plans and replace them with her own life enhancing scheme, which has at its center the unification of all movement: the dance, Ambrose and Ermengarde's dance, Cornelius and Barnaby's dance and, finally, her own dance to the "Hello Dolly" tune at the climax of the film.

First, overhearing Ermengarde's and Ambrose's plan to elope to New York City, Dolly decides she will teach Ambrose, who is all thumbs on his feet, to dance. Once this is done Ambrose and Ermengarde will be able to win the prize money at a dance to be held at the "Harmonia Gardens" restaurant in New York City, where Dolly will have Vandergelder waiting at 8 o'clock that evening; and, by winning the contest they will be able to convince Vandergelder that Ambrose is not a fool when it comes to making money, at least not by the art of dancing.

Meanwhile, stimulated by hearing of Vandergelder's intentions to go to New York City and unhappy with the enormous limitations of his present existence, Cornelius convinces Barnaby that they, too, should absent themselves from the work-a-day world of Vandergelder's store and go to the big city in search of adventure. Dolly, who once again appears in time to overhear them talking, arranges for them to meet two young ladies in New York City, one of whom is the woman Vandergelder is planning to propose to. Later, once Cornelius and Barnaby have arrived in New York City, in order that they may move forward in their romantic relationships and much to their amazement and joy, Dolly will also teach both of them to dance.

But for now, Immediately after inviting them to meet the two young ladies once in the city, in what might be counted as the end of the first part of the film in which all the dichotomies have been made clear and the resolution to them suggested, all the concerned participants with the exception of Vandergelder who had left earlier, board a train to make the trip to the fantasy world, New York City. With the singing of "Put on Your Sunday Clothes,"<sup>13</sup> begun by Cornelius and soon joined in turn by Dolly, Ermengarde, Ambrose and finally by a chorus of what seems like the entire town of Yonkers, they wend their way to the station and board a train for New York City. The lyrics of this song describes and confirms our earlier impressions of the attributes of the fantasy world and their effect upon the human psyche. The fantasy world is "out there;" it is a world of light "full of shine and full of sparkle," but because it is the aesthetic world of the imagination it can be seen with closed eyes (l. 5); and because it is a world where sound dominates image it is a world that can be perceived by Barnaby by simply listening (l. 6) to the poetry of Cornelius' lyric.

The bulk of the song concerns itself with the necessary preparation for entry into the world of the imagination and the objective to be attained once there. Paradoxically, putting on

“your Sunday clothes” and doing whatever you can to enhance your external appearance is the way to improve your psychological disposition and make yourself ready to enter the world of the imagination. That world is a world of perfumed beauty (l.10), energy, freedom (ll. 13–14) and entertainment (l. 14). When entering that imaginative–aesthetic world you become an integral part of it “dressed” now “like a dream” (l. 31) and having “your picture took” (l. 30).

As for the object of the journey into the imagination, at first Cornelius announces that he wishes to “trot to a smoky spot, where the girls are hot as fuel” and he won’t come home until he’s “kissed a girl” (l. 16). However, as the song and with it the necessary preparation for entry into the fantasy world is completed, the objective becomes, perforce, more psychological, one in which the physical sensation of kissing a girl is replaced by the grander and more enrapturing emotional experience of falling in love (l. 52).

With all participants arrived in the fantasy world of New York City and all under the guiding control of Dolly, the stage is now set for a working out of the resolution to the many dichotomies presented in the film. The place of the resolution will be the “Harmonia Gardens” restaurant, a romantic name highly suggestive of an Eden-like paradise in which all constituent parts are brought into a harmonious unity. The time will be 8 o’clock, also an allusion to the archetypal ‘8’ which conveys a sense of completion.

Having all arrived at the restaurant before her, Dolly will make her entrance with all in attendance. Like a goddess, she will descend from a heavenly height down a long staircase lined with the staff of the restaurant who are waiting with much anticipation to greet her and who, upon her arrival, welcome her presence in the title song “Hello Dolly.” To the accompaniment of the song, dancing her way through the crowd of admirers, she weaves together, as she did previously in the first scene of the film, all who are present. Joining in the lyric like a god of



compassion, Dolly complements each of her admirers; and at intervals she promises three times (the symbolic 'three' again) and then a fourth time, consisting of repeating the same phrase three times consecutively, that "Dolly will never go away again." (lines 4, 14, 28, 35)<sup>14</sup>

Running counter to all this harmony and joy, however, and recalling that Dolly is a bit of a trickster<sup>15</sup> whose objectives are achieved in a somewhat underhanded way, the jumbled situations and increased dichotomies which at first seem to be the outcomes of the evening at the Harmonia Gardens following her entrance song,<sup>16</sup> are all, by the middle of the following day, resolved. After returning from their experiences in the fantasy world not only will Vandergelder realize that Dolly is the kind of person he is looking for in a wife, but the subordinate characters' problems will be resolved when Vandergelder also consents to the idea of making Cornelius his partner in the business, promoting Barnaby to a responsible position and allowing Ermengarde to marry Ambrose.

