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**From Corpus to Canon: (De)Constructing the
Genre of Musical Television**

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Abstract

Since the first musical TV series aired in 1968, the genre has developed in sporadic fashion. The series belonging to the genre have often been commercial failures, but, as this thesis strives to prove, that does not mean they are without aesthetic value. By first clearly defining and delimiting the genre to establish a corpus and then subjecting the corpus to diverse means of analysis, this thesis presents an evaluative canon of TV musicals. This canon is in no way objective or representational of any views other than the author's but is nonetheless an attempt to legitimate the genre as an aesthetically valuable mode of expression. The thesis claims that even though TV musicals are victims of a duality of condescension, they should not be: Musical TV series have the potential to be valuable, not only in the context of television but in the context of art as a whole. Through aesthetic criteria and the concept of camp, this thesis seeks to legitimate not necessarily the genre as a whole, but those selected works which comprise its evaluative canon.

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1 Introduction

Whenever a person writes about art, there are two nearly ever-present aspects which impact the text but are oftentimes neglected and not actively accounted for. One is the writer's subjectivity: In texts which seek to ascertain something about artistic merit or the relative worth of specific artworks (in other words an evaluative text), the writer seeks to make judgements which cannot be empirically proven and are thus infallibly shaped by their taste and their bias; but even texts that might strive for, and claim, objectivity are affected by the sensibilities of the writer as well as the paradigm within which they choose to operate. The only way to avoid subjectivity completely is to only state inarguable facts, such as which colors are utilized and what year the artwork was released, a mere literal description of the work. One method of masking subjectivity is to use trusted sources and established theories which lend reliability, but this does not make the text objective. In a way it might make it *less* objective, both because the writer has chosen the theories to apply, the sources to use, meaning that the source is one whose sensibility corresponds to or agrees with that of the writer's, and because the source, while maybe trusted and authoritative, is still not objective itself; even historical recounts, something often thought of as an objective exercise, are formed by the writer's biases and subjective priorities. Thus, attaining objectivity is not a realistic proposition for a text or its author, and nor should it be.¹ Art is a sensuous experience, the perception of which will always be guided by the recipient's subjectivity: Just as there is no art without an artist, so also is there no criticism without a critic.

The other aspect too often overlooked is the existence of a canon. Defined as "a sanctioned or accepted group or body of related works"(Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b), the wording implies that a canon can have two natures: Either it is an explicit (or sanctioned) canon (when someone lists the canonical works of a category, such as Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (1550), an account of the "most eminent" Italian artists and architects² (Vasari, 1965)), or it is an implicit (or accepted) canon (when there seems to be a general agreement on which works comprise the canon of a certain category³). There may very well be overlap between canons of these types (such as

¹ This isn't to say that *appearing* objective, to strive for something universally agreed upon, is worthless, but that even such texts will always be, in some way or another, influenced by subjectivity and claiming they aren't is a fool's errand.

² Though this is a canon of artists, it is also one of works: the works of those artists.

³ This type of canon is in constant flux and often contested because it is based on a general notion and not made explicit.

Vasari's canon corresponding to the implicit canon of Italian renaissance artists), but they are never the same: If someone takes an implicit canon and attempts to make it explicit it is no longer an implicit canon; rather it becomes that author's explicit canon. Though the criteria for constituting a canon can be many different things, they are generally one of two: evaluative (a canon including those works which are of the highest artistic value), or representative (a canon of those works which most accurately epitomize the characteristics of the canon's category, be it a genre, a place of origin or an artistic movement⁴). This latter category can also be referred to as a corpus (by Altman (1987), for example), but the implication is different. A corpus consists of those works which belong to the category at all; a representative canon consists of those which most clearly represent it. Returning to topic, canons are usually left implicit, ignored so that the critic doesn't have to concretize exactly what they refer to when they say, for instance, "good art", "influential cinema" or "quality TV". This isn't in itself necessarily a problem: as long as the writer's concept of the implicit canon somewhat corresponds to the reader's (something usually achieved by including *some* examples of what they mean without stating the entire canon) there is no issue with leaving it implicit. However, in many cases, and especially when writing about very specific categories, establishing an explicit canon (or asserting a pre-existing explicit canon to which you relate and thus use) would be preferable. At the very least the writer should be aware of the canons which shape their text, be they implicit or explicit, evaluative or representative.

With this in mind, my thesis will be actively acknowledging both these elements (subjectivity and canon). One reason for this is that when I wrote my bachelor's thesis about musical TV two years ago there existed no explicit canon of musical TV, and the implicit canon was underdeveloped because it is a concept barely anyone has paid any mind. Thus, there arose in me a determination to create this canon, to make it explicit for the first time. For one, this could be of help to anyone wanting to write about, or just at all examine, the musical TV genre, but more importantly it presented me with the opportunity to break ground on a subject barely ever covered in an academic context. The decision I then had to make was whether my canon would be representational or evaluative. My decision quickly fell on an evaluative approach because

⁴For example, a representative canon of a western would consist of those works that employ the most traits typical of the western, a representative canon of Swedish art would consist of those works that are "most Swedish", and a representative canon of modernistic cinema would consist of those works which exhibit the most traits characteristic of modernism i.e.: Those works most representative of their category.

simply stating which TV series are the most musical would not be as interesting (or as easy to make long enough). However, there still is a sort of representational canon, in that I do assert the characteristics and precise definition of the TV musical in the first half of the thesis, but because this is a process intended not to ascertain which TV series correspond most to the conventions of TV musicals but rather which TV series should be called musicals at all, I will be operating with the term corpus instead.

Before I move on to my thesis statement, I want to highlight two other aspects of the TV musical which I found interesting while writing my bachelor's but only had the opportunity to broach, and will thus incorporate heavily into this thesis: One was the role musical numbers played in the series, as this is the semantic element which separates them from regular TV shows; the other was the assertion that musical TV series suffers from a lack of artistic legitimacy due to a duality of condescension (both their genres are looked down upon as works of lesser artistic pedigree than their alternatives: The TV series is generally viewed as less artistically valuable than cinema, while musical films and plays are seen as less artistically valuable than their non-musical counterparts). This focus on musical numbers and their roles and functions within the series will shape the definition of the genre as well as the detailed analyses of the series (particularly when it comes to the evaluation of them *as musicals*) and the legitimation of the genre as an aesthetic artform will provide some of its theoretical and methodological framework.

My thesis question, and thus the thesis itself, is divided in two: First, I will define the TV musical genre in specific terms and establish precisely which series belong to the genre according to that definition, or: What is the genre's corpus? Then, I will constitute an aesthetically evaluative canon out of this corpus in order to ascertain which TV musicals are valuable, or: What is the genre's (evaluative) canon?

2 Methodology, part one

Before I can precisely define of the TV musical genre, I want to explain why, and how, I will do so. Firstly, I want to assert the affiliation of my methodological approach. The methods used belong to the category of qualitative research. More specifically, what I will perform is a singular case study, with multiple analytical entities (Johannessen, Tufte, & Christoffersen, 2016, p. 206). The singular case examined is the TV musical genre, while the analytical entities are various series which might be classified as such. This approach is used to examine a phenomenon from

multiple angles and often provides rich descriptions and understanding of these phenomena (Johannessen et al., 2016, p. 207).

Such an approach to genre will have to start with the following questions: “What is the musical? How do we define it, delimit it, analyze it?” (Altman, 1987, p. 1), asked by Altman in the introduction of his book on the American film musical. A genre, he posits, is not an absolute category, universally agreed to be one thing and not another. Genres are constructions, and their constructors need to be aware of that (Altman, 1987, p. 5). Traditionally, the genres are established by the production industry as a “discursive act” intended to guide the audience toward the desired interpretation by replacing the interpretive community with specifically chosen intertexts.⁵ The role of the critic, then, has been to renounce the text of this manipulative categorization, this conscious decision made by the industry not to assign the text *any* meaning (as that would also be accomplished by an unmoderated interpretive community), but the *right* meaning, the meaning which would benefit the industry most. However, and importantly, this does not make the critic objective or necessarily more truthful: The set of intertexts proposed by the critic to replace the one established by the industry is not by default a more correct or even neutral one (Altman, 1987, pp. 5-6).

Does this mean, then, that genre analysis is futile, that no matter what your intentions the analysis will be rendered worthless by your own inevitable subjectivity? Not at all. The point Altman tries to get across is that everyone who writes about genre writes out of personal motivation, and that striving toward absolute objectivity is thus either an act of dishonesty or indicative of an acute lack of self-awareness. The critic must be aware of their role as a self-serving party and strive not for objectivity in its most common understanding (being unbiased and impartial) but for objectivity in the sense that calling another person’s judgement objective implies you have the same objective (or objectives), that you are working towards the same goal (Altman, 1987, p. 8). The target of genre study shouldn’t be to convey a true representation of what the genre is, but to present a version of the genre which is useful in multiple contexts and (potentially) for multiple people.

⁵ The interpretive community, according to Altman, is the fourth element in the process of making meaning of a text alongside author, text and audience, and can be summarized as the context in which the text’s meaning is created. With a generic classification placing the text in a particular context, a context consisting of the intertexts of the same generic affiliation, the interpretive community is made obsolete.

Hence, establishing the set of intertexts to which the text relates, in other words defining its genre and ascertaining that genre's corpus, becomes a vital part of any self-conscious generically oriented analysis: "The constitution of a corpus comprises one of the genre critic's most important tasks" (Altman, 1987, p. 13). The process of creating a corpus starts by assuming the most inclusive definition of the genre, in my case any program broadcast on television and streaming which contain musical numbers (meaning sequences in which a character appears to be performing to music). This preliminary corpus, as Altman calls it, will then be reduced through analysis until the critic is left only with those texts which correspond to their specific definition of the genre; a revised corpus (Altman, 1987, p. 13). Though the entire preliminary corpus with which I started will not be stated, the most controversial exclusions, those series which most often would be thought of as a "TV musicals" but by my definition are not, will be used as examples so as to prove that they were, in fact, considered.

In defining a corpus, Altman stresses the difference between a semantic approach (focusing on "the genre's building blocks") and a syntactic one (focusing on "the structures into which [the building blocks] are arranged") (Altman, 1987, p. 95). In defining my genre I will exclusively concern myself with semantic elements, ignoring the syntax for two reasons: For one, the TV musical genre contains so few texts that identifying over-arching structures shared by a majority of them is quite difficult,⁶ but maybe more importantly I will consider syntactic elements such as the integration of plot and music in my later canonization of the genre so there is no need to make exclusions on this basis already now. If there are series which have syntactic elements contradictory to what a musical is and should be, that will be considered a negative factor when evaluating the series, most likely leading to its exclusion from the final canon anyway.

3 Defining the TV musical

3.1 Initial specifications

Thus, we've arrived at the first important task of this thesis: accurately defining the TV musical genre. Before I can get to that, though, I first need to assert three stipulations about the genre herein considered, three groups of texts which might be implied by the term "TV musical" but

⁶ This is especially true because the series to a very small degree relate to each other. There are two notable exceptions (*Cop Rock* and *Blackpool*) which explicitly showcase the legacy of Dennis Potter's musicals, but aside from those the series seem more inspired by and affiliated with other genres such as the film musical, the theatre musical and the TV drama than each other.

which will not be discussed. The first stipulation is one of language: All musical TV series analyzed in this thesis primarily (and usually only) use the English language. This is due to two main factors: Firstly, it would be an enormous chore to identify all the relevant series without this restriction. Secondly, even if I were able to track down and watch every single example from the entire world, my analysis would be significantly less informed due to not understanding the language, especially when talking about lyrical matters. This would inevitably lead to inclusions to and exclusions from the final canon based on faulty, and hard to defend, analysis. Therefore, the choice to only feature English-language series, a language I speak fluently and which is spoken in a large amount of TV series (and thus TV musicals), was made both to make the thesis more feasible and of (probably) higher quality.

The second stipulation is that only live action TV series will be included, excluding animated TV series from the corpus. The reasoning behind this is that animated series have quite a different relationship to musical numbers. This is due to multiple conditions inherent to animation, but I want to highlight one especially: Because of the shows' animated nature, there is an element of unreality which contributes to the occasional musical number not being quite as jarring as it would in a live action series. Thus, shows such as *Big Mouth* (2017-) and *South Park* (1997-) frequently incorporate musical numbers, but they aren't really considered musicals. This grey area, combined with the fact that there are no clear cut and important animated TV musicals (for example there is, perhaps surprisingly, no TV series that has attempted to replicate the Disney brand of animated musicals), led to the decision to limit the genre to live action shows.

Finally, we have the stipulation that series must be adult-oriented, that is, aimed toward an adult demographic. This is to exclude children's TV shows which feature musical numbers, as well as teen shows of the same category.⁷ In some ways, this is a head start on the evaluative criticism I will later rely on: Very few TV shows not geared toward adults are generally considered to be of great artistic value. Including these shows would have expanded the preliminary corpus massively but would probably have little or no impact on the final canon.

⁷ Teen shows are here defined as shows which almost exclusively appeal to a (pre-)teen demographic. This precludes, for instance, the vast majority of Disney Channel series from being included, but not *Hull High* or *Rags to Riches* which devote a more considerable portion of their runtime to adult characters and issues.

3.2 Further semantic definition

Having now made the necessary initial delimitations to the genre, time has come to state the semantic requirements any series has to fulfill in order to be considered a musical TV series. Each condition will be accompanied by examples of the most prominent shows, or types of shows, it removes from consideration. The first, and perhaps most obvious one, is that the musical TV genre is a narrative one, corresponding to Altman's identical assertion about the film musical (Altman, 1987, p. 102). This serves to exclude variety shows with musical elements such as *Saturday Night Live* (1975-) and *Hee Haw* (1969-1997). The next condition is tied to the "TV series" part of the genre, and a partial equivalent to Altman's requirement of length (Altman, 1987, p. 103). In this case TV series is descriptive of the format, not the broadcasting nature of the show. That means the series don't have to actually air on television (because this would automatically exclude those released by, and on, Internet streaming services), but they do have to conform to generic traits of the TV series (such as a structure consisting of episodes and seasons if they get to/want to continue). Another implication of this term is that I view each TV series as one entity. This becomes particularly relevant when, in the evaluative part of this thesis, I analyze series which decline in quality. These series, then, cannot be defended simply by saying "but if you only consider season two, the series *must* be said to have value". Each series is judged on the basis of every accessible episode.

Here we encounter one series which finds itself in a kind of grey area: *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* (2008), which was touted as a web series when it released and consists of three episodes. However, three short episodes, totaling a runtime of 45 minutes, is too short to be considered a TV series. It is more akin to a film (although not even long enough to be considered a feature film), with each episode corresponding to one act. For context, even the mini-series of Dennis Potter have a run-time of over 6 hours each, so it's safe to say that, enjoyable as it is, *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* is not in the same ballpark as the series I do include in the revised corpus⁸ and is thus excluded.

3.2.1 Defining "musical"

Now we arrive at the most important semantic requirements, those pertaining to the denomination of "musical": What separates a musical TV series (as in a series which contains

⁸ With the notable exception of *Shangri-La Plaza*, which was never ordered to series and thus is only a pilot. The intention was for it to be a full-fledged series, which to me justifies its inclusion.

musical numbers in any form) from a *musical* TV series (as in a series belonging to the musical genre)?⁹ There are several distinctions to be made between these categories, starting with the frequency of musical numbers. Is it fair to call *Scrubs* a musical series because one of its episodes is a musical one? How about *Community*, which amassed 3 such episodes throughout its run? These still have a vast majority of non-musical episodes, so their denomination would be “TV series containing musical episodes”. But there are shows which tread closer to the line: a majority of the episodes of *Eli Stone*, for instance, contain at least one musical number, but there are still several which contain none. I am wary of drawing an arbitrary line for what amount of musical numbers makes a series a musical and prefer to make judgements on a case-by-case basis as an arbitrary call could ignore important nuances, but I will state a base-line for a series to even enter into consideration: The series need to have at least one musical number in an *overwhelming* majority of its episodes, and most of these episodes must contain one musical number per half hour.

This is still quite arbitrary, but leaves some room for interpretation in unique cases and will hopefully seem justified following an explanation. The wording “overwhelming majority”, while subjective, ensures that a series consistently is a musical and would be considered as such by almost anyone. The stipulation of temporal frequency is made on the following basis, drawing examples from the film industry: There exists films which contain a few musical numbers, but would never be considered musicals (neither by audiences, critics nor the industry itself). Examples include *Cleo from 5 to 7* (1962), wherein there is a sort of interlude in the middle in which the main character performs a song, *Marriage Story* (2019), which features two songs from Sondheim’s musical *Company* in the latter part of the film, and *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* (2004), in which Ron, Brian, Brick and Champ sing a barbershop version of “Afternoon Delight”. However, as soon as a film reaches three musical numbers, or one song per 30 minutes assuming a standard feature film length of 90 minutes, there will originate claims the film is indeed a musical, such as with *Enchanted* (2007). To also back this up with an example from the TV world: The *How I Met Your Mother*-episode “Girls vs. Suits” features one musical number (in a 20-minute episode) but is never referred to as a musical episode.

⁹ This first meaning of “musical” is only used here for contrast, whenever else I refer to a musical I mean it as in belonging to the musical genre.

However, there is still more delimitation to be done to the genre. Because the definition of musical numbers (any performance which appears diegetic) still includes those shows which are merely *about* music without being, in any interesting or even meaningful definition of the word, a musical, there needs to be a final semantic requirement: The musical numbers have to originate from an alternative diegesis. To fully argue for and explain this, I will need to go on a tangent about the nature of the musical in the perspective of fictional worlds, diegesis and realism.

3.2.2 Fictional worlds

First of all, I'll introduce the concept of fictional worlds, a term borrowed from Larry Brown (Brown, 2018) and Mark J. P. Wolf (Wolf, 2018). A fictional world is a whole and enclosed place, or multitude of places, with its own layout and rules. The different fictional worlds comprise the story's universe (Engelstad, 2015, p. 121). There are many ways to denominate these worlds, but the terminology I will operate with here is an amalgamation of Wolf and Engelstad: The primary world is "the world we live in" (Wolf, 2018, p. 67), making the main storyworld the secondary world (the fictional universe's primary world, if you will¹⁰).

Alternative (or parallel) worlds, then, are worlds within the fictional universe that differ from the secondary world in terms of layout or, more importantly, rules. What I will try to argue here is that every true musical contains an alternative world which in some way permits the characters to sing, dance and/or play instruments in a way the primary world does not.

3.2.3 Alternative diegesis

And thus, the concept of alternative diegesis is born. Altman defines the diegesis as "the fictional world created by the film" (Altman, 1987, p. 12). The alternative diegesis, then, is an alternative fictional world created by the film (or, in this case, TV series). Another way to look at this would be to consider diegesis what you were to see, hear and experience if you were to enter the series' universe, whilst the alternative diegesis is what the audience, and usually at least *some* of the characters, perceive. An important thing to note here, which I will expand upon later, is that the mere existence of musical numbers in an alternative fictional world does not automatically qualify a series as a musical; The fictional world needs to differ from the primary world in the rules pertaining to musical performance.

¹⁰ To avoid confusion I will hereafter only refer to the real world as the primary world, and main worlds of a fictional universe as secondary worlds.

The alternative diegesis can be handled in a multitude of ways: Some shows make it explicit (such as in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, where the musical numbers (to some extent) are explained as the main character imagining her life as a musical or *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist* establishing a mishap during an MRI scan leading to Zoey hearing people sing their heart's desire to her), but most of the musicals don't attempt to justify or explain the existence of their alternative world. This doesn't necessarily mean that they don't justify their characters singing: in many of the numbers in *Glee*, for instance, it makes sense for the characters to perform, but it does not make sense for them to perform in the way they do. There is often background music with no established diegetic source, and the fact that the students frequently know the choreography and harmonies to songs they have never heard before is a form of exaggerated diegesis so unrealistic that it qualifies as an alternative world.

3.2.4 Realism

This brings me to the final point of this tangent: musicals and realism. The point I want to get across here, is that unreality is such a vital part of the musical that the presence of an alternative world, an unreal diegesis, is the main thing that separates the musical from the almost-musical (as in a series which features diegetic music but lacks the alternative diegesis to be an actual musical).

First, there is again some terminology in need of clarification. Realism is a vast movement, and the term carries multiple different implications (Taylor describes it as “a less extreme form of naturalism” and “the portrayal of life with fidelity” (Taylor, 2012, p. 142), in other words art as truthful representation of life, but not art as life). The aspect of realism most relevant to this definition of the musical is the concept of verisimilitude. Verisimilitude is most easily explained through the lens of fictional worlds: The assumption when watching any TV series is that the universe presented has an equal set of rules and characteristics to our own, until those rules are broken in some way. In other words, verisimilitude is the level of identification the audience experiences toward the universe, whether or not it seems real, seems like its laws and events correspond to the possibilities of our world; whether the secondary world matches the primary world. Most TV musicals (indeed most TV series) rely on verisimilitude to create the illusion of realism, and rarely try to ascertain their story's universe as one drastically different from the real world. That is, until the characters start to sing.

Steven Cohan writes about this violation of verisimilitude in musicals, pointing out that even in backstage musicals in which the musical numbers seem diegetically justified they are often in some way unreal: “The numbers’ treatment as filmed and edited usually does something “impossible” to the narrative’s otherwise more realistic sense of cinematic space” (Cohan, 2020, p. 5). Though Cohan seems less convinced that *this* is what makes a film a musical, he does seem to agree that the existence of an alternative (and by nature impossible) diegesis at the very least is an integral part of the musical genre. Another factor which speaks for the musical as generically opposed to absolute verisimilitude is its historic perception: The musical has usually been viewed as an escapist genre, with the intention of distracting the audience from their lives (an abject contrast to the intention of realism). Although this is an unfairly simplistic and reductive view of the genre as a whole, there is definitely truth to the musicals numbers often having that function, even if the film/series/play does not. It is also arguable that TV musicals are less escapist than their cinematic counterparts, but this doesn’t weaken the argument: It just makes the dichotomy of musicality and realism and the contrast between verisimilitude and impossibility even more pronounced.

3.3 Consequences

In order to conclude this definition of the musical genre, I will present my reasoning for these final restrictions, as well as examples of series affected by them. The main objective for these specific delimitations was to exclude series which are not, and should never be considered as, musicals, but contain enough music that the initial, broad definition included them. These shows are usually about performers of some kind, but the way in which they use their musical numbers (in most cases without a clear narrative function) and the totality of the series mean these shows have very little in common, on both a semantic and syntactic level, with the series which definitely are musicals, in every definition of the word. The easiest way to ensure their exclusion (and the way most in tune with what I believe does, and should, constitute a musical) was to introduce the concept of alternative diegesis as an absolutely necessary factor in order for a series to move on from the preliminary corpus to the revised one. The list of shows purposefully and successfully excluded due to this includes (but is not limited to) *The Monkees* (1966-1968), *Fame* (1982-1987), *Empire* (2015-), *The Get Down* (2016-2017) and *Star* (2016-2019).

These restrictions also, however, brought some consequences that I didn’t necessarily foresee, and which could put into jeopardy the integrity of this thesis were they not to be addressed. One

of these is the exclusion of the series *Perfect Harmony* (2020). On the surface, *Perfect Harmony* seems like a Christian take on *Glee* (which, spoiler alert, made the revised corpus): They are both shows about a show choir consisting of outcasts and misfits which gets a new instructor in the first episode, they both start out as underdogs but steadily work their way toward success through sheer determination, personal improvement, and heaps of previously undiscovered talent. However, the most obvious and important difference between the two, and the factor which (in my opinion justly) prevents *Perfect Harmony* from being considered an actual musical, is the existence of an alternative diegesis. In both cases most of the performances are diegetically justified (it makes sense that they are performing; anyone in their fictional universe would be able to hear/see them perform), but *Perfect* almost never transcends reality. Whenever someone performs in the series, all the instruments the audience hears is visually present, and the performers for the most part perform to a standard not impossible for a church choir. This is in stark contrast to *Glee*, wherein (as previously touched upon) there is unexplained background music, costume changes which make no sense, and a level of musical achievement which is entirely unrealistic. A somewhat common reading of *Glee* is that the audience hears what the performers imagine themselves to sound/look like (though this is never made clear), which corresponds with the presence of an alternative fictional world. In any case, the difference is clear: Most of the musical numbers in *Glee* transport the audience to an alternative fictional world with its own alternative diegesis; Most of the musical numbers in *Perfect Harmony* do not.

The next case I will examine is more nuanced, and a less straight-forward decision to make. This pertains to the three series and their relation to both alternative diegesis and the limits for how many musical numbers are required to make a series a musical. The shows in question are *The Singing Detective* (1986), *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002) and *Eli Stone* (2008-2009), starting in the chronological middle.

3.3.1 *Ally McBeal*

Ally McBeal, on the surface, does not seem much like a musical series, but is occasionally referred to as such due to the sheer number of performances in the show. In fact, there is a character which has no other function than to perform songs in the bar the characters go to after work. These songs are often thematically relevant and chosen to fit the narrative, but they are not consequently part of an alternative diegesis. However, there is definitely an alternative diegesis present in the series: Ally's fantasy sequences. These sequences are often presented to the

audience as part of the fictional world, but their impossibilities compared to the usual rules of the universe reveal them to be of an alternative nature. This alternative diegesis being a part of the show obviously doesn't in itself make it a musical, but there are several cases of the fantasy sequences containing a musical element or intersecting with musical performances in the bar. This presents a problem, because an implication of the concept of alternative diegesis as a musical benchmark is that the alternative diegesis is created for (or by) the musical numbers specifically (though not necessarily exclusively). However, this is not quite correct. The only prerequisite for the alternative world to qualify as an alternative diegesis is that the rules of the world in some way differs from the primary world when it comes to musical performance, which is the case in *Ally* (though it's not utilized very often). Thus, the series is excluded due to the frequency; There is nowhere near one alternatively diegetic musical number per 30 minutes.

3.3.2 *Eli Stone*

Where *Ally* for the most part separates its musical numbers from its alternative diegesis, *Eli Stone* does not, making it a more complicated case. The alternative diegesis is quite similar to that of *Ally*, but instead of straight-forward fantasy sequences they are visions that Eli are having due to a brain aneurysm. These visions are quite often musical in nature, but they are just as often not. The vital part, though, is that this alternative diegesis has its own set of rules, allowing Eli to time travel, see things he was not present for, and hear people sing even when they don't. This provides us with another example of an alternative world which is not exclusively created for musical numbers but nevertheless counts as an alternative diegesis because its musical ruleset is different to the primary world's. In the end, though, *Eli Stone* is excluded because of its infrequent musical numbers.

3.3.3 *The Singing Detective*

Although these two series weren't too far from making the cut and therefore may have justified an explanation in their own right, my main motivation for using them as examples was to establish the precedent before tackling the final two shows I will elaborate on in this section, the first of which being Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective* (1986). The secondary world of this series, the place where most of the narrative plays out, is the hospital where Philip Marlowe is admitted with psoriatic arthropathy, a skin disease from which Dennis Potter himself suffered. Additionally, there are two alternative worlds present throughout the series: The world of the singing detective (a book Marlowe has written and is working on rewriting), and the world of

Marlowe's childhood which is shown in flashbacks. These three worlds each represent one thread of narrative, which is (thematically and/or physically) interwoven to form Marlowe's journey of (re)discovery of who he is and why (as well as the more literal plotline of his healing, but this is closely tied to his mental and personal development).

However, there is another alternative world, one in which characters, with no apparent diegetic justification, lip-sync to music. Examples of this include the version of "Dry Bones" seemingly performed by the hospital's doctors and nurses in the first episode, the other patients and a nurse lip-syncing to "You Always Hurt The One You Love" in episode five, and the scarecrow seeming to sing "After You've Gone" in the series finale. This alternative world is never explicitly explained; It's never made clear whether this is just part of Marlowe's fantasy, though it is hinted at. It's also worth noting that these numbers can originate in (and sometimes cross over between) any of the three alternative worlds in the narrative (occasionally with the performance being justified in one world, but not in another). So based on this information, it seems easy enough to label *The Singing Detective* a musical and move on, but I have not yet accounted for the frequency of these numbers. The six episodes in total contain only eight musical numbers in this specific alternative world (one in each of the first five and three in the final episode), and with a runtime of one hour per episode the average is far less than one per 30 minutes, as was my requirement. Thus, it should be automatically excluded due to a lack of numbers, right?

Not quite so. Just like in *Eli Stone* and *Ally McBeal*, there exist alternative worlds which are *occasionally* musical in nature. In the alternative world of the singing detective there are multiple musical numbers performed by the detective because his other occupation is singing at a dance hall, like "Cruising Down The River" in "Heat" and "Paper Doll" in the beginning of "Lovely Days". In the flashbacks to Marlowe's childhood we get to see his father singing a few times, as well as diegetic music in the form of records being played and Marlowe and his classmates singing songs at the behest of their teacher. However, there is an important distinction to be made here: Where the alternative diegesis of *Eli* and *Ally* were consistently illogical and didn't adhere to principles of verisimilitude, *The Singing Detective's* does (except for the aforementioned unjustified songs). In other words: These alternative worlds do, in the same way as the secondary world, correspond to the expectation of realism, they have a seemingly identical

ruleset to the primary world, and these musical numbers do not break with that ruleset to enter the realm of the alternative diegesis present in “Dry Bones” and “After You’ve Gone”. My argument is that, because these specific worlds are developed and expanded upon, they are not alternative in the same way as the world in which we found completely unjustified performances. There are only two ways in which these alternative worlds break the rules of the primary world: Through the illogical musical numbers I mentioned (which by my previous definitions constitute a separate alternative world inside the alternative world), and by characters occasionally crossing over from one world to another as in the confrontation scene an hour into the final episode (which I would argue also creates a new fictional world (probably inside Marlowe’s mind) in which there are no rules which deny the travel between separate worlds). Thus, the justified musical numbers are located within an alternative world, but they do not utilize alternative diegesis because they take place in a world with no special rules regarding music.

Thus, it seems inevitable to exclude *The Singing Detective* from my revised corpus. To further back up this potentially controversial exclusion, I want to make some observations on its generic affiliation. Dennis Potter himself said that part of his objective with the series was “Playing with the conventions – the musical convention, the situation-comedy convention, the detective-story convention – in order to see what TV drama can do” (Carpenter, 1998, p. 433). Here, the author himself identifies the series as a TV drama first and foremost, with certain conventions from different genres (a stark contrast to his other arguable musicals *Pennies from Heaven* and *Lipstick on Your Collar* which are deeply immersed in the musical genre and features many, many more musical numbers of alternative diegeses). This does not preclude it from being a musical TV series – multiple of the series in my revised corpus has a different primary genre. However, it does seem to equate its musical nature with its detective-story nature and, most importantly, its sit-com nature. The scenes which are most clearly playing with sit-com conventions are the scenes between two of the patients, Reginald and Mr. Hall. The screen time of these scenes is quite substantial (probably more than the musical numbers, and certainly more than the musical numbers using an alternative diegesis). Would it, then, be right to call this series a sit-com? In my opinion (and most likely most people’s opinion), no. This is not to say that because it is not a sit-com it cannot be a musical either, but to demonstrate that just because a series plays with the conventions of a genre, it doesn’t *become* that genre. On the basis of all of this, I have reached the (unfortunate) conclusion that *The Singing Detective* is not, by my

definition, a musical TV series; It is, like *Ally McBeal* and *Eli Stone*, a drama series with occasional, but too infrequent, elements of the musical genre.

3.3.4 *Galavant*

The final series I want to examine in regard to the concept of alternative diegesis, is *Galavant* (2015-2016). In all the shows included in my definition, there are generally two takes on the alternative musical diegesis: Either it's explained, such as the aforementioned examples of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* and *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist*, or it's never addressed. In some cases it is hinted at that, for instance, the alternative diegesis is inside someone's mind, but aside from the examples of explicitly explained alternative worlds, the alternative diegeses of the musical numbers are not talked about. Except, of course, in *Galavant*.

Though other series make meta references to and joke about their musical numbers, it is always in an implicit manner (so that it is funny to the audience but doesn't actually prove that the characters know what they're a part of) or within the musical number (so that the meta reference itself is a part of the alternative diegesis). This is not the case in *Galavant*: on multiple occasions, the characters make references to the fact that they perform, even though they seem to be fully present in the show's primary universe. Some of the references take place right before or after a number and *could* be argued to be an extension of the number's alternative diegesis, but there are also times where they refer to their musicality far removed from any number (for example, Galavant proclaims that he "dreamt a really upsetting musical number" in episode 2 of the second season (referring to the "World's Best Kiss" duet he sang with Isabella), and the jester worries that Galavant's army missed his song, suggesting that "maybe we ask them to wait so I can run out and sing it again?" in episode 9 of the same season). Thus, it seems very hard to argue that there is a consistent alternative world, separate from the secondary world, in which all the musical numbers take place. Does this mean, then, that all the musical numbers not explicitly part of an alternative musical world should be excluded, just as the ones in *The Singing Detective* had to be? To answer this question, I'll have to analyze the fictional universe of *Galavant*, and how it corresponds to both our world and the fictional worlds of other TV series.

The secondary world, and in fact the whole fictional universe, of *Galavant* is not characterized by verisimilitude: The show is set in what seems to be an entirely made up universe¹¹. This is in stark contrast to every other series considered in this thesis: Although they do not, obviously, take place in our *actual* world, they seem to exist in a closely resembling version, making references to real places, people and events; the secondary world is an (almost) exact replica of the primary one. No such claim can be made about *Galavant*. There are certain vague references, such as the time being referred to as the middle ages and pre-renaissance, but there is nothing to suggest that it is based on *anything* real (the other shows' universes are at the very least in a specific country).

But even though the universe has very little specific in common with ours, it could still strive for a reasonably high degree of verisimilitude if at least the rules of the universe corresponded to ours. However, and vitally, they do not. Rules of the secondary world are important factors in arguing for alternative diegesis as a qualifying factor because in every single one of the series included in my preliminary corpus except for *Galavant* the secondary world operates with rules identical to the rules of our primary world. Therefore it's easy to contend that the musical numbers which break these rules are not, in fact, parts of the secondary world because there is nothing to suggest that the secondary world would allow for something the primary world does not. The musical numbers in *Cop Rock*, for example, are alternatively diegetic because the rest of the series is very realistic and true to the principles of real life (with the obvious exception of the final meta sequence, which is also part of an alternative fictional world halfway between our own and the show's). But in the secondary world of *Galavant* there exist dragons, hobbits and magic. What is there, then, to say that these musical numbers *aren't* part of the show's main diegesis, thus disqualifying them from the categorization of alternative diegesis? If you can communicate with a crystal ball, resuscitate a dead army and move anything by waving a wand, why can't you break into song accompanied by a seemingly absent orchestra and perform, unrehearsed, an elaborate song and dance?

Given this, there are three ways in which to interpret the musical numbers' relation to the fictional world: One reading is that the musical numbers belong to an entirely own diegesis

¹¹ Although all fictional universes are made up, they are often (and in this context aside from *Galavant* always) based on the real universe.