In the scene of recognition, after the dawn of a new consciousness and its resulting attendant disposition to others occurs, the ungainly singer Vandergelder repeats the title song, "Hello Dolly" most sweetly. Following that he evidences his imaginative union with Dolly by suggesting that the store be repainted "green" (a color usually signifying new life), which is the same idea Dolly mused about earlier in the film at the conclusion of her rendition of "It Takes a Woman."

The last scene of the film shows Dolly and Vandergelder on their wedding day. Over the strains of the by now familiar music, they are seen entering a church beside the Hudson River, and, as the film ends, the camera draws back to a heavenly height, as if to signal that whatever divine force that was at work in resolving the dichotomies is no longer needed in attendance.

The analysis of *Hello Dolly* invites a general, albeit hypothetical,

understanding of the musical comedy as an art form in which all five of the elements of narrative are found to be distinct. First, regarding style, the constituents which differentiate the musical from more typical narratives are the inclusion of three arts: music, poetry and dance. It is these three elements, usually presented in a single form, which bears the responsibility to communicate the greater share of the musical's theme and which addresses the audience with a directness that is usually not possible by the use of dialogue alone in other forms of narrative.

Second, the setting is dichotomized into fantasy and real worlds. The fantasy world may be represented in true fairy tale fashion, as it is in early musicals,<sup>17</sup> by a palace or a castle; or, in later musicals reflexively by the stage or some other form entertainment locale; or, as the glamour of cosmopolitan urban life began to suggest itself as an appropriate locale,<sup>18</sup> it may be represented by a fascinating city, with New York and Paris two apparent favorites.<sup>19</sup>

Third, a division of responsibility in relation to communicating the theme of the musical comedy can be noted in its use of character. With its dual focus the two principal characters are the nexus around which all the dichotomies in the film center themselves, but the resolution of those dichotomies will be shared with the supporting characters who will sharpen audience awareness to, as well as generalize the benefits of that resolution.

In addition to this, the plot moves forward from dichotomy to resolution because one of the principal characters teaches the other to recognize and value creative power. Residing only in the teacher at the start of the film, as it does in *Dolly the dance-master*, the confidence resulting from possession of that power attests to its communication from teacher to student in the course of the film. In *Hello Dolly* the transference of creative power from Dolly to Vandergelder is evidenced by the way in which he is able to sing his rendition of "Hello Dolly" at the end of the film; and the communication of a more generalized

sort of power from Dolly to the secondary characters, Cornelius, Barnaby, Ambrose and Ermengarde, is apparent by the way in which they are able to act in a free, independent, spontaneous and assertive manner at the conclusion of the film. *Funny Face* (1957) and *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) are two more examples of films that evidence the same kind of resolution. In *Funny Face* the fashion photographer Dick Avery teaches Jo Stockton, an emotionally inhibited intellectual, to be a model; and, in the process we observe Jo being transformed from an other-directed to a self-directed and emotionally expressive person; and, in *The Wizard of Oz*, the Wizard, who is in reality the master psychologist Professor Marvel, teaches Dorothy and her companions that they have always had the power to resolve their difficulties within themselves.

Through its use of visual symbolism *The Wizard of Oz* makes clear another important feature of the plot in musical comedy. At the start of her journey to get help from the Wizard Dorothy must "follow the yellow brick road" which spirals in ever expanding outward circles. But by taking that road, that is, by journeying outside herself, "out there" as Cornelius sings in his song "Put On Your Sunday Clothes," she will find complications that temporarily prevent her from resolving her difficulties; and these difficulties will persist until she finds, ironically, that the answer is within herself. In *Hello Dolly*, too, Vandergelder who travels outside of Yonkers looking for an outsider to be his wife will, at the moment of his enlightenment when, standing in his own store, realize that the answer lies with Dolly who has persistently come to him inside of Yonkers and who is the kind of person he, in the core of his being, really needs. Thus, for the characters in a musical comedy, difficulties persist so long as the characters try to find their solutions outside of themselves, while enlightenment and with it resolution come at the moment of recognizing their inner powers.