(meaning that if you were present in the universe of *Galavant* you would not be able to hear/see the performances as they exist solely for the audience and sometimes certain characters). A second is that the musical numbers are examples of exaggerated diegesis (meaning that in this universe it is normal for people to break into song, but what the audience hears is a more polished version with more stellar musical performance and the presence of background music which is not diegetically justified. This still counts as an alternative diegesis, akin to many of *Glee*'s numbers, and would qualify the series as a musical but would exclude certain of the numbers which make complete sense diegetically such as "Hey, Hey, We're The Monks"). A third interpretation is that all the numbers are entirely diegetic (meaning the universe is one which allows for people to perform musical numbers perfectly without preparation and with unsourced background music). The latter interpretation is the one which would make it hardest to conclude that *Galavant* is in fact a musical because there is no presence of an alternative world for the musical numbers to utilize an alternative diegesis. However, I would argue that because this universe has a ruleset which so drastically changes the potential for someone to perform musically, the entire universe qualifies to be considered an alternative world, and the musical numbers are thus part of an alternative diegesis. This suggests that the alternative diegesis that has to be present for a show to be classified as a musical is not an alternative to the series' main world (the secondary world) but to the real world (the primary world). This distinction will not be of further importance to this thesis because in the case of every show except for *Galavant* the secondary world is virtually indistinguishable from the primary one, but if I (or someone else) were to apply this definition of the musical to a different field it very well might be.¹²

3.4 Revised corpus

Thus, it seems that regardless of which of the three interpretations you go for, *Galavant*'s inclusion in the revised corpus seems justifiable.¹³ That also means that the first round of analyses, the one which would make my preliminary corpus into a revised one, is finished. Here

¹² This different field could be the film musical for instance, but the distinction would also be relevant if one were to examine the singular musical episodes of TV shows, because series such as *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* takes place in a universe quite different from ours and are examples of shows with standalone musical episodes.

¹³ For the record, I find the second interpretation (that the musical numbers are examples of exaggerated and thus alternative) to be most logical, but as it won't be relevant for the rest of the thesis I won't elaborate on exactly why.

is the corpus of series which fit my definition of the TV musical genre, the series I will be proceeding with and convert into an evaluative canon:

That's Life (ABC, 1968-1969)

Pennies from Heaven (BBC, 1978)

Rags to Riches (NBC, 1987-1988)

Cop Rock (ABC, 1990)

Hull High (NBC, 1990)

Shangri-La Plaza (CBS, 1990)

Lipstick on Your Collar (Channel 4, 1993)

Blackpool (BBC, 2004)

Viva Laughlin (CBS, 2007)

Flight of the Conchords (HBO, 2007-2009)

Glee (Fox, 2009-2015)

Smash (NBC, 2012-2013)

Garfunkel and Oates (IFC, 2014)

Galavant (ABC, 2015-2016)

Crazy Ex-Girlfriend (The CW, 2015-2019)

I Ship It (2019)

Soundtrack (Netflix, 2019)

Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist (NBC, 2020-)

4 Historical summary

What follows is a short overview over the series featured in my revised corpus. The intent of this section is not to analyze the series as this will be done later, but simply to establish the most

basic information about each series, such as their plot, approach to the musical genre, and success¹⁴ so that this will not have to be mentioned when analyzing them in detail later.

4.1 *That's Life*

The history of musical TV series (as per my definition) begins in 1968, when ABC launched *That's Life*. This series was conceived as an attempt to bring the Broadway scene to homes all across The US via the television, and would half-way succeed: “When *That's Life* is good, it is very, very good – good enough to pay money for on Broadway,” writes TV critic Cleveland Amory, “and even when it's bad, it's never, never horrid” (Hadley, 2019). However, it did not succeed in reaching the desired proportion of American homes and was eventually cancelled.

While it was on the air, *That's Life* was a daring and innovative show starring Robert Morse and E. J. Peaker as a young couple which we get to see meet, fall in love and get married over the course of the series. Usually, episodes would feature a musical guest (akin to a variety show, though the songs performed were often integrated into the narrative¹⁵), as well as notable guest actors such as Liza Minnelli, Goldie Hawn and Rodney Dangerfield. As this was the first narrative musical TV show, it would seem a probable inclusion in any evaluative canon which values innovation (as mine does), however there is an important, and unfortunate, caveat when it comes to the evaluation of *That's Life*: It is seemingly unobtainable. The company which holds the distribution rights was kind enough to provide a free sample of the first episode of the series but has remained evasive to enquiries about the rest. A show only having one episode available for perusal does not, in itself, exclude it from evaluation (as *Shangri-La Plaza* will prove), but when that one episode comprises less than 4% of the series' complete run, any analysis would be devoid of merit. Thus, *That's Life* will have to be excluded on a technicality, but if it's ever made available in its entirety this would have to be revised, and the show could be made a part of the canon.

4.2 *Pennies from Heaven*

For the next installment in the TV musical corpus, the journey goes to England, and back to the ingenuity of one Dennis Potter. Even though I excluded *The Singing Detective*, Potter is left with

¹⁴ Success is here whether people watched it and whether the series got renewed or cancelled, saying nothing about its artistic success.

¹⁵ Integrated is here used in the literal sense, meaning the musical numbers were part of the narrative, not necessarily in the sense I will use the term later (meaning that the musical numbers and the rest of the narrative work towards the same end).

two entries in the revised corpus, the first of which is *Pennies from Heaven*. Following in his tradition of writing long-form plays for television, *Pennies* is a six-part mini-series which takes place in England during the depression and features songs from that era to which the characters lip-sync. On why he picked the thirties, Potter said this: “Because the music was, perhaps, at its most banal and its most sugary, least challenging – and yet it also encapsulates, somehow, some diminished image of the human desire for there to be a perfect and beautiful and just world” (Carpenter, 1998, p. 350). The songs themselves were written as escapism for a struggling population, just as numerous musicals use *their* songs – and just as *Pennies* uses them.

Even though all the songs featured are recordings of existing songs, Potter wanted them to appear “as though it had been written for just that occasion ... as though I *had* written the song” (Carpenter, 1998, p. 349), making the job of finding the right songs a time-consuming task. The first musical number of the series, “The Clouds Will Soon Roll By” performed by Elsie Carlisle, served to establish the illogical nature of the musical genre right away (Potter claimed he wanted “As much dislocation from the conventional as possible in the first scene” upon being presented with the option of using a performance by a male singer (Carpenter, 1998, p. 346)), but also serves to give us an immediate glimpse into the mind of the main character, Arthur Parker (Bob Hoskins). Arthur is a sheet music salesman trapped in a marriage with a woman completely disinterested in a physical relationship: Already in the first scene Arthur propositions sex, only for his wife Joan to promptly turn him down, leading Arthur to exclaim “You never want to nowadays...”). Arthur himself, on the other hand, rarely seems to think of anything besides sex, and falls in love with beautiful women on sight. The two most relevant objects of his affection are Eileen, a school teacher with whom he falls in love and gets pregnant (leading her to move to London to be with him, only to be forced into prostitution in order to make a living), and a blind girl whose murder Arthur gets accused of, leading him and Eileen to go on the lam in the latter part of the series. To this day, *Pennies from Heaven* is considered a highlight of Dennis Potter’s oeuvre, and it was also lauded by critics upon release (Carpenter, 1998, pp. 369-371).

4.3 *Rags to Riches*

The next entry in my revised corpus is *Rags to Riches*. The show, akin to Potter’s entries, is a period piece, set in the 60’s (and aired on NBC in the late 80’s). In the pilot (which doubled as a TV movie) we meet Nick (Joseph Bologna), a rich bachelor who temporarily adopts six orphaned girls for PR purposes, but ends up growing attached to them and adopting them

permanently (though the number of girls went down to five from the pilot to the second episode). Throughout its run, it utilized the period setting to incorporate 60s hits into the narrative, but with a caveat: The lyrics were altered to better fit the situation (something no other series does; All the others either write their own songs, or use exact versions of existing ones). Unlike the other American TV musicals around this time, *Rags to Riches* was successful enough to get renewed, but not successful enough to get to finish the second season prior to its cancellation.

4.4 *Shangri-La Plaza*

Two years after the cancellation of *Rags to Riches*, there arrived somewhat of a wave of TV musicals to the American television landscape. In 1990 the three biggest broadcast network channels would each try their hand at the concept, each failing spectacularly: CBS with *Shangri-La Plaza*, NBC with *Hull High* and ABC with *Cop Rock*. The first, and least successful, of the three was *Shangri-La Plaza*. This was a pilot which never got picked up to series but was aired nonetheless in the summer of 1990. Written by director of *The Last Starfighter* (1984) and face of the *Halloween*-franchise Nick Castle, it featured Jeff Yagher and Broadway star Terrence Mann as two brothers running a car repair shop in a mini mall, Melora Hardin (of eventual *The Office*-fame) and Allison Mack (known for her role as a mother and daughter who has inherited a donut shop from their deceased ex-husband/father in the same mini mall, jazz-singer Carmen Lundy as an employee of said donut shop, and Savion Glover (at the time one of the world's most prominent tap-dancers, a talent he sadly couldn't showcase as he broke his leg prior to shooting and dances on crutches with his leg in a cast throughout the episode) as a parking attendant and part of a three-person dancing crew, all of whom almost constantly express their thoughts and feelings through song and dance. However fantastic this does sound (and, frankly, is), CBS did not deem it worthy of a series order, forever leaving it as a tragic what-if (if not for the general population then, at the very least, for me personally).

4.5 *Hull High*

Second, we have *Hull High*, a high school drama series which features a rapping Greek Chorus consisting of mostly African-American performers (as Feuer points out, a convenient way to avoid any of them being part of the show's actual narrative, as the performers did not interact directly with the action and was there solely to narrate the episodes and commentate on the action (Feuer, 1993)). Although this show *did* make it to series, it was pulled off the air before the end of the first season because it failed to garner a large enough audience. It is hard to

ascertain whether its eventual failure was due to its musical nature or because of the quality of its other elements (none of which are particularly memorable, groundbreaking or interesting). It was at least more likely for it to be judged as a regular series than, say, *Cop Rock* and *Shangri-La Plaza*, as the musical numbers were constrained to a short intro and/or outro (and the intro often blends into the title sequence, thereby maybe not appearing quite as jarring as regular numbers) plus one or two regular, alternatively diegetic, musical numbers (compared to *Cop Rock's* five numbers per episode and *Shangri-La Plaza's* ten).

4.6 *Cop Rock*

That brings us to the final of the broadcast network trilogy of TV musicals, and the most (in)famous of the three: *Cop Rock*. *Cop Rock* was the byproduct of Steven Bochco penning an overall deal with ABC for a certain amount of shows, leaving him with almost unprecedented freedom. Coming off the success of shows like *Hill Street Blues* (1981-1987) and *L.A. Law* (1986-1994) which greatly contributed to the development of their respective genres, he wanted to do something groundbreaking and a lot riskier. There were two important factors which made him decide to try his hand at merging the cop show with the musical: He was a big fan of *The Singing Detective* (though Dennis Potter seemed unimpressed by the apparent homage, labeling it plagiarism (Carpenter, 1998, p. 518)), and he had previously been proposed a musical theatre adaptation of *Hill Street Blues*, an idea which intrigued him even if it turned out to be unfeasible. “When I finally had this 10-episode commitment from ABC ... let’s be bold, let’s take some chances,” Bochco states in an interview. “I thought, well, if I can’t take a cop show to Broadway, what if I bring Broadway to a cop show” (Bochco, 2017).

One important thing separates *Cop Rock* from Potter’s series, however: Bochco wanted the music to be written specifically for the show. So, determined to make this idea a reality, he approached two important people: Mike Post, who had composed the music for many of his other shows and would serve as composer and head of the music department throughout *Cop Rock*, and Randy Newman, who would write the songs for the pilot in order to ensure that the series was off to a flying start musically speaking. Then, an appointed song-writing team would write the five required songs for the rest of the episode. This ambitious approach seems to be part of *Cop Rock's* undoing; Writing five songs per episode on a television schedule where time is very limited proved a major challenge. This led to an inevitable drop in musical quality through the series’ run, as they no longer had Randy Newman to spearhead the songwriting, and time

became more and more limited. The show's musical nature also meant they had to decide whether they should focus on musical talent or acting talent when casting. In order to make it feel like a musical Bochco wanted to prioritize the former, and the overall acting quality was subsequently diminished (Bochco, 2017). In the end, the audience immediately rejected the idea of a police musical TV series. The uncompromising approach (never waiving on the amount of musical numbers even when explicitly told they could continue the series if they removed the musical element, and establishing its musical nature persistently and very early on in the first episode (akin to Potter's *Pennies from Heaven*)) only hastened *Cop Rock*'s downfall, and the series was cancelled after eleven episodes, thus ending The US' TV channels' first collective love affair with the TV musical, a concept they would refrain from flirting with for many, many years after.

4.7 *Lipstick on Your Collar*

However, in Britain Dennis Potter still had the required clout, success and talent to do whatever he wanted, and in 1993 he returned to the musical format with *Lipstick on Your Collar*. Again a period piece, *Lipstick* was set in the 50's and featured numerous songs from that decade. The show chronicles the events of a foreign affairs office during the Suez Crisis of 1956, though the main focus is on the characters, their feelings and their relationships. In terms of musical numbers it marked a return to the approach of *Pennies*, with almost all the songs taking place in an alternative diegesis (often hinted to as being the fantasy of Mick (Ewan McGregor)), however the number of musical numbers is nowhere near as high (*Pennies* features 53, *Lipstick* 19).

The reception of *Lipstick* was nowhere near as positive as Potter's previous musicals. Some dismissed it as being another gratuitous peep show from "Dirty Den" (a nickname Potter's detractors used to disparage the works of his which tackles the subject of sexuality and featured any explicit nudity whatsoever), others just didn't find it interesting and called it bland, but the main criticism of *Lipstick* seems to be that it wasn't Potter at his very best (Carpenter, 1998). This could be due to its tumultuous production; Potter himself was supposed to direct it but was denied that opportunity last minute, leaving him so angered he considered sabotaging the production (Carpenter, 1998, p. 521). Of course he didn't and stayed on as creative producer, but it may have played a part in why *Lipstick* failed to reach the levels of his previous highs. However tepid the response to the series was, one thing remains clear: Even a sub-par Dennis Potter series belongs in the upper echelon of TV series.

4.8 *Blackpool*

Lipstick was Potter's final show in the musical TV genre as he died of pancreatic cancer in 1994, but his influence would contribute to another addition to the corpus ten years later: *Blackpool*.

¹⁶This series followed in the footsteps of Potter's, utilizing lip-synced musical numbers as a contrast to the stark social realism of the narrative. *Blackpool* follows Ripley Holden (David Morrissey), a casino owner who becomes the primary suspect of murder after a body is discovered in his casino, and Peter Carlisle (David Tennant), the detective in charge of the investigation who falls in love with Ripley's wife. Though the approach is similar to Potter's works, there are two distinctions to be made: For one, *Blackpool* is set to the present, and utilizes songs from many different periods instead of limiting itself to only one. Secondly, even though the songs are recordings played as the primary auditive source, one can also hear the actors singing, so it's not pure lip-sync as in *Pennies from Heaven*, *The Singing Detective* and *Lipstick on Your Collar*.

4.9 *Viva Laughlin*

Blackpool was a success by most metrics, and a worthy tribute to the Potter legacy. As was also the case with many of Potter's series (including *Pennies from Heaven* and *The Singing Detective* which were made into Hollywood movies), *Blackpool* was picked up for an American remake, and in 2007 *Viva Laughlin* premiered on CBS. However, it failed to replicate the success of its predecessor and was pulled off the air after only two episodes. Because the episodes have never since been made available, I have been unable to get my hands on them and must thus exclude *Viva Laughlin* from my canon on the same basis as *That's Life*. One could claim that because it performed so abysmally its quality wouldn't be sufficient to warrant inclusion anyway, but as we have seen (and will yet see), the number of viewers isn't the most reliable indicator of artistic merit.

4.10 *Flight of the Conchords*

For the next entry in my revised corpus, we'll venture into the land of premium cable for the first time with HBO's *Flight of the Conchords*. This was already the title of the New Zealand musical comedy duo consisting of Bret McKenzie and Jemaine Clement who star in the series as fictionalized versions of themselves trying to make it in New York as a band. The first season

¹⁶ Though a sequel to *Blackpool* titled *Viva Blackpool* was released in 2006, it is categorized as a standalone film and thus not considered part of the series.

features mostly pre-existing songs which the narrative is then written around, while for the second season they mostly had to come up with new songs, allowing them to write songs which fit the narrative instead of the other way around (but also leading to a drop in musical quality as they were drawing on one year's worth of songs instead of ten). After the second season the duo decided to end the show because it took up too much time and making it had "stopped being fun" (Itzkoff, 2016), despite receiving ten Primetime Emmy Award nominations.

4.11 *Glee*

Though *Flight of the Conchords* was a successful, if short-lived, series, it stands no chance measuring up to the next show (at least in terms of viewers). *Glee* was on the air for a remarkable six seasons, gaining a passionate following (self-labelled "Gleeks") and maintaining a steady viewership throughout the first four seasons before a rapid decline in the final two (though still maintaining more viewers than most of the other shows on this list). The series follows a high school glee club, led by Spanish teacher Will Schuester (Matthew Morrison), chronicling their tribulations inside and outside of the club. Other characters include just about any archetype you can think of: A surprisingly sensitive jock, a gay kid who struggles for acceptance, a sassy African-American girl with the voice of an angel, and an overachieving Jewish girl who expects too much from everyone (and even more from herself), to name a few. The glee club setting serves as justification for the characters singing, but as previously mentioned most of the numbers are alternatively diegetic, either because of background music with no source, costumes which come out of nowhere, background dancers who don't exist outside the number, or simply because the quality of the performance is so unrealistic that the only explanation is that it's not entirely real.

4.12 *Smash*

The success of *Glee* seemed to instill a renewed confidence in the networks that a TV musical series *could* work, and in 2012 NBC made another attempt with *Smash*. Though *Glee* and arguably *Flight and the Conchords* can be categorized as backstage musicals, *Smash* fits the definition in a more conventional way: Traditionally, the backstage musical is about someone staging one specific performance, which is the case in *Smash* but none of the others. The performance in question is a musical play about the life of Marilyn Monroe, and the show starts at the play's conception by writing duo Tom Levitt and Julia Houston (portrayed by Christian Borle and Debra Messing, respectively). Before the end of the first episode casting is underway

and establishes the main conflict of the first season: Who will play the part of Marilyn? Will it be Ivy Lynn (Megan Hilty), the experienced New Yorker with musical theatre in her blood, or Karen Cartwright (Katharine McPhee), fresh off the train from Iowa with an innocence more befitting of the role? *Smash* enjoyed decent ratings in its first season, but a steady decline in season 2 (where the storyline became much less focused, introducing a second play and multiple new characters) ultimately led to cancellation.

4.13 *Garfunkel and Oates*

Around the same time, HBO was seemingly looking for a replacement for *Flight of the Conchords*, ordering a pilot from the comedy duo Garfunkel and Oates (Riki Lindhome and Kate Micucci) (Littleton, 2011). They ultimately passed on the series, but IFC picked it up and aired an 8-episode season in 2014. The structure is strikingly similar to that of *Flight of the Conchords*: We follow slightly fictionalized versions of Lindhome and Micucci through comedy plots written to justify the inclusion of their pre-existing songs. There never came a second season, so there were even fewer songs written to fit the narrative (rather than the other way around) than in *Flight*, as they didn't run out of material.

4.14 *Galavant*

Then, in 2015, the two series initially responsible for awakening my interest in the concept of TV musicals premiered: *Galavant* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. The former is a medieval musical comedy series created by Dan Fogelman and music written by Broadway veterans Alan Menken and Glenn Slater, in which our hero (the titular Galavant, played by Joshua Sasse) sets out to rescue his one true love from the clutches of evil king Richard (Timothy Omundson). Though its ratings were sub-par for an ABC series, it was miraculously renewed for a second season but ended after that.

4.15 *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*

The latter is a musical dramedy from writer Aline Brosh McKenna (*The Devil Wears Prada*, *27 Dresses*) and Rachel Bloom. McKenna had discovered Bloom's YouTube channel which featured numerous parodic songs akin to both *Flight of the Conchords* and *Garfunkel and Oates*¹⁷ and approached her to collaborate. Unlike the previous examples, however, they decided to write all new songs for the series, so that the songs would exclusively serve the narrative and not the

¹⁷ The comedy duos, not the series.

other way around. The songwriting team was spearheaded by Bloom and the late Adam Schlesinger. A pilot was originally developed for Showtime, but after they declined the project it was picked up by The CW, where it aired for 4 seasons (the amount Bloom had planned since the beginning) despite low ratings (but with high critical acclaim).

4.16 *I Ship It*

Right as *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* was ending, The CW took a chance on another musical TV series, greenlighting an adaptation of the short-form web series *I Ship It*. This is a comedy about a woman who gets hired as a writer's assistant on her favorite show. It failed to even live up to the ratings of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, however, and was cancelled after only two episodes (with the remaining four episodes being released online).

4.17 *Soundtrack*

After *I Ship It* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* ended there was a period with no musical TV series airing, until *Soundtrack* was released on Netflix in December 2019, the first (and only) streaming series included in the revised corpus. Like *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, *Soundtrack* had originally developed a pilot (then titled *Mixtape*) for a different network than the one it aired on, but was picked up by Netflix after Fox declined to order it to series (Roots, 2018). The show is primarily centered around Sam (Paul James), who has a young son and is a recent widow, and Nellie (Callie Hernandez), who is dumped by her long-term boyfriend early on in the first episode. Initially these storylines seem to have no connection, but at the end of the first episode it is made clear that they occur at different times: Sam's recently deceased wife is revealed to be Nellie, and we see Nellie meet Sam for the first time in her perspective. The rest of the ten-episode season follows these separate storylines, showing us how they got to know each other and how Sam deals with losing her and raising their son on his own (as well as a bunch of peripheral stories about their family and friends). Musically, the series follows in the footsteps of Dennis Potter, with the characters frequently lip-syncing to contemporary songs, often accompanied by elaborate dance numbers. It was released virtually unannounced and barely promoted by Netflix (myself, I found out about it on accident months after its premiere) before quietly being cancelled a few weeks after premiering.

4.18 *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist*

Thus, we have arrived at the final series in the revised corpus, and the one most recently aired at the time of writing. *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist* premiered in January 2020 (though the second

episode didn't air until mid-February) on NBC. It features Jane Levy as Zoey, a woman who gains the power of hearing people express their inner feelings in song (a prime example of an explicitized alternative diegesis). The songs, while performed by the cast, are not originally written, but new recordings of popular songs. The series follows Zoey's home and work lives, mainly focusing on her could-be romantic relationships with two of her co-workers, and the struggle of slowly losing her father to a fatal debilitating neurological disease. The recently finished first season received generally favorable reviews, but there is still no word about whether it will return for a new season.

5 Methodology, part two

Before I can conduct the canonization itself, I again want to explain how, and why, I will do so. I continue with the qualitative approach of case studies, however the exact classification has changed: Whereas the previous section positioned the TV musical genre as the object of study, the thing about which I was to draw a conclusion, I will now be conducting case studies of the series established as my revised corpus. Thus, the cases are now multiple, meaning it is a multiple case study with multiple analytical entities. This distinction might seem trivial, but nonetheless warrants mentioning. Johannessen et al. summarizes the approach as gathering information about multiple entities within multiple contexts (Johannessen et al., 2016, p. 206), which is what I will be doing: I will be analyzing each series in the context of different aesthetic criteria, and eventually arrive at a conclusion regarding each series' value.

5.1 On aesthetic criticism

Aesthetics is the “branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, art and taste and with the creation and appreciation of beauty” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a). Aesthetic criticism, then, is the process of assessing aesthetic value. However, before I can start establishing the criteria of evaluation and start analyzing the individual series, I first have to ask: Can television be considered aesthetically valuable? Is this medium, traditionally dismissed as the medium of the masses and the antithesis of artistic merit, capable of producing not only art but *high* art, art which holds up in face of aesthetic evaluation and criticism, maybe even benefitting from it?¹⁸

¹⁸ Because of the vast difference in the TV landscape of Great Britain and The US from the very start, this section does not, to a particularly high degree, concern the works of Dennis Potter and *Blackpool*. Because British television drew inspiration from the world of theatre it had a much easier time being legitimated as an artform of comparable

5.2 Television's delegitimated reputation

In order to prove that it is, I first need to prove that the general consensus has been that it is not (because if television was always considered of high aesthetic value this section would probably not be necessary). Somewhat ironically, the easiest way to ascertain this is through looking at those series which subvert the expectation of TV as a lesser artform; or, more specifically, looking at their reception. This is because very often these series will be received, talked about and even marketed not as valuable *because* of their nature as TV series, but *despite* it. When *Friday Night Lights* premiered, the New York Times' critic had this to say about the series:

Lord, is "Friday Night Lights" good. In fact, if the season is anything like the pilot, this new drama about high school football could be great -- and not just television great, but great in the way of a poem or painting, great in the way of art with a single obsessive creator who doesn't have to consult with a committee and has months or years to go back and agonize over line breaks and the color red; it could belong in a league with art that doesn't have to pause for commercials, or casually recap the post-commercial action, or sell viewers on the plot and characters in the first five minutes, or hew to a line-item budget, or answer to unions and studios, or avoid four-letter words and nudity. (Heffernan, 2006)

This covers many of the reasons why TV series in general has been lackluster in aesthetic quality, why artistic ambition is often absent, but in doing so delegitimizes the entire medium. Examples can also be found from the side of the creators themselves: *Twin Peaks* was advertised as "TV too good for TV" (Newman & Levine, 2012, p. 49), David Chase asserted that he "didn't want [*The Sopranos*] to be a TV show" (Newman & Levine, 2012, p. 65), and HBO has based its identity in no small part on freeing itself from being labelled TV with its slogan "it's not TV, it's HBO". This demonstrates the pervasive belief which dominated for a long time, that "aesthetically valuable television" was a contradiction; the only recourse to prove a series' value seemed to be comparing it to other more aesthetically viable artforms. In other words, TV series

pedigree to cinema and theatre. This is showcased by *Pennies from Heaven* often being referred to as a play rather than a series, with Potter himself even asserting that it consists of six individual *plays*, not episodes.

which could be labelled high art were frequently treated as exceptions that proved the rule¹⁹ rather than examples of the medium's potential. Newman & Levine quotes David Thorburn to back up the critique of this conviction:

The Sopranos is not a film. It is a television series. It uses the strategies perfected over decades in daytime soaps and prime-time series. It draws on a tradition of visual mastery developed equally in the interior spaces and tight, compelling close-ups of soaps, sitcoms, and family melodramas and in the fluid editing and skill at framing action and exterior spaces for TV's small screen of the cop and private-eye shows. (Newman & Levine, 2012, p. 206)

Even more concretely than this, though, Newman & Levine list the following examples of common conceptions about television which has contributed to its delegitimation: they assert that the “casual dismissals of television as “chewing gum for the eyes,” or the “one-eyed babysitter,” make TV out to be an easy but unedifying and juvenile way of passing leisure time,” and that “its condemnation as “the opiate of the masses” bespeaks at once television's cultural centrality, its ideological narcotizing function as an escape from reality, and its appeal to lower classes rather than to elites” (Newman & Levine, 2012, pp. 32-33). In the face of this, it seems undeniable that TV for a considerable amount of time was viewed as a medium incapable of producing high art.

5.3 The legitimation of TV as art

Thus, having established that television was long dismissed as an artform, I can start exploring why it shouldn't be, as well as how it isn't (as much) anymore. To discuss this, I have derived three key elements from *Legitimizing Television*: The concept of quality TV as a discursive genre, *auteurism* as a road to legitimation, and the role of the scholar. However, before I do so, I need to defend my position in the discursive formation of legitimation. This is because, while presenting an account of the legitimating process which has contributed to a more general acceptance that TV can be of aesthetic value which is immensely useful to someone striving to argue for exactly that, Newman & Levine also criticizes the concept of legitimation. One apparent consequence of legitimation which they seem to detest is that it “always works by selection and exclusion; TV becomes respectable through the elevation of one concept of the medium at the expense of another” (Newman & Levine, 2012, p. 29). The entire legitimation

¹⁹ The rule being that television is antonymous to high art.

process, then, runs the risk of doing exactly what I discussed in the previous paragraph, namely to only legitimate certain works of television instead of television itself.

On first glance, this seems to be exactly what I am doing: I use conventional aesthetic criteria to argue for the value of those series I deem worthy, and thus inevitably devaluing the series I don't. However, I believe (and hope) that two important caveats will save me from being considered as a contributor to those aspects of legitimation most problematic: For one, many of the series I consider belong to one of the groups of series which according to Newman & Levine gets delegitimated as a consequence of other series' legitimation: feminine TV. They convincingly argue that those series most frequently elevated in the legitimating process exhibit decidedly masculine traits in favor of feminine ones (Newman & Levine, 2012, pp. 119-125). However, in my TV musical canon, this is at the very least not a consequent rule: One show which will be included in the canon is the explicitly feminine, even feminist, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. Though this might not make up for the feminine series I *do* exclude, the fact that the very genre I'm analyzing (the musical) is historically tied to femininity and homosexuality as well as a lack of aesthetic appreciation, my hope is that, on this account at least, my thesis exhibits the positive and not so much the negative aspects of legitimation.

The second aspect which breaks with the tradition of elevation by demotion is the eventual inclusion of camp as a possible venue to value. camp, as will be explained in detail later, represents an antithesis to traditional aesthetic criteria, elevating series which could probably never be argued for as of significant value purely by traditional aesthetic evaluation. Finally, I want to reassert the subjective nature of this thesis (and any thesis like it). As a male in his 20's with an upper-middle-class background currently obtaining higher education within the field of film and TV it is inevitable, and maybe unfortunate, that my tastes and sensibilities largely conform to those most oppressive, both historically and currently. As soon as I elected for a thesis with an evaluative aspect it would thus contribute also to the continued oppression and delegitimation of art unlikely to appeal to my specific sensibility. The only alternative, then, would be to avoid legitimation in order to also avoid delegitimation, but constituting an evaluative canon, that is, to make the statement that "these specific TV series are valuable", is inherently an act of legitimation and avoiding the topic would limit the thesis' self-consciousness and thus its integrity.

5.3.1 Quality television

Having hopefully precluded myself from accusations of misunderstanding the point of *Legitimizing Television*, I will proceed to discuss the first key aspect in the process of legitimating television. The concept of quality TV originated in the 1970's and 1980's with the move away from focusing exclusively on overall ratings to valuing certain demographics (particularly those that did not normally watch television) (Mittell, 2015), planting seeds for the acceptance of TV as art. Then, *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991²⁰) premiered and made an unprecedented claim for TV to be considered film's equal (at the very least in potential), before the emergence of HBO would further the medium's claim for legitimacy. Due to the fact that HBO was a premium channel for which you had to specifically pay, it offered a unique opportunity for artistic expression. To justify its existence, HBO had to offer something different from "regular" television, breaking free of the norms and conventions which had prohibited TV series from achieving a higher cultural status: "HBO must, by necessity, sell itself as a unique product, adding value to one's television experience – the value it most typically claims to add is Quality and the cultural status that designation carries" (Newman & Levine, 2012, p. 32). This led to shows such as *The Sopranos*, *The Wire* and *Six Feet Under*, the artistic merit of which are undeniable. Broadcast TV was inspired by HBO's success, leading them to develop an increased amount of such series themselves, thus cementing quality TV as a genre appreciated both by audiences and executives. This meant that a certain portion of television series suddenly had an increased claim to aesthetic legitimacy: Something being labelled quality TV would almost automatically elevate the series above "regular TV" in artistic merit, and the process of legitimating television as an artform had officially begun.

As I've started discussing quality TV, allow me to digress for a moment to explain the consequences this will have for the final canonization. Because quality TV became a discursive genre tied closely to legitimating television as an aesthetically viable artform, one would think that the criteria for aesthetic value should equal the criteria for quality TV; but it's not quite as simple as that. Mittell ascertains that, since quality TV is a discursive category, it does not, in itself, constitute an evaluative basis (Mittell, 2015, p. 212). Including a series in the canon of quality television does not automatically mean that it is of high quality or value; it can simply

²⁰ The series returned for a third season in 2017, but I consider that season its own entity (as does, for example, IMDb)

share enough traits with shows traditionally labelled quality TV that the categorization becomes inevitable.²¹ Therefore, I will refrain from classifying series as quality TV or not quality TV. Instead, I will identify those traits associated with the term which I deem most relevant for ascertaining the series' value and use them to make an evaluative aesthetic judgement. This will function as a sub-category of aesthetic criteria, a category of criteria specifically constituted for the TV medium (whereas general aesthetic criteria should, by nature, be applicable to all forms of art). There will also be a second sub-section tied to the musical genre and criteria tied specifically to it.

5.3.2 The TV auteur

Returning, then, to the most relevant factors in the process of legitimating television, we have the emergence of the TV *auteur* as a signifier of value. The term *auteur*, used to credit a single person with authorship of a film (or often an *oeuvre* of films), became commonplace in film theory in the 1950's after being introduced in *Cahiers du cinema*, and Andrew Sarris used it to argue for the American cinema's artistic merit (Newman & Levine, 2012, p. 45). In the context of television, the *auteur* (if there is one) is usually the showrunner, the person who is in creative control of the writing and often created the series (Newman & Levine, 2012, p. 39). This concept originated the 80's and 90's with series such as *Hill Street Blues* (1981-1987, created by Steven Bochco), *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991, created by David Lynch), and gained increased popularity in the 2000's (particularly due to HBO's faith in the concept with series like *The Sopranos* (1999-2007, created by David Chase), *The Wire* (2002-2008, created by David Simon) and *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005, created by Alan Ball) (Newman & Levine, 2012, pp. 61-62). The existence of an *auteuristic* showrunner primarily added value to the series in two ways: Giving it a consistent mode of expression (Newman & Levine identifies "the very fact of coherent authorship and "vision" as a mark of distinction" in the case of *The Sopranos* (Newman & Levine, 2012, p. 46), which corresponds to the general aesthetic criteria known as "integrity", and lending it a personal touch (backed by *The Sopranos*-creator David Chase, who stated

²¹ This is problematic when some such traits pertain to demographic and cast size, which usually say nothing of the series' aesthetic value. To use an even more concrete example: Thompson ascertains that "Quality TV is best defined by what it is not. It is not "regular TV" Quality TV breaks rules" (Thompson, 1996, p. 13). Thus, it is conceivable for a show to exist which breaks all the rules assumed by the TV medium and strays as far as possible from conventional television that it could successfully be argued for as quality TV. This hypothetical show, however, might still easily be of no remarkable aesthetic value, proving that "quality TV" is not completely synonymous with "aesthetically valuable TV".

“Network dramas has not been personal” as one of his major qualms with the artform (Newman & Levine, 2012, p. 46)).

5.3.3 The role of the scholar

Finally, I want to highlight the role of the scholar in legitimating television. As Newman & Levine point out, the concept of “TV studies” was once considered a misnomer; How could one study the depths of such a superficial genre? However, through an active effort to legitimate television as art, as well as the development of the medium to a level of closer resemblance to, for instance, cinema, TV studies in itself is no longer considered a joke (Newman & Levine, 2012, p. 187). Moreover, Newman & Levine assert that “Study in institutions of higher education has historically marked the ascent of cultural forms such as theater and film to high status, as intellectualization promotes the serious contemplation of meaning and value and aligns new forms with old concepts” (Newman & Levine, 2012, p. 185), concluding that scholarly examination is key to legitimation. Thus, the very act of me, as a scholar, writing a thesis based on the aesthetic value of TV series contributes to the medium’s legitimation, making this section a case in point. To circle back to the negative aspects of the process of legitimation, they also assert that when legitimating television, on purpose or not, “television scholars can and should strive for awareness and transparency in the ways their tastes shape their practices” (Newman & Levine, 2012, p. 186). My hope is that this thesis fulfills that expectation, and the consequences of my legitimation becomes, at worst, neutral.