Thematically, therefore, musical comedy is a kind of

divine comedy, a testament to the idea that the kingdom of heaven is within. As part of its psychological focus it also conveys a message about the essential nature of marriage. In musical comedy marriage is more than a ritual conferring social approval upon a physical relationship. Rather, the musical conveys the idea that marriage is a meeting of minds, suggested, represented and endorsed by the physical union. And, to refer to an element in the setting, the essentially magical – or shall we say imaginative – nature of marriage is recognized and reinforced by the properties of the physical place in which it is conferred, as for example, most usually in a church, as in *Hello Dolly*. When the marriage is wholly internal, that is, between conscious and unconscious, as it is in Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, the physical place may be only a magic carpet, the magic slippers that she wears.

All of these considerations indicate that the musical comedy, like the image of Shiva surrounded by the ring of fire, attempts to paint for us a picture of the dance of life seen in its completeness. Representing whole of life, it cannot surrender its all embracing vision in order to gain transparency of reality in the physical world. As the camera moves upward and away at the end of *Hello Dolly* some of the fine detail is lost in order that the whole picture might emerge. By this we are reminded that the picture thus painted is filming art.

## NOTES

1. Pam Cook, ed., *The Cinema Book*, (London, British Film Institute, 1985), p.106.
2. Gerald Mast, *A Short History of the Movies*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1981), p.275.
3. Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art, Vol. 4: Naturalism, Impressionism, The Film Age*, (New York, Vintage Books, N/A), p.230.
4. Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987).
5. Altman, p.1.
6. Roger Manville, *The Film and The Public*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1955), p.174.
7. The term real is used here in the conventional way to indicate the external physical world of time and space as it is perceived. However, its use should not be understood as an indication that its internal counterpart, the psychological world of imaginative time and space, is anything less than equally "real" from the standpoint of the perceiving subject.
8. Altman, p.71.
9. Named "the Great Mother archetype" by Carl Jung and discussed at length in Erich Neumann's *The Great Mother* (New York: Pantheon, 1955), she is the archetypal goddess of birth, fertility, sexual union, and the entire complex of growth.
10. So widespread is the use of the number three in mythology, religion and art that it defies the need for explanation. From the Greek pantheon of Zeus-Poseidon-Hades and the Christian Father-Son-Holy Ghost to the three hammer blows of fate in Mahler's 20th century sixth symphony or Lewis Carroll's poem "The Hunting of the Snark" the number three is used to represent the ultimate ground of being and the force behind the movement of all things.
11. Since I am exploring the dichotomy between Dolly and Vandergelder, I take the decision to use a non-musical actor for the role of Vandergelder to be intentional and an appropriate play off against the highly musical Barbra Streisand for the role of Dolly.
12. See Altman's discussion of this throughout his text but especially pp. 24-27.
13. Out there, there's a world outside of Yonkers,  
Way out there beyond this hick town, Barnaby,

there's a slick town, Barnaby.  
 Out there, full of shine and full of sparkle,  
 5 Close your eyes and see it glisten, Barnaby.  
 Listen, Barnaby.  
 Put on your Sunday clothes there's lots of world out there,  
 get out the brilliant team and dime cigars.  
 We're gonne find adventure in the evening air,  
 10 girls in white in a perfumed night,  
 with the lights as bright as the stars.  
 Put on your Sunday clothes we're gonna ride through town,  
 in one of those new horse drawn open cars.  
 We'll see the shows at Delmonico's  
 15 and we'll close the town in a whirl  
 and we won't come home until we kissed a girl.  
 Put on your Sunday clothes when you feel down and out,  
 Strut down the street and have you picture took.  
 Dressed like a dream your spirits seem to turn about,  
 20 that Sunday shine is a certain sign  
 that you feel as fine as you look.  
 Beneath your parasol the world is all a' smile  
 that makes you feel brand new down to your toes.  
 Get out your feathers, your patent leather,  
 25 your beads and buckles and bows,  
 cause there's no blue Monday in your Sunday clothes,  
 No blue Monday, no Monday in your Sunday,  
 no Monday in your Sunday clothes!  
 Put on your Sunday clothes when you feel down and out,  
 30 Strut down the street and have you picture took.  
 Dressed like a dream your spirits seem to turn about,  
 that Sunday shine is a certain sign  
 that you feel as fine as you look.  
 Beneath your bowler brim the world's a simple song.  
 35 a lovely look that makes you tilt your nose.  
 Get out your slippers, your - - - - -  
 For there's no blue Monday in your Sunday clothes.  
 Ermine Gott keep smiling. No man wants a little ninny.  
 Ambrose do a turn. Let me see.  
 40 Mr. Hakel, Mr. Tucker, don't forget Irene and Minnie.  
 Just forget you ever heard a word from me.  
 All aboard, all aboard, all aboard.  
 Put on your Sunday clothes there's lots of world out there.  
 Put on your silk crowned hat and brand new shoes.  
 45 We're gonna find adventure in the evening air.