Whether the impact of this legitimation will be of a positive or negative nature, I have at least established that TV series can strive for the label of aesthetic quality and that it thus can be fruitful to discuss which series should be considered as such. The next thing I want to focus on, then, is the process of evaluation, and the creation of the subsequent canon. My claim is that, as asserted in this paper’s introduction, subjectivity and canon are two elements almost always present in critical writings on art. One of the aims of this text is, then, to simultaneously take both these aspects seriously by acknowledging canonization as an often-times cooperative and implicit process based on a mostly shared set of criteria while also admitting that any canon constructed by myself (or any other person) will necessarily be shaped by my personal tastes and sensibilities. Therefore, while never claiming objectivity nor even representability, I will be presenting criteria mainly based on established and largely accepted theoretical sources and using those to make the judgement of which series are good, and which are not. The hope is,

then, that this canon, while wholly subjective and in no small part affected by my subjectivity, will be well enough argued for to exhibit some degree of authority, thus ensuring its future potential applicability.

5.4 Finalizing methodology

Another element which I have to emphasize here, is that when working with a revised corpus consisting of 18 series, half of which will be excluded from the final canon, I see no way to justify focusing only on those series which I deem valuable in the end: In order to ascertain what is valuable and why, I also need to ascertain what is worthless²² and why. Therefore, whilst listing the criteria used to make evaluations, I will be making exclusions as I go. This entails a certain lack of flow; Rather than list every criterion and then conduct separate analyses I will strive for a more ambitious approach of integrating the analyses. Every exclusionary analysis will be conducted as soon as all the criteria which ultimately led to its exclusion has been established.²³ When making exclusions (as well as inclusions), the criteria deemed most relevant to the decision will be stated, and the series will be analyzed within the context of these. It is also important to note that some of these analyses will be longer than others. Certain series are somewhat obviously not going to make the final canon and can thus be dismissed with no serious effort, but others, especially those which almost qualified, will require a more comprehensive analysis (maybe even exceeding the comprehension of some included series).

Before I get started on the evaluations, I want to make some final observations on the topic of writing evaluative criticism, if nothing else to offer an alternative view on the subject than that of Newman & Levine. Mittell writes about evaluation as a valuable and maybe even necessary academic approach: “We can use evaluative criticism to strengthen our understanding of how a television program works” (Mittell, 2015, p. 207). However, and crucially, he also points out, on more than one occasion, that evaluative criticism is never, and should never strive to be, objective, even though it often is. “The most common tactic among media scholars is to pack it away, bracketing it off from our professional writing in the name of analytic objectivity, or at least neutrality” (Mittell, 2015, p. 206). He then ascertains his views on this process as dishonest,

²² Worthless here used as a loose and relative term, not to dismiss every excluded series as completely without value.

²³ This, of course, also means that the very final analyses, the ones of the series included in the canon to explain why, will be in their own section at the very end.

because it isn't objective at all, and more importantly as detrimental to the analysis: The sensuous and partially inexplicable but nonetheless valuable aspect of *experience* is lost if one refuses to employ evaluative discourse (Mittell, 2015, p. 207). Finally, as the last point I will make before embarking on the next section of this thesis, Mittell ascertains the nature of evaluative arguments: "Evaluation is an act of persuasion rather than demonstration.... [It] is an invitation to a dialogue, as debating the merits of cultural works is one of the most enjoyable ways with which we engage with texts" (Mittell, 2015, p. 207). When analyzing in an evaluative manner, all you hope to achieve is for the reader to agree, if not with the conclusion then at least with your reasoning, but the statements with which they would agree are not absolute: "They are contingent claims lodged in their contextual moment that will almost undoubtedly be revised after future viewing and conversation" (Mittell, 2015, p. 208). The canon I construct here is not permanent and is constantly subject to change; it is only an accurate representation of which musical TV series I, right now, deem the most valuable.

6 Canonization

As I now venture to present every criterion used in canonizing the TV musical genre, there is one assertion to make: These criteria are specifically chosen because they are relevant to my judgement of this genre in particular. Therefore it is conceivable that some of these would not be included as criteria in an evaluation of a different genre, just as, conversely, there might be aesthetic criteria which I generally consider important to evaluation but which aren't included here because they either don't pertain to the musical genre or because they play no part in the exclusion or inclusion of any given series, meaning establishing them would be entirely superfluous.

6.1 General aesthetic criteria

Aesthetic criteria, criteria used for subjective evaluation of an artwork's value, are plentiful, and their exact definition vary greatly depending on which source one opts to use. The theoretical foundation on which I will base my specific criteria is, by and large, Monroe C. Beardsley's *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, a hugely influential book on the nature of aestheticism. In this, Beardsley includes an entire chapter on the concept of critical evaluation, dividing the reasons for such evaluation into five sections, all of which contain at least one

criterion I will use to ascertain my canon: Cognitive, moral, genetic, affective and objective reasons (Beardsley, 1958, pp. 456-462).²⁴

6.1.1 Serialization

The first criterion I will introduce is based on a so-called objective reason, meaning “either descriptive statements or interpretive statements” (Beardsley, 1958, p. 462), more specifically in the sub-section which refers to the unity of the work: serialization. I chose to begin with this criterion because it is traditionally a very central part of making aesthetic judgements about television and will thus also have immediate consequences for the canon. Thompson backs up the concept by stating that “Quality TV has a memory” (Thompson, 1996, p. 14). In fact, it is intrinsically linked to the concept of quality TV: Some of the first series to be considered as quality TV (*Hill Street Blues* (1982-1987) and *St. Elsewhere* (1982-1988), to name two) are also some of the first shows which strayed from the strictly episodic structure of the TV medium. Every TV series used to have self-contained episodes with little or no link to other episodes, to accommodate viewers who hadn’t seen the previous episode. However, with the introduction of the VCR allowing viewers to record the episodes they normally would have missed, as well as an increased trust in the audiences to follow more complex storylines, some series ventured into serialization.

There is some leeway within the terminology of episodic vs. serialized TV, though. Using the aforementioned early examples of serialization, one can identify the concept of partial serialization: *St. Elsewhere* and *Hill Street Blues* use their settings to tell episodic stories (as is the convention for police and hospital series) to accommodate those who hadn’t seen the latest episode, combined with serialized elements usually tied to the characters and their relations to reward returning viewers. If one, as I and others do, sees serialization as an indicator of the series’ artistic value, partial serialization would be the neutral middle ground between complete serialization (positive indicator of value) and no serialization (negative indicator of value).

²⁴ Beardsley himself is critical to certain of these categories (particularly genetic and affective). For instance, he posits that any intentionalistic judgement, that is, judgement of what the artist intended and whether they fulfilled that intention, are judgement of the artist and not the art. I disagree somewhat; The intention has bearing on the result, and the correlation between artistic success and aesthetic value is often strong. I do agree that it is foolish to claim to know the artist’s exact intention, but I see no greater fallacy in assuming it, in guessing it, than in making any other subjective, interpretive statement. I guess this puts me in the camp of moderate intentionalism, that the artist’s intention might be relevant but is not always important, but that is quite beside the point.

To further demonstrate the forms of serialization, and to make my first exclusions of this section, I will use some specific TV musicals as examples. For examples of fully serialized series, you don't have to look far; most of the remaining ones are. However, there are four shows which have no, or close to no, serialized elements: *Rags to Riches*, *Hull High*, *Flight of the Conchords* and *Garfunkel and Oates*. I'll section these into two categories, as they are quite naturally paired off: The comedy duo showcases, and the teenage drama series.

6.1.2 *Flight of the Conchords* and *Garfunkel and Oates*

Starting with the former, it is quite easy to see the abundance of similarities between the two series: Both aired on premium cable channels, both have a musical comedy duo play fictionalized versions of themselves, and both return the status quo at the end of their episodes.²⁵ Even when there appears to be development (one of the members get a partner, someone leaves the band, there is conflict within the group), it is resolved before the end of the episode. Thus, if you ever miss an episode you will almost definitely not notice. This is, of course, quite standard when it comes to sit-coms (which both of these are classified as), but nonetheless speaks against their inclusion in the final canon. When the audience knows that everything will work out, it removes the suspense and lessens the quality (indeed, this is also a devaluing factor for very many film musicals). If this was the norm, if, say, the corpus only consisted of sit-coms, then the situation would be different (as it is within the genre of Hollywood musicals) and there would have to be other qualities separating the series. However, in a corpus so dominated by serialized television, it would take something very unique for a completely unserialized show to be included. This, combined with the reverse integration of the musical numbers (the story is written to fit the songs, lessening the narrative quality), ensures that neither *Flight of the Conchords* nor *Garfunkel and Oates* can be included in the final canon.

6.1.3 *Rags to Riches* and *Hull High*

As for the teen-oriented *Hull High* and *Rags to Riches*, the case is a little more complex. Both have occasional serialized elements, and the characters at least learn something from the episode's events (whereas in the previous two examples there is no development whatsoever). However, one important element of serialization is lacking: over-arching storylines. Compared to another partially serialized show like *Cop Rock* (written by Steven Bochco who also wrote *Hill*

²⁵ There is slight link between the final two episodes of *Garfunkel and Oates* and between episode 12 and 13 of *Flight of the Conchords*, but these serve as exceptions to the episodic rule.

Street Blues), which features episodic plots but have multiple storylines which last for many episodes (like the trial of LaRusso and the lady who sells her baby), *Hull High* and *Rags to Riches* never feature plots which last for more than one episode; The only thing that changes is the characters' statuses (usually their relationship status). Since this may not be enough of a reason to exclude the two series, I will now introduce the next three criteria: Innovation, artistic ambition and interest.

6.1.4 Innovation

The first two of these both belong to the category of genetic reasons, meaning reasons which refer to “something existing before the work itself, to the manner in which it was produced, or its connection with antecedent objects and psychological states” (Beardsley, 1958, p. 457). Innovation is close to an example Beardsley provides: “It is new and original (or trite) (Beardsley, 1958, p. 457). The concept of innovation is also partially derived from two of Thompson's claims about quality TV: That it “is not ‘regular TV’” (Thompson, 1996, p. 13), and that “Quality TV creates a new genre by mixing old ones” (Thompson, 1996, p. 15). The assertion is that innovative works, works which do something new or unique, has a higher chance to be valuable than those which simply recycle old styles and conventions. In the context of musical TV, it means that series such as *That's Life*, *Pennies from Heaven* and *Shangri-La Plaza* attains higher status than if all series were to be considered in a vacuum, because they either established a new concept or presented a new take on an existing concept. The best way to exemplify this is by comparing *Pennies from Heaven* to *Blackpool*: If considered irrespective of innovation and time, they would be easy to place side by side. When, however, they are compared keeping in mind that *Blackpool* owes its existence to *Pennies* as well as *The Singing Detective* and *Lipstick on Your Collar*, it becomes harder to place *Blackpool* higher hierarchically than its predecessor if one assumes that they are of similar quality. If, however, *Blackpool* elevates the genre, perfects the style in some significant way and thus exceeds its predecessor in quality, it could be considered more valuable than *Pennies*; antecedent works aren't inherently more valuable simply because “they did it first”, but it is still a relevant indicator.

6.1.5 Artistic ambition

The second genetic criterion pertains to the intention of the artist, to be precise their artistic ambition. A work which doesn't *try* to be valuable, very rarely will be.²⁶ This also alludes to Thompson's very first point (that quality TV is not "regular TV"), as well as his assertion that "Quality TV tends toward the controversial" (Thompson, 1996). This places value on taking risks, especially relevant in the context of TV because the nature of the medium encourages playing it safe: The shows which make the most money are those which appeal to the lowest common denominator of the audience. This also leads into what Beardsley calls fulfillment of the artist's intention (Beardsley, 1958, p. 457): Although artistic ambition in itself is a positive factor (it is better to try and fail than to not try at all), it becomes all the more impressive when the ambition is matched by the execution.

6.1.6 Interest

The final of these three criteria belongs to what Beardsley calls affective reasons, which refer "to the psychological effects of the aesthetic object upon the percipient" (Beardsley, 1958, p. 460). Here, he lists interest as a positive trait, contrasted to being dull and monotonous. Interesting series are those which engage the viewer in some way, which keep the audience's attention. Oftentimes interest is tied to innovation: Innovative or abnormal devices tend to spark the audience's interest quite efficiently.

6.1.7 Concluding *Rags to Riches* and *Hull High*

If we now return to *Hull High* and *Rags to Riches*, it becomes apparent that on top of lacking serialization, they are neither particularly innovative, artistically ambitious nor interesting. The most innovative aspect of each series is that they feature the occasional musical number, but as this is the case with every series considered it can hardly qualify the shows on its own. Aside from the numbers, both series are completely ordinary high school-oriented drama series, tackling the regular issues: teenage love, the struggle to be popular, academic problems, family conflict etc., all of which is resolved within the episode (robbing the series of any suspense about whether it will turn out OK; we know it will). It is only when it breaks out of the conventional and takes risks that either veers toward being interesting. For *Rags to Riches*, this is just about never. It is a completely safe show: Even the musical numbers are well-known songs forced into

²⁶ Exceptions occur when judging something from a camp perspective, where intent is irrelevant. This will be covered later in the chapter.

the narrative more to offer the audience a sense of familiarity and, if lucky, a slight comic relief than to drive the narrative in any meaningful way. In *Hull High*, these instances of unconventionality are slightly more common, and often accompanied by a musical number: A student believing he has killed one of his teachers on accident in episode 2 (leading to the song “Sorry Mr. Slovak”) is at least a change of pace from the will-they-won’t-they of the series’ two romantic pairings, as is one of the school’s more academically challenged students bonding with the rival football team’s mascot pig in the sixth episode (culminating in him singing the ballad “All Over Now” to the pig, a surprisingly heartfelt song even though it contains the line “When you make a righteous friend, you bust a righteous move. You don’t let a bunch of buttheads mess around with such a truly awesome dude”). However, these risks don’t always pay off: One unconventional storyline features a female teacher who struggles to keep her class concentrated as they are all so distracted by her beauty, leading to the musical number “Figure of Speech”. Feuer points to this as a problematic example of the male gaze and subsequently labels the show sexist (Feuer, 1993, p. 138), a conclusion with which it is hard to disagree.

Thus, even though I have not yet established more than four factors upon which to judge value, *Rags to Riches* and *Hull High* seem prime candidates for exclusion. They score low on innovation (the only innovative aspects are the musical numbers to which they both showcase unique approaches in altered versions of popular songs and a rapping Greek chorus, respectively), serialization, artistic ambition and interest by adhering too much to the medium’s risk-adverse tendencies. Though the rest of the criteria are still not stated, I can reveal that, while not scoring low on all of them, neither *Rags to Riches* nor *Hull High* score particularly high on any, and are thus excluded from the canon of TV musicals.

6.1.8 *I Ship It*

Another series I will consider before it is necessary to introduce new criteria is *I Ship It*. Even though it was technically serialized, the show had no innovative elements, very limited artistic ambition and barely any interesting elements. It was originally a web series released on CW Seed, and failed to adapt to the higher standards of television. The writing is repetitive, the acting is sub-par, the musical numbers fail to stand out or ever become interesting. The series is an artistic failure with no redeeming qualities and will thus not be included in my final canon.

6.1.9 Humor and emotion

As I've started on affective criteria, I might as well list the final two from this category: comedy and emotional impact. Comedy is the successful invocation a joyous psychological reaction (often also accompanied by a physical one, i.e. laughter or smiling). Though most prevalent in the pure comedy series, there are several shows which can be categorized as "dramedies" (*Glee* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* to name two) and therefore also heavily relies on humor. "Powerful emotional impact" (Beardsley, 1958, p. 461), as Beardsley puts it, can take a variety of forms: the feelings elicited can range from sadness (used in abundance by *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* and *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist*) and anger (somewhat frequently employed in *Cop Rock*, for example when someone sets a cross on fire at Potts' lawn and the three cops who were responsible for keeping an eye on his house state that they saw nothing, or when all of Potts' colleagues turn their backs on him after he testified against LaRusso), to happiness (which can be combined with humor but doesn't have to be: Moments of tranquility, such as the wedding sequence in the finale of *Galavant* or the performance of "Love is Strange" in the finale of *Lipstick on Your Collar* evokes happiness without really making me laugh).

6.1.10 Skill

One criterion which is relevant to the judgement on *any* piece of art is the genetic aspect of skill. Though I will later cover some particular elements of this (specifically those tied to musical numbers), I want it established here as well to ascertain the different areas of skillful expression I consider: Acting, cinematography, writing and editing are all skills not necessarily tied to musical numbers and which will be relevant at some point or another to argue for or against the value of a show.

6.1.11 Authorship

Next, we have the matter of authorship which I've already established as central to quality television. It is also linked to the objective reason of unity: A TV series created by its showrunner is more likely to (but not guaranteed to) exhibit a sense of overall cohesion in terms of both narrative and themes. Andersen labels this the story's "integrity", the way in which the series as a whole and the series' individual elements relate to each other (Andersen, 1987). In the remaining shows of the TV musical genre, the *auteur* showrunner is prevalent, but not ever-present. There are very clear examples in Dennis Potter (*Pennies from Heaven* and *Lipstick on your Collar*) and Steven Bochco (*Cop Rock*), both of whom are some of TV's prime examples of

auteurism. Most of the other series also have one person apparently responsible for its creative vision (meaning they both created it and served as showrunner), but not of all them seem like they can be categorized as *auteurs*. Though this won't be used to immediately include or exclude any series from the final canon, the benefits of an *auteuristic* approach herein stated will be relevant again later.

6.1.12 Authenticity

Before I move on to criteria based more specifically on the series' musical nature, I want to assert three more criteria to cover Monroe's as of now unused categories. The first one, while not explicitly stated as an example, is that of authenticity. This belongs in the group of cognitive reasons, which have to do with our intellectual reception of the artwork (Beardsley, 1958, p. 456). Authenticity is whether or not the events depicted *feel real*, in other words their psychological realism. Characters behaving in a way that is logical based on the information we have on them will contribute to a series' authenticity, as will depictions of situation which the audience recognize and identify with.

6.1.13 Characterization

Thus, the concept of characterization is linked to authenticity, but will also stand on its own as a criterion: The characterization should be authentic, yes, but it should also exhibit moral traits (making the characters adhere to a moral code the audience can identify with) as well as the affective traits of interest and emotional impact. An uninteresting character will fail to garner sympathy or maintain the audience's attention in the same way any other uninteresting aspect would, and a valuable series will succeed in making the audience identify and sympathize with its characters so that the audience experiences the same emotion as the character. Finally, there should also be integrity in the characters, meaning their development is logical and their defining characteristics largely stay the same.

6.1.14 Social Criticism

Finally, we have the group of reasons labelled "moral reasons" (Beardsley, 1958, pp. 456-457). The criterion belonging here which is most relevant to my remaining corpus is that of effective social criticism: Series saying something worthwhile or insightful about the world or society in which we live will attain increased value compared to those which say nothing at all or, worse yet, showcases ineffective or misguided social critique. Dennis Potter's series are unsurprisingly the most prominent in terms of relevant social criticism, but *Cop Rock* also tackles issues which

are still relevant today and which it was ahead of its time when discussing in 1990 (examples including homelessness, police brutality and racial profiling).

6.2 Musical quality

Thus, we have arrived at the criteria specifically tied to the series' quality *as musicals*. There is an important thing to note here: Because all the series taken into consideration are semiotically more defined by their TV categorization than their musical one, the genre-specific criteria of the musical I will be focusing on all pertain to the musical numbers. Thus, my analytical approach is a dualistic one: When the characters are speaking, I evaluate the series as TV series, and while they sing/dance I evaluate them as musicals. Of course, I also take into consideration the way these elements interact with each other, but regard this as a combination of the two modes of analysis rather than a third one.²⁷

6.2.1 Integration

The first criterion for evaluating a musical's value is based on the concept of integration. This concept is related to the established "integrity", only it specifically concerns the relation between the musical numbers and the rest of the narrative. The lyricist of such musicals as *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel* and *The Sound of Music*, Oscar Hammerstein II, states the following: "[The songs] must help tell our story and delineate characters, supplementing the dialogue and seeming to be, as much as possible, a continuation of dialogue. This is, of course, true of the songs by any well-made musical" (Morris, Wolf, & Knapp, 2011, p. 98). Although the term when introduced was used to separate the integrated musical from the un-integrated one, this distinction is not of particular interest: The un-integrated musical is largely a thing of the past. In the early days of the film musical the songwriters used to write vague songs which could, if need be, be repurposed for a different musical with little to no effort. This meant the musical numbers had no bearing on the plot and didn't contribute to the narrative in any meaningful way, thus making the numbers un-integrated. However, this is very rarely the case anymore, and not the case in any of the TV series considered. Even the musicals which don't even write their own songs choose songs that carry some relevance to the plot or the characters. Therefore, it is pointless to talk about a musical as integrated or not; Instead, what I will talk about is whether the ever-present *attempted* integration is successful or not. Hammerstein seemed to agree, referring to musicals as

²⁷ There will be a third mode of analysis based on the camp sensibility covered later.

well-integrated instead of well-made and also formulates the ultimate meaning of successful integration: “The merging of words and music ‘into a single expression’” (Morris et al., 2011, p. 98).

6.2.2 Function

In addition to focusing on integration, I want to establish three aspects of musical numbers which will be analyzed in order to ascertain value: function, style and performative quality. Starting with the former, the function of a musical number is which effect it has on the viewer.²⁸ An important thing to note here, is that when examining a musical number’s function I will primarily be focusing on what the musical number achieves which wouldn’t be achieved by a regular scene exploring the same subject. To exemplify this, I want to highlight a function which allows the series to do something they otherwise find difficult: subjective access. Subjective access is when a musical number gives the viewer entry to the inner life of a character, be it their thoughts, their feelings, their dreams, or otherwise. This is an important function because if the series were not a musical, an alternative scene which conveyed the same information would be difficult to conceive of. To use a concrete example: When Rebecca Bunch sings the song “You Stupid Bitch” in “That Text Was Not Meant for Josh!”, its functions would be difficult to replicate without song. The number not only gives us insight into Rebecca’s reaction to Josh walking out on her, but also gives us a unique look at her internal discourse, the way she talks to and views herself, which is a big part of her self-destructive tendencies and general unhappiness. If this wasn’t expressed through a musical number, however, it is hard to imagine how they would effectively be able to communicate this to the audience, never mind exploring it to the lengths they do. Parts of it could have been stated in, for instance, a therapy session or a close personal conversation, but so much of what makes this so effective is that this is how Rebecca acts with, and to, herself; the audience experiencing such a deeply personal moment from her subjective perspective. Her telling herself that she is a “horrible, stupid, dumb and ugly, fat and stupid, simple self-hating bitch” could not be expressed more efficiently, nor more impactfully, than through song.

Using function to ascertain value seems difficult, because there exists no hierarchy of which functions are more valuable so I would have to establish this myself. However, I won’t create an

²⁸ See addendum 1 & 2 for a list of the different functions with explanation and an overview of functions of the musical numbers in the final canon.

exact list of which functions are good and which are bad. Instead, I will focus on the clear existence of function (bordering on the concept of integration; if a song has a clear function it is usually integrated well) as a positive trait, as well as whether the function is tied specifically to the musical number's nature because if a song could easily be replaced by a talking scene and have the same impact and function, the function of the song is near irrelevant (which doesn't mean the song detracts from the series' value, but that the function of it isn't indicative of high value). This ties the concepts of function and integration together: A musical number with a clearly defined and successfully accomplished narrative function is almost always a well-integrated one.

6.2.3 Style

Next, we have the style of musical numbers. This is primarily the visual style, or the aesthetic expression of the musical number. This is largely covered by the term of *mise-en-scène*, or stage design: The skill involved in lighting, costumes, and general cinematography all fit within this concept. When evaluating *mise-en-scène* I will emphasize cohesion and effectiveness; whether it serves the narrative, complements the overall visual style of the series, and whether it succeeds in conveying what it intends to. However, two other stylistic criteria based on skill are important and not necessarily a part of the *mise-en-scène*: choreography and editing. The choreography is included here because it has primarily visual consequences, and the editing is relevant particularly for one series with quite a unique visual expression: *Glee*. All the relevant criteria for judging the series is not yet established, however, so I will have to delay the analysis of it until they are. Because I have no experience with dance analysis, I will be basing the judgement of choreography on what effect it has on me as a viewer, the visceral, instinctive quality and appeal of it.

6.2.4 Performative quality

Finally, we have performative quality, pertaining to singing and dancing and again a criterion tied to skill. However, this isn't dependent only on the skills of the actors: Most of the series use separate recordings of the songs rather than live performances, introducing the aspect of mixing and auditive editing, which will be included here because there is nowhere else logical to place it. Again, I have no formal education in the analysis of singing and dancing performance, but I have a fairly good idea of what constitutes good singing and dancing due to years of watching musicals and performing with a choir.

This seems to conclude my section on criteria for musical quality. However, there is one important aspect I have not yet introduced, which is because it splits the corpus in two: The quality of songwriting. Of the remaining series there are five which write their own songs, enabling me to judge the compositional and lyrical quality. These (*Cop Rock*, *Shangri-La Plaza*, *Smash*, *Galavant* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*) will be analyzed later, but the rest (*Pennies from Heaven*, *Lipstick on Your Collar*, *Blackpool*, *Glee*, *Soundtrack* and *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist*) are so-called jukebox musicals which I will now dedicate a section to.

6.3 The jukebox musical

The jukebox musical is a musical which does not use originally written songs, rather relying on pre-existing work. Famous examples include *Mamma Mia!* and *We Will Rock You*, which you may notice only feature songs from one artist. This is not the case for any of the series, however. Some limit themselves to a certain period, while others have no such restrictions, but all have one thing in common, a thing which is central to the jukebox musical genre: they use popular music. The challenge, then, for a jukebox musical becomes obvious: How does one successfully integrate pre-written songs of a notoriously shallow musical genre into the narrative in a meaningful way? Using two successful examples and then two less successful ones I will look at how they utilize their musical numbers, what their intended function is, and whether they succeed in reaching it.

6.3.1 *Pennies from Heaven*

The first example will be Dennis Potter's *Pennies from Heaven*. As previously mentioned, this series is set in the 1930's, and features exclusively songs from that period. In analyzing *Pennies* I have identified two key forms of integration utilized in order to lend meaning to the musical numbers: thematic integration and atmospheric integration. The former speaks for itself: The narrative story and the musical numbers co-operate in discussing a theme (or multiple themes). In the case of *Pennies*, these are themes such as willful escapism (which can also be categorized as delusion) and momentary, fleeting happiness as meaning of life. Both of these work in tandem with each other to lend the shallow nature of 30's pop music elevated meaning: One of the series' statements appears to be that escaping into the artificially gleeful world of "the songs" is a valid coping mechanism for the numerous problems of ordinary life (particularly poignant when set to the great depression of the 30's: Never has the contrast between reality and the optimistic fantasy of popular music been starker than it was then). Atmospheric integration also carries

particular relevance due to the 30's settings, as the songs are central to convey the *zeitgeist* of a time so dark and gloomy but at the same time hopeful and bizarrely optimistic. There is also much to say about the functions of *Pennies'* songs, but to me it is already clear that a series so critically acclaimed, innovative, influential and successfully integrated despite its jukebox nature would be impossible to exclude from my canon. Thus, further analysis will be conducted in the paper's final section.

6.3.2 *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist*

The second example of a successful jukebox musical is *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist*. This series ensures that the musical numbers carry relevance to the plot by making explicit the alternative diegesis: The musical numbers are people singing their heart's desires to Zoey. Not only does this make clear the nature of the alternative diegesis, it also makes the characters aware of it, allowing for an easier task of making them an integral part of the plot. In fact, many of the episodes are at least partially built up around the musical numbers: One of the characteristics of Zoey's "powers" is that she hears people singing to her until she solves the problem which made them sing. However, there still lies a crux at the choice of song. At times, the songs seem only tangentially related to the reason the person sings (such as "Sound of Silence" in episode nine only alluding to Howie having a problem but nothing about his specific situation), but for the most part the songs seem almost tailored to the situation, without ever giving the impression that, as was the case for *Flight of the Conchords* and *Garfunkel and Oates*, the plot was written specifically to incorporate a certain song. Just to balance it out, here are some examples of particularly fitting song choices: "Just Give Me A Reason" in the episode "Zoey's Extraordinary Failure" specifically describes the situation David and Emily find themselves in (diminishing intimacy whilst Emily is pregnant mainly fueled by David panicking at the prospect of becoming a father) and the irrational fears which arise in such a situation, and "Happier" in episode nine almost seems like it could have been written for that specific situation (and in a way it is: Originally it is a solo, but was re-written as a duet for the show, and very successfully at that). Though the writing can't be said to be of the same quality as Dennis Potter's, its successful integration seems to make a compelling case for *Zoey's* inclusion. Add to this choreography which is, frankly, at least a level above anything the other series has produced, and *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist* has officially made the cut.

6.3.3 *Soundtrack*

Moving on, then, to the two unsuccessful jukebox musicals, the time come to make an exclusion: *Soundtrack*. To frame the reasoning for its exclusion, I want to first highlight two aspects in which *Soundtrack* shows promise, shows the potential of a valuable TV musical, those being choreography and premise. The first speaks for itself: In a show which uses lip-sync of pre-recorded modern songs, the most relevant performative element is dance, placing emphasis on the choreography: Were the choreography uninteresting or poorly executed, the series would have been incredibly boring. The first musical number, only a few minutes into the first episode, showcases the potential of the series' choreography in a dance number performed to Sia's "Elastic Heart", but unfortunately not all the musical numbers reach the same highs, and so this on its own does not warrant its inclusion.

The second impressive part, the premise, is the concept I laid out in the historical summary: That these two storylines we follow in the first episode are separated by time and not space, because the wife Sam recently lost is the other main character, Nellie. However, the potential of this premise is never actually fulfilled. The two storylines seem to have little to no correlation (thematic or narrative) aside from the fact they contain the same people. To showcase this, I want to compare it to another series with a slightly similar premise: *This is Us* (coincidentally created by *Galavant*-creator Dan Fogelman). In the pilot of *This is Us*, we follow four people who happen to share a birthday. At the end it is revealed, in similar fashion to *Soundtrack*, that three of these are triplets²⁹, and the fourth is their late father. Both series then continue each of these storylines in subsequent episodes. What *This is Us* crucially manages, however, is to tie these timelines together. To use a specific example: In an episode with the present-time plot of Randall (the adopted, African-American triplet) struggling to fit in to his upper-class neighborhood due to his skin color, the flashback plot centers around his childhood struggling to fit in with his Caucasian family. This serves to tie the two storylines together narratively (the flashbacks explain Randall's present behavior and expands on his feelings) as well as thematically (giving the episode the coherent theme of race and identity). *Soundtrack* rarely, if ever, attains such a cohesion, such integrity, not helped by them introducing an abundance of peripheral characters and insisting on focusing just as much on them as Sam and Nellie (each episode is titled two

²⁹ Their mother was pregnant with triplets, but one fetus died in labor leading them to adopt Randall who was abandoned at a fire station by his father after his mother died in childbirth.

names indicating the characters whose point of view we follow in the episode, and four of the ten episodes contain neither Sam nor Nellie's perspective).

This brings me to the over-arching problems of characterization in *Soundtrack*, because one of the main problems it has is that it struggles to make the audience care about the characters. The first episode succeeds to a certain extent, but the reason you get invested in and feel for Sam and Nellie is not because of anything they are, but because of something that happens to them. It is easy to develop sympathy for a character who gets dumped by her childhood sweetheart because he feels that, as an emerging artist, he can do better than her; and it is especially easy to feel for and identify with a character who has recently lost his wife and is struggling to provide for their young son on his own. However, this sympathy is only temporary, if the audience is not provided with an additional reason to care for the characters, which the series does not prioritize. In the second episode, as we follow the early days of the relationship between Sam and Nellie, neither of them is shown in a favorable light. They seemingly have no conversational chemistry and don't really get along. The one redeeming quality is that the sex is reportedly *amazing*, leading to them starting a casual relationship which, without any apparent change in dynamic and no development shown, suddenly turns into a serious one. Not only does this belittle the very relationship the series uses as a foundation (it is implied that this was a love story for the ages, Sam even at one point shying away from seeking a new relationship because he believes everyone only gets one "great love"), but they also fail to redeem the characters' behavior: They are both portrayed as selfish and uninteresting people, and it is never explained why or how they eventually fall in love. Thus, the audience is left with two people who have what seems like a dysfunctional relationship (the level of passive-aggression they both exhibit is, frankly, astounding), and the only reason to care for the characters are the traumatic events introduced in the first episode. Eventually it is at least explained why Nellie acts the way she does (her parents are terrible people and even worse parents) but this is not accompanied by a development on her part, so her poor communication skills, her tendency to blame everyone but herself and her tantric outbursts are explained, but still decidedly negative traits.

The lack of relatability in the two main characters *could* have been bearable if the rest of the characters were interesting, but, sadly, they are not. For the most part they are shallow, two-dimensional characters, and the amount of screen time they get does not seem to change this. To

use two specific examples: episode two and episode eight. Half of the second episode is dedicated to introducing the audience to Joanna, the social worker who will observe Sam and his son in order to ascertain if he will be allowed to keep custody. She is introduced as a dancer and we follow her chasing her dream, before she realizes the dream is out of reach and settles for becoming a social worker. All that time only serves to introduce us to a character who is going to be a part of the plot, but whom we never really get to know all that well, and to the fact that she *actually cares* about the cases she works.

However, this isn't even the most astonishing waste of time on something completely irrelevant. The *entire* eighth episode ("Gigi and Jean") is dedicated to Gigi, Nellie's best friend. She has been around throughout the series, but never directly related to the plot or fleshed-out as a character. The decision to spend an entire episode on her, then, seems out of left field, but the concept of deviating from the series' main narrative for an episode has been successful in other series (*The Leftovers*' "The Garveys at Their Best", *Breaking Bad*'s "The Fly" and *Master of None*'s "New York, I Love You" and "Thanksgiving" are such examples). However, an episode like that needs to either have *some* bearing on the plot, or be interesting in its own right as a standalone unit in order to have some value in the overall context of the series. "Gigi and Jean" fails on both counts: it has absolutely no impact on the rest of the series (it helps us get to know Gigi a little better, but she barely even appears in the final two episodes and is never of any particular importance), and as a standalone it is completely pointless. It chronicles Gigi's budding romance with a famous chef, and as they get to know each other and he invites her to move away with him, there is a sense that maybe this episode is a way to write her out of the show, to give her character a happy ending by falling in love and moving out of town. However, by the end of the episode the chef breaks up with her, leaving her exactly where she was before the episode. Thus, *Soundtrack* has managed to spend an hour of its 10-hour runtime on a character only tangentially related to the plot, giving the audience a bit of insight into her character but ending with no development, nothing meaningful happening, all equating to a quite dull and pointless hour of television.