To town we'll trot, to a smoky spot, where the girls are hot  
as a fuel.

Put on your high silk hat and after dawn outside  
We'll wear a hand made  
You wanna take New York by storm.

50 We'll join the Astors at Tony Pastor's - - - - -

And we won't come home, no we won't come home,  
we won't come home until we've fallen in love!

14. Hello Rudy. Well, hello Harry. It's so nice to be back home  
where I belong.

You are lookin' swell Manny. I can tell Danny,  
you're still glowin', you're still crowin', you're still  
goin' strong.

I feel the room swayin' for the band's playin'  
one of my old favorite songs from way back when.

So, bridge that gap fellas, find me an empty lap, fellas,  
Dolly will never go away again.

5 Hello Dolly. Well, Hello Dolly. It's so nice to have you  
back where you belong.

You are lookin' swell Dolly. We can tell Dolly,  
You're still glowin' you're still crowin', you're still  
goin' strong.

We feel the room swayin' for the band's playin'  
one of your old favorite songs from way back when  
So, here's my hat fellas. I'm stayin' where I'm at, fellas.  
Promise you'll never go away again.

10 I went away from the lights of 14th street and into my  
personal haze,

But now that I'm back in the lights of 14th street  
tomorrow will be brighter than the good old days.

Those good old days.

Hello Dolly. Well, Hello Dolly. Hey, look! There's Dolly!  
Glad to see you Hank. Let's thank my lucky stars.

11 Your lucky stars.

You're lookin' great Stanley. Lose some weight? I think  
-I think you did, Stanley.

Dolly's overjoyed and over wound and over par.

I hear the ice tinkle. See the lights twinkle.

And you still get glances from us handsome men.

15 Look at you all. You're all so handsome.

Golly gee, fellas. Find me and empty knee, fellas.

Dolly'll never go away again.

Well, Hello Dolly!(Well, look whose here.)

- This is Louis, Dolly. (Hello, Louis.)
- 20 It's so nice to have you back where you belong.  
 (I'm so glad to be back.)  
 Are you lookin' swell, Dolly. (Thank you, Louis.)  
 I tell , (Does it show?)Dolly.  
 You still glowin', you still crowin', you still goin' strong.
- 25 I feel the room swayin' and the band playin'  
 one of our favorite songs from way back when.  
 (I remember it. It was a favorite.)  
 So, show some snap, fellas. (Yeah!)  
 Find her an empty lap, fellas. (Yeah)  
 Dolly will never go away again!  
 Well, well Hello Dolly. It's so nice to have you back where  
 you belong.
- 30 You are lookin' swell Dolly. We can tell Dolly,  
 you're still glowin', you're still crowin', you're still  
 goin' strong.  
 I hear the lark tingle. (I hear it tingle.)  
 See the stars twinkle. (I see them twinkle.)  
 And you still get glances from us handsome men.  
 So, Wow. wow, wow, fellas! Look at the old girl now, fellas!
- 35 Dolly'll never go away, Dolly'll never go away,  
 Dolly'll never go away again !
15. Funk & Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend, edited by Maria Leach (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1972 ), identifies the trickster as being often regarded as the culture hero who has brought the arts of living to mankind; a reator-culture-hero-transformer, pp. 1123-24. See also Norman O. Brown, *Hermes The Thief: The Evolution of a Myth* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), especially the discussion of the magic powers of the trickster, pp. 11-24.
16. A recognizable rhythm in myth, as well as in all narrative, is the increasing confusion that occurs, a kind of climax of conflicting values, before fusion or final resolution is accomplished.
17. Outstanding examples are *Love Parade* (1929) and *Love Me Tonight* (1932).
18. See *Forty-Second Street* (1933) *Singing in the Rain* (1952) and *The Bandwagon* (1953) to name just three of the many fine films using this setting.
19. See *On the Town* (1949) and *Silk Stockings* (1957) having those fantasy locales respectively.