I would be amiss if I didn't also talk a little more about the musical elements of *Soundtrack* before banishing it from my thesis. As a lip-synced jukebox musical like *Pennies*, *Lipstick* and *Blackpool*, integration and function are particularly important to look at. The integration in

Soundtrack isn't so much unsuccessful as it is uninteresting and uninspired. In *Pennies*, for instance, the magic of the songs is an important part of not only the series' ideology, but also to the main character's. *Soundtrack* attempts something similar by having Sam open the series with a monologue from Sam about how "every song is a love song", but aside from Sam being a musician in the flashback parts of the series (in the present he has temporarily given it up after Nellie's death), music is not an important part of the series' universe.³⁰ The integration, then, is more literal than metaphorical: The songs sung relate to the specific situation which procures their existence. However, this relation is not always very accurate. The songs are about the general situation in which the characters find themselves, but the exact correlation (for example found in certain of *Zoey's* numbers) often lacks. Another way to phrase this is that though the chorus usually relates to the situation, the verses more rarely do so. Pretty much the only times there is a unique approach to integration is when there's a mashup: The two characters whose perspective the episode is told from convene in a mashup of two different songs which, when successful (which is not always but sometimes), integrate the episode's two arcs in some way. To use a specific example: The mashup of "Ain't No Sunshine" and "When I Was Your Man" at the end of episode two shows Sam and his cousin Dante each lamenting over losing their partner; they are both at a point in their lives where they have to learn to live alone.

The functions are also varyingly successful. Most of the songs have clear functions, but a lot of the time they convey information that the audience already knows, or which could have been conveyed through natural dialogue. Here, the same example is relevant again: The mashup tells the audience that both Sam and Dante miss their partner, but this is not new information, nor a subject about which the show reveals additional details. The songs boil down to Sam saying "My life is worse since my wife died" and Dante saying "I should have treated my girlfriend better so she didn't break up with me", both of which are obvious statements. The function, thus, is diminished, and the number has limited impact on the narrative.

Though neither integration nor function can be called abject failures, neither also fail to elevate the series in any meaningful way. In any series with poor characterization and a general lack of

³⁰ Nellie's ex is a musician and Joanna was a dancer, but these are such minor elements that they are barely worth mentioning.

interesting aspects³¹ the musical numbers would really have to blow me away in order for it to make the final canon, something *Soundtrack* accomplishes far too rarely. Hence, *Soundtrack* is excluded.

6.3.4 *Glee*

This brings me to the final jukebox musical, and the most well-known TV musical of all time, *Glee*. This time I'll start by discussing integration and function, before moving on to matters of integrity, style and performative quality. *Glee*, akin to *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist*, features musical numbers of popular songs from multiple time periods, performed by the cast. However, the setting is similar to that of a backstage musical as we follow the members of a high school glee club, meaning them breaking into song is, most of the time, diegetically justified. What makes it a musical, by my definition, is that almost every time they sing³², we enter an alternative diegesis where the members know songs perfectly which they may never have heard before, they seem to have constructed some kind of choreography, and background music (as well as occasionally background dancers) emanates from nowhere. This poses a problem both when it comes to function and integration: If the reason for the musical numbers is that the characters want to/have to perform they can get away with the numbers not being integrated in any meaningful way and having no important functions. So, is this the case in *Glee*?

Not quite, because at the very least they *attempt* to integrate the songs and lend them functionality. The songs are usually chosen to represent some theme of the episode, and they try to pick songs which represent some aspect of the characters who perform them. The question becomes, then, are they successful? There is an aspect of the show's narrative structure which limits the potential of its musical numbers' integration and functions: Most episodes, the glee club has a theme for the week. Sometimes, this theme does not hinder integration, such as the episode "Ballads" (where the theme is, obviously, ballads), because the theme is broad enough that the songs available can be integrated successfully into the narrative. This is the case for "I'll Stand By You", a musical number which works in tandem with the narrative by signifying Finn coming to terms with having a daughter and his fears of not being able to be there for her, and

³¹ There are other aspects of *Soundtrack* which don't work, but I feel like enough has been said to justifiably exclude it without expanding on, for instance, the subpar standard of acting, the contrived and occasionally ridiculous dialogue, and the baffling fact that multiple of Sam's son's lines are obviously dubbed.

³² Exceptions being planned performances such as regionals and sectionals where it would be somewhat realistic for them to perform to the level they do.

having the function of subjective access to Finn (as well as the more literal function of leading to Finn's mother finding out about Quinn's pregnancy). However, other themes provide limitations which seriously hinder the integration and potential functions. One such example is "A Katy or a Gaga", in which all the songs are either originally performed by Katy Perry or Lady Gaga (the plot of the episode is that all the members of the glee club all very clearly identify with the abrasive diva-ness of Lady Gaga or the innocence and wholesomeness of Katy Perry, so they get as an assignment to perform a song of the one with which they don't identify). In this episode, the three first musical numbers ("Marry the Night", "Applause" and "Wide Awake") are neither well integrated nor have important functions. The first one is just an audition which easily could have been a 20-second clip showcasing the talent of Adam Lambert's character. The second is literally integrated in that it drives the plot toward the turning point of Marley being suspended, while the third is not integrated and has no function other than showing that the diva kids can perform a low-key song.³³ The most important thing, though, which detracts from the quality of integration and function in this episode, is that the lyrics of the songs are almost completely irrelevant. Nothing is revealed, nothing is said, nothing is creative. Additionally, the developments they lead to are not permanent – next episode everyone is back to normal, unchanged by experimenting with an alternate mode of performance. The choice, then, to have an episode centered around the Katy Perry/Lady Gaga dichotomy is narratively unjustified as it led to nothing of relevance, and it did not improve the episode as a musical either, hurting the quality of both integration and function. Thus, the most logical remaining reason is that this theme was chosen to have an excuse to incorporate massively popular songs, both to make people watch and to have more people listen to the songs outside the episode. One can even spot an aspect of reverse integration here: All the characters are not established as either complete divas or completely innocent, but they are all pushed in one direction for the purpose of introducing this theme. Unfortunately, this is something that happens quite a lot on *Glee*. The characters often change on a dime, either to serve a musical element or to nudge the narrative in the direction the writers want.

³³ The fourth song, «Roar», coincidentally the only one which isn't diegetically justified, is integrated more successfully and has a more important function, but that is not enough to redeem the overall musical quality of the episode.

This contrivance³⁴ is one of *Glee*'s major weaknesses. Even though it had a creator/showrunner who must be called an *auteur* in TV context (Ryan Murphy), its integrity is almost non-existent. Though the show struggled for consistency from the start, it becomes particularly clear in the last few seasons. The series declined in quality throughout its run (though it was never great to begin with), and particularly one event seems to exemplify perfectly the problem with *Glee*'s writing: Coach Beiste coming out as a transsexual man in season six. On the surface, this is not a problematic storyline. *Glee* had dealt with trans issues in the past through the character Unique, a trans woman who joins the choir. However, the problem with having Beiste come out as trans is that in doing so, *Glee* betrays its own message. One of the main functions of Beiste's character since its introduction in season two was to comment on the difficulty of being a traditionally unattractive woman and that, despite her³⁵ height of 190 cm and muscular build, wanted people to think she was pretty just like anyone else. *Glee* dedicated an entire episode to this issue with "Never Been Kissed", in which the male students start thinking about Beiste whenever they need to cool down in a sexually arousing situation. This inevitably becomes known to Beiste, hurting her feelings and leading to her admitting she has never been kissed. In a somewhat touching, somewhat condescending moment, Will decides to give her her first kiss.

Thus, the message tied to Beiste was that everyone deserves love and that even though you look like a man it doesn't mean you don't want to be appreciated for your femininity. Eventually Beiste gets married, and the show thus provides hope for even the homeliest of girls. The marriage eventually ends due to her husband's abuse, however, and she admits to having been enamored with the idea of being loved for the first time. It is a logical character arc, culminating in her realizing that she is worthy of love but that she shouldn't settle for love from someone who beats her. Then she comes out as transsexual, invalidating the entire point of her development. The statement of Beiste's character is no longer "all women are pretty in their own way" or "appearances don't matter", suddenly it's closer to "if you are a masculine woman, chances are you're really a man". When coming out Beiste says that he's felt this way the entire time, but if that were really the case, if this was part of the writers' plan from the beginning, then they would not have made the entire focus of the character that being masculine does not mean

³⁴ Contrived writing is unnatural writing; The characters do things that aren't logical based on what we know about them and about the world.

³⁵ I use pronouns corresponding to what the character was recognized at that time to avoid confusion.

you're a man. Instead, it seems that they had him come out to fill the representational whole left after Unique departed at the end of season five.

Next, I want to bring to attention the style of *Glee*'s musical numbers, particularly the editing and camerawork, because almost every musical number in the series has a distinct style: *constant* movement. The camera never stops panning, and the editing never allows a shot to last for more than a few seconds. During ballads, this works to a certain degree. The camera movement is usually slow and the cutting isn't overly rapid, leaving some room for personal expression and a certain degree of identification. It also serves to take some of the pressure off: If the camera is in movement and we see new angles frequently, some of the weaker moments in terms of acting and dancing can be glossed over, and if the performer isn't able to lend the number dynamism, the camera does it. However, even *if* the performer sells the moment perfectly it never sinks in properly because the camera never rests, the camera never allows the audience a pause to take it all in. Thus, while the editing and camerawork occasionally help the performance during ballads, they just as often detract from it, breaking even in total.

But that only goes for ballad numbers. In anything that isn't a ballad, any song with a semblance of energy (and especially those numbers which consist of the choir performing together), the editing and camerawork becomes not only dynamic, but hyperactive. Not only does the camera never rest, but it moves around with such vigor, such intensity, that you can barely make out the details of what's happening on the screen. Pair this with an editor who insists on cutting every other second at most, and the result is a stylistic approach to musical numbers more likely to induce motion sickness than glee. To provide an example for reference: The performance of "Bad Romance" in "Theatricality" spans two and a half minutes, during which the camera cuts 120 times, making the shots last an average of 1.25 seconds (in addition to the camera zooming and panning the entire time). The effect of this is, I believe, intended to have two functions: To make the numbers appear dynamic regardless of the quality of the dance and/or choreography, and to mask any weaknesses in the performances by making it virtually impossible to notice details. Though it does accomplish this (at least to an extent), it also serves to cheapen the performance (because if it is impossible to closely analyze the negative aspects that will also be the case for the positive aspects) and put into question the quality of its dancers (because by cutting every second we never get to see an entire dance sequence play out, and for all we know

they cut so much *because* the dancers are not up to par and are unable to dance convincingly for more than a couple of seconds at a time).

This brings me to the performative aspect of *Glee*. All the numbers are performed by the cast so one would think their performances are vital to the series' quality, but this is not the case because their performances can barely be called their own. *Glee*, like all the "modern" TV musicals (those released after 1990) record their songs in a studio rather than live on set. This has been done in films for decades and is not, in itself, a negative indicator of value. However, when the musical performances are over-produced to the point of it sounding like a different person than the one who just spoke, it is. And in *Glee*, they often are. Of course, this is more true in some cases than others as some are worse singers and thus require more studio enhancement to reach the level of performance required by *Glee*, but the use of voice editing is prevalent throughout. There is one caveat, though, which might excuse its use: If the objective was not to appear real, it would not be a problem. Of course, the musical numbers on *Glee* are, for the most part, supposed to be real performances, but they *are* part of an alternative diegesis. Therefore it is not a big problem that the numbers don't seem grounded in the show's internal reality, but the problem is that they don't seem grounded in reality at all. The issue isn't that, say, Kurt wouldn't sound anything like what he sounds like performing "Defying Gravity" in "Wheels"; The issue is that Chris Colfer *doesn't* sound like that, making the performance not unrealistic but *unreal*, and for a performance to really be effective, to have impact, it needs to at least feel authentic, something few numbers in *Glee* does. I would much rather have the flawed and unpolished, but real, performances of *Cop Rock* and *Shangri-La Plaza* than something that may as well have been created by a machine. After all, if you are going to edit the performances to sound just like the original version, why not just use the original and have the characters lip-sync?

Thus, *Glee* is found lacking in terms of integrity, authenticity and integration, as well as either a lack of skill or a lack of the right intention (or both) when it comes to the musical numbers' filming and editing. The only thing which could possibly redeem it as valuable would be there was some other way in which to evaluate an artwork which places value on completely different aspects than aesthetic criticism. This brings me, finally, to the subject of camp.

6.4 Camp

The use of “camp” as a term describing certain kinds of people and works of art found its origin in the late 19th century. It was first defined in 1909 as “ostentatious, exaggerated, affected, theatrical; effeminate or homosexual; pertaining to, characteristics of, homosexuals” (Eiss, 2016, p. 25). This definition serves as a baseline, an associative frame of reference, but little more. As we’ll later discover, giving camp a literal “dictionary definition” is counter-productive to the process of exploring camp objects, though some of the 1909 definition is worth discussing. It immediately emphasizes two aspects: exaggeration and homosexuality.

These characteristics are both intertwined with the idea of camp, but one is more essential than the other. Though homosexuality and camp are constantly linked by both scholars and non-scholars, they are not inseparable. As Susan Sontag writes: “Camp taste is much more than homosexual taste” (Sontag, 1964, p. 31). This overlap seems to have been overemphasized in the early instances of camp discourse (and still is to this day). Exaggeration, on the other hand, seems more essentially linked to camp, partly also due to its many areas of application.

Exaggeration doesn’t pertain to just one aspect of an artwork, or even to a few; In a work of camp one can identify exaggerated costumes, coloration, stylization, superficiality, desire, ambition, character, and so forth. This isn’t to say that camp is always exaggerated in every way (though much of camp is exaggerated in many), but you would be hard-pressed to find something that is in no way exaggerated and still considered camp.

As this first recorded definition of the camp concept barely seems to have scratched the surface, further discussion and deliberation would be required to arrive at a concise yet adequately wide definition of camp. However, this didn’t come for a long time. For 50 years, camp existed in the public discourse as an adjective and a concept, but scholars seemed uninterested in developing a shared and specific definition. This led to camp developing in the mind of our society until everyone knew what it was, but very few could put it into words. Even today, camp is a diffuse term, seeming for some to simply mean “to do with homosexuality in some way” and to others “so bad it’s good”. Due to this oral and indeliberate development it became an incredibly hard concept to write about in an academic way, but Susan Sontag made a valiant effort to academize the term with her 1964 text *Notes on Camp*.

6.4.1 Notes on *Notes on Camp*

The first key thing that *Notes on Camp* does is determining the proper suffix of the word camp. Until then (and also since then) it has been called camp taste, camp style, camp aesthetic, camp art and other things. While some of these are phrases Sontag uses as well, she crucially identifies that none of them encompasses the entirety of what camp is, and labels it “the camp sensibility”. The camp sensibility is a way to look at art (and life), a paradigm of judgement based not on traditional criteria of taste and quality, but on instinctive qualities like fun and frivolity. It is a step away from viewing artworks as having meaning, perhaps even hidden away in some dark basement only detailed analysis can uncover, to viewing art as pure artifice, valuing eccentricity, uniqueness and extravagance. “Camp turns its back on the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgement What it does is to offer for art (and life) a different – a supplementary – set of standards” (Sontag, 1964, p. 22). Thus, camp becomes the antithesis to aestheticism; an alternative way of viewing, evaluating, and asserting the artistic value of art.

After an initial introduction wherein Sontag explains her motives and lays the groundwork for her theorization on the camp sensibility, she states that the method for discussing camp which she has settled on is not a traditional essay or article laying, but rather a structure based on notes and observations, numbered and presented. What follows is an admittedly cluttered but nonetheless concise and immensely useful run-down of what Sontag considers the important facts and facets regarding camp, as well as some key works, giving a sense of what she perceives is the current camp canon (an implicit canon from which she construes a partial explicit canon). Going through these observations one by one (or important one by important one) would be doing it a disservice and betraying the flexibility and usefulness of Sontag’s chosen structure. Therefore, I will say no more of her musings here, instead inserting quotes and notes where they are appropriate while discussing the relevant aspects of camp.

6.4.2 The subjectivity of camp

When Susan Sontag creates a canon of camp, she is guided by her own subjectivity and the conditions which formed it: her education, her upbringing, her genetic pre-disposition, her time, her taste; her own sensibilities. Labelling something camp is a dangerous task, not because you might be wrong (as that would be impossible to prove) but because someone will disagree. As Rolness puts it: “When they shout in joy over a great solo performance in the genre, others shake

their head over what they perceive as immoral and nihilistic, silly and nonsensical, or don't understand at all"(Rolness, 1992, p. 22).

The relative and wildly subjective nature of camp is also emphasized by its relation to time. "Time liberates the work of art from moral relevance, delivering it over to the camp sensibility" (Sontag, 1964, p. 20). This is the ultimate factor in the detachment which characterizes the camp sensibility: Not only do you purposefully rid yourself of conventional lenses of reception and standardized notions of quality and value, but you are also removed (not on purpose, but by the logic of linear time) from the very society and landscape (be it artistic, political, philosophical, religious...) in and for which the work of art was created.

This (in some cases necessary, in others not) detachment can be achieved in years, decades or centuries. Therefore, the camp canon is ever-changeable: When we say something is or isn't camp, it's not an absolute, timeless statement, just as is the case with any subjective canon. What we're saying is "I perceive this as camp, right now". This also implies that no work of art is ever safe from a camp categorization; Time can turn almost anything into camp. However, the inverse isn't as true. The camp canon grows at a pace far faster than it shrinks due in part to our society's mostly progressive, not cyclical, development.

6.4.3 Camp and sexuality

In the public's view, camp and homosexuality are inseparably connected. When an average person calls another person "camp" it can often be translated as "exhibiting traditionally homosexual characteristics", though the most influential camp theoreticians steer clear of claiming they're synonymous: Both Sontag and Booth go out of their way to ascertain that, while camp and queerness share similar traits and have a deeply connected mutual history, they are not interchangeable. Sontag formulates it thus: "While it's not true that Camp taste is homosexual taste, there is no doubt a peculiar affinity and overlap," before pointing out that homosexuals "constitute the vanguard – and most articulate audience – of Camp" (Sontag, 1964, p. 30). Booth goes a little further, emphasizing that, contrary to what Sontag and others had claimed, homosexuals did not invent camp, nor did it originate in a gay sub-society. "Camp people tend to be asexual rather than homosexual," he states, labelling the traditional camp personalities of Beau Brummell and Andy Warhol as "honorary homosexuals, or homosexuals in spirit rather than practice"(Booth, 1983, p. 20).

The most significant overlap between camp and homosexuality seems not to lie in the performance or the performers, but rather in the reception. Universally accepted camp personalities such as Greta Garbo and Tallulah Bankhead weren't gay (and certainly weren't male homosexuals), but their personalities, their character and style, spoke to the gay sensibility (a useful term when not claimed to have in and of itself "created" camp). And it did so, it seems, due to an overwhelmingly similar set of traits. Camp is lavish, it is exaggerated, it is androgynous, as are stereotypical homosexuals. Perhaps the most important link, however, and one that serves to connect camp not only to male homosexuality but to queer culture as a whole, is that camp is marginal. It is created and exists in the fringes of society, not only outside the mainstream, but as an active revolt against it. In an attempt to define camp more concisely than his theoretical predecessors, Booth claims that "to be camp is to present oneself as being committed to the marginal with a commitment greater than the marginal merits" (Booth, 1983, p. 69), which is also a central element to surviving in this society as someone who are themselves marginal.

The exact reason why camp and queerness share so many traits is hard to pinpoint. To say that it's entirely coincidental would be doing it a disservice: It is very probable that homosexuals have adopted traits from camp personalities, just as camp has adopted traits from homosexuals. This is, however, a far cry from synonymity. It is clear that the two are intrinsically connected, but there is no obligation. You don't have to be gay to be camp, just as you don't have to be camp to be gay.

6.4.4 Camp and musicals

A similar, though not *as* significant relation is shared by camp and musicals. Obviously, much of camp is devoid of musicality, just as many musicals are devoid of camp, though there is an undeniable list of shared traits between them. One is the association to queerness, specifically male homosexuals. Musical, particularly Broadway musical, has long been a sub-section of art dominated by homosexuals. However, where camp's reception is more homosexually dominated than its creation, the inverse seems to be true for musicals; it is well-received, both in terms of numbers and acclaim, by the general public (though you certainly can make the case that homosexuals have an increased affinity for it), but on the production side it is dominated by gay men, so much so that you can be shunned for being heterosexual (though this is way less likely to happen nowadays than, say, 40 years ago).

Another shared trait between camp and musicals is the love of artifice. Camp art is never realistic, it is propped-up and stylized so as to represent, but not resemble, something real. Some of the same can be said of musicals: It is flighty and escapist, but, most significantly, it is performed. Performance is central to camp, so much so that many camp people never stop performing. Though the performative element in itself is not the most significant, but rather *how* it is performed: in song and dance. As established, this always breaks the rules of reality and realism, in a way that other forms of camp art can only dream of. There is an immediate need for suspension of disbelief, as there is no place on earth where people *actually* break into song and dance on a whim. You won't watch a musical and think "I recognize *all* of this from real life", just as you won't watch a play by Oscar Wilde and think "*this* is reality, unfiltered".

A third commonality between these two sections of art is their propensity for being looked down upon. Unclaimed camp art is just art that has been dismissed as tacky or lacking in quality by an audience unable to see its uniquely interesting properties. The same was true for musicals when they first entered the scene: Musical theatre wasn't "real" theatre, it was frivolous and light and should therefore not be taken seriously. However, camp theory is one avenue for musicals to be considered a valuable artform. In the camp sensibility, one doesn't want "serious" or "high-brow", one wants fun, indulgence, ridiculousness and freedom from the boring conventions of quality-based judgement. Camp criticism takes these elements seriously and converts them into criteria by which to ascertain whether a given artwork is interesting and worth discussing or analyzing, in other words its value.

6.4.5 Camp criteria

When writing about camp in an academic, theoretically based setting, one has to choose which interpretations to subscribe to, as most everyone who has written about camp seem to disagree with what others have written. This thesis will mainly trust in the originator, the first to formulate many of these ideas, Susan Sontag. Though not infallible, her thoughts on camp are concise and sensible, and provide a sufficient theoretical framework in which to write about camp in a specific context. Thus, the following list of camp criteria will be based in large part on *Notes on Camp*.

6.4.5.1 Artifice

"All Camp objects, and persons, contain a large element of artifice. Nothing in nature can be Campy," writes Sontag (Sontag, 1964, p. 8). With this she argues that camp is a step away from

real life, an attempt to, instead of staying grounded, fly as high as you can, away from the world and its boring realities.

6.4.5.2 *Innocence*

One element of camp which Sontag seems to value more than almost any other theoretician, is that camp (or at least pure camp) must be made in good faith: “Camp which knows itself to be Camp (camping) is usually less satisfying. The pure examples of Camp are unintentional, they are dead serious”(Sontag, 1964, p. 13). If you go in with the intention to create camp, you will fail before you start (and probably not fail in the way camp appreciates).

6.4.5.3 *Ambition*

“When something is just bad (rather than Camp), it’s often because it is too mediocre in its ambition” (Sontag, 1964, p. 16). The greatest examples of pure camp have tried to establish themselves as great works of art in a traditionally judged canon. If you don’t try to be great, you can’t fail in an attractive or interesting way.

6.4.5.4 *Passion*

“Without passion, one gets pseudo-camp” (Sontag, 1964, p. 18). To create something outrageous with ambition and then fail in a spectacular way, you need to be driven by passion. Passion feeds into ambition: If you’re not passionate, you won’t reach the levels of ambition and spectacle required to create (or be) camp.

6.4.5.5 *Seriousness*

Almost all theoreticians agree that you can only make camp of what you take seriously. One of the first deliberations on camp in literature phrases it as such: “You can’t camp about something you don’t take seriously. You’re not making fun of it; you’re making fun out of it” (Isherwood, 1954, p. 110). This is also a specificity of the required ambition; If you don’t take yourself or your artwork seriously, you can’t fail in the way that camp necessitates.

6.4.5.6 *Failure*

“In naïve, or pure, Camp, the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails” (Sontag, 1964, p. 16). Failure here has a dual meaning: Firstly, the seriousness of the work fails in such a way that what was meant to be taken seriously, can’t be: “Camp is art that proposes itself seriously, but can’t be taken as such” (Sontag, 1964, p. 17). Secondly, the work itself fails in a more traditional sense, which is to say commercially. “There is a sense in which it is correct to

say ‘It’s too good to be Camp.’ Or ‘too important’, not marginal enough” (Sontag, 1964, p. 7) says Sontag, and establishes marginality as another condition, later echoed profusely by Booth.

6.4.5.7 *Excess*

“The hallmark of Camp is the spirit of extravagance”, “‘It’s too much’, ‘It’s too fantastic’, ‘It’s not to be believed’ are standard phrases of Camp enthusiasm” (Sontag, 1964, pp. 16-17). Camp is created by overdoing, by exaggerating traits which by their very existence can be deemed excessive, and often combining these. Think of *Shangri-La Plaza* (possibly the only musical TV series one can call pure camp): not only do they sing, in itself outrageous and campy, but they sing *all the time*, while also exaggerating all the stereotypical traits of their characters (especially their minorities), making almost all of them ridiculous (the sassy-to-a-fault-but-with-a-good-heart African-American waitress; the wise-beyond-her-years 7-year-old who says everything that pops into her head regardless of how socially unacceptable it might be; the seemingly-troubled-but-surprisingly-articulate group of African-American teenagers with so much hip and hop flowing through their veins they can’t help rapping and break-dancing every time they’re on screen).

6.4.5.8 *Entertainment*

The ultimate meaning of camp and the most important function of its sensibility is the concept of entertainment for the sake of entertainment. Entertainment value, intentional or not, is what seems to separate it from traditional views on quality and value. A very camp statement would be “This entertains me and is therefore valuable”, in other words: camp is fun. The challenge, then, is to identify *why* it is entertaining, which specific qualities contribute to it being fun, so as to avoid shallow analyses and unjustified conclusions.

So how does one apply this to musicals, and specifically TV musicals? Feuer talks about the concept of “gay readings” of Hollywood musicals (as opposed to the predominant way to view them, through the main heterosexual couple) (Feuer, 1993, p. 139). Though the focus on sexuality does not translate to the TV medium (as TV musicals aren’t inherently focused around a central romantic pairing), her assertion is that alternate readings of a musical based on entirely different paradigms of evaluation are valid. A camp reading of a musical TV series, then, will be to view it through the lens of camp, to completely disregard the conventions and paradigms established in, and by, aesthetic criticism and to instead value those aspects of it which may be considered camp, the aspects established in this section.

6.4.6 Conclusion on *Glee*

So, then, does this save *Glee* from exclusion? Though it is often referred to as campy, it does not seem to correspond all that well to the criteria listed above. It is not innocent or unaware of its own camp qualities, immediately disqualifying it from the label of “pure camp”. It is somewhat ambitious, but at no point does it attempt to transcend its medium or become something more than a reasonably successful (ratings-wise) TV series. The passion involved diminishes over time, going from quite passionate in the first season to everything from the production to the performances seeming really quite disinterested in the final season (the phrase “phoning it in” comes to mind). It does occasionally take itself seriously, but it would probably not be considered serious overall. It was certainly not a commercial failure, in fact, out of all the series taken into consideration *Glee* seems by far the most successful in this regard, so its marginality is also very slight. It does, however, seem that some of the seriousness intended does fail, although it’s hard to say if it is supposed to be taken seriously or laughed at. Where *Glee* corresponds most closely to camp seems to be its artifice and its excess. The musical numbers are ridiculous, the narrative is usually laughable, the characters are exaggerated stereotypes, and the whole show carries an air of unreality.

All this, however, needs to add up to one thing: entertainment. How fun is *Glee*? In my opinion, not fun enough. At times, *Glee* is as entertaining as it tries to be (though not always in the ways it tries to be). At other times, though, *Glee* is a slog to sit through, because at some point even campiness reaches a point of diminishing returns. Sue Sylvester acting like a comic book villain might be funny the first 15 times it happens, and her coming around and showing a softer side might be somewhat touching a few times. But when this happens again and again, every time in the same way of her being ridiculously petty and mean before something happens that makes her sympathize with the glee club before returning to her evil ways in a matter of episodes, one inevitably grows tired (especially when it is executed in poorer and poorer fashion). At some point you just have to throw your hands in the air and exclaim “How has this woman not yet been arrested?”, and at that point it becomes impossible to read it as valuable camp. If *Glee* only aired the original 13 episodes, it may very well have made the cut. Even after two seasons it may have remained in the discussion. But six seasons of inconsistency, diminishing returns and a drop in the quality of nearly every aspect? It fails miserably within the paradigms of aesthetic criticism, and with camp unable to redeem its value the exclusion of *Glee* is a fact.

6.4.7 *Smash*

Before I move on to talk extensively about the series which *are* included, I want to discuss the merits of one final series: *Smash*. A backstage musical, *Smash* follows the production of the fictional Marilyn Monroe musical *Bombshell* in the first season before branching out and also enveloping another musical production in the second season (titled *Hit List*). In addition to the musical numbers connected to these shows, however, there are also performances of hit songs akin to in a jukebox musical (but overall there are more songs that are written for the show than there are cover versions, so I don't categorize it as a jukebox musical). In ascertaining the value of this show I will primarily focus on four aspects: integration, integrity, characterization and camp.

First of all, though, I want to talk a little bit about the alternative diegesis used in *Smash*. Its musical numbers usually have utilize one (or more) of three different approaches to the concept: Either the entire song is alternatively diegetic (when there is no justification for the characters singing, such as “It’s a Man’s Man’s Man’s World” in “Let’s Be Bad” and “Under Pressure” in the series finale), there are alternatively diegetic auditive elements (such as the piano score in “A Song For You” from episode five or the full orchestral accompaniment to “Don’t Say Yes Until I Finish Talking” in “Understudy” even though there is only a piano and a drumkit in the rehearsal space), or there are alternatively diegetic visual elements (this happens in multiple rehearsal numbers, such as “Let’s Be Bad” in the episode with the same title cutting to a polished stage version of the performance³⁶ or the sudden appearance of purple lights during “The 20th Century Fox Mambo” in “The Callback”). Occasionally the alternative diegesis is explained, like “Let Me Be Your Star” in the second episode and “Public Relations” in “The Read-Through” which take place in Tom and/or Julia’s imagination, but for the most part it is not.

Though there are different approaches to alternative diegesis used, almost all the numbers are alternatively diegetic, meaning the series most definitely qualifies as a musical. As a backstage musical, though, successful integration will be difficult. If we separate the musical numbers into two categories, those which are part of *Bombshell*, *Hit List* or some other in-universe show and those which don't belong to any such performative context (for the most part this is also a separation between the numbers which only partially take place in an alternative world and those

³⁶ This could be seen as a flash-forward and thus not necessarily an alternative diegesis, however Karen is not in the chorus at any point during an actual performance, so it is not a flash-forward.

which do so almost completely, as well as the separation between songs written specifically for the show and cover versions of pre-existing songs), it is immediately clear which category is the easiest to integrate successfully: The songs that are written for an in-universe show will need to make sense in the context of that show and is thus less likely to say something meaningful about the characters or the plot. There are examples of such songs being well-integrated, though, most significantly at the end of the pilot when Karen and Ivy perform a duet version of “Let Me Be Your Star”. This number serves a multitude of purposes: The lyrics represent both Marilyn Monroe as well as Karen and/or Ivy perfectly (Karen and Marilyn were both small-town girls trying to make it big in the city, all three have/had and incredible hunger for fame and success, and the plea of “Choose me” is both relevant in the context of Marilyn pleading for the public to revere her and for Karen and Ivy wanting to be chosen for the role of Marilyn), it is a climactic end to the episode, and it sets up the rivalry between Karen and Ivy which would remain in focus for most of the series. It doesn’t hurt, either, that the song is arguably the best song in *Bombshell*. Unfortunately, this seems to be the exception rather than the rule, and the integration (as well as the series itself) never manages to replicate the high point of the first episode.

So, the integration of the originally written songs is weakened because they also need to make sense within the context of their show, but what about the ones that don’t? As is the case with *Glee*, their integration seems to be a mixed bag. Some numbers drive the narrative and gives the audience relevant information about the characters (such as “High and Dry” in “The Phenomenon” giving us a unique insight into Jimmy’s addiction and successfully depicting him as a sympathetic character for once), while others seem to give no new information or serve any interesting function (such as “Cheers (Drink to That)” in “Hell on Earth” or “Dance to the Music” in “The Coup”). Thus, the problem with the integration isn’t that it’s always poorly done, but that it is inconsistent. Some episodes feature several well-integrated musical numbers, while in others there doesn’t even seem to be an attempt to integrate the plot and the music.

This brings me to the integrity of *Smash*, which is quite woeful (another shared trait with *Glee*). In this case it isn’t so much that the characters act irrationally and change their behavior from episode to episode (they occasionally do, but not nearly as often as in *Glee*), but that the overall quality of the writing varies greatly (to be fair, this was also a major problem for *Glee*), and that the vision, the overarching target towards which the series is working, seems nonexistent. Some

storylines are well-crafted and interesting, but some are either ridiculous or just boring (sometimes both). In the first season the poor writing is often tied to two specific characters, making the problems of characterization and writing/integrity indistinguishable. The characters in question are Tom's assistant Ellis and Julia's son Leo, both of whom I will now analyze in relation to the plot, starting with the former. The problem with Ellis is that it seems like the writers want us to root for him, to care about what happens to him, despite the fact that he is entirely unsympathetic. He starts out as Tom's assistant, manages to alienate both Tom and his writing partner Julia by recording and leaking a song from *Bombshell* and thus putting the whole production in jeopardy. Miraculously he salvages his job, but soon jumps ship to work for someone more powerful, the producer Eileen. One might think this made him buck up his ideas and start exhibiting some loyalty, but alas: Right after getting the job he is hacking into Eileen's computer and stealing contact information for his own personal gain. He is also used as a lazy device by the writers on more than one occasion. You need the contents on a private conversation to be revealed to someone else? Just have Ellis eavesdrop and leak the information in characteristic fashion. The main problem with Ellis, however, is that he is constantly awful to everyone but seemingly gets away with it every time. Fortunately, he is found to have poisoned an actress "Previews" and is consequently fired and thus written off the show, mercifully sparing season two from his toxic presence.

Leo isn't as unsympathetic as Ellis but makes up for it by being even more annoying. He is a character completely devoid of depth or any interesting traits, making every scene he is in almost unbearable to watch. Like Ellis, Leo is also a proponent of lazy writing: Need Julia to be confronted about her affair? Have her kiss her paramour right outside her apartment for Leo to notice. Need to create tension on the set of *Bombshell*? Have Leo get busted for smoking marijuana, leading to Julia leaving in the middle of the day and questions being raised about her commitment to the show.

Although these two characters were problematic, it seems like they were only a symptom of the problem in the show's first season: creator and showrunner Theresa Rebeck. She was mainly a playwright, but because she also had some TV writing credits she was entrusted with running the show on her own after the promising pilot. This creator/showrunner combination is indicative of a show having a coherent vision which most of the time will be a sign of quality, but if the vision

is bad the inverse becomes true. This seems to be the case for *Smash*, as Rebeck insisted on full creative control and led the show in her own direction, a direction NBC executives evidently were not happy with. At the end of season one she was fired as showrunner and, not so coincidentally, both Ellis and Leo were written off the show (Arthur, 2013). Joshua Safran, who would later create *Soundtrack*, was brought on as showrunner for the second season, but was unable to save it from cancellation.

Though the issues with *Smash*'s writing are plentiful (in both seasons), the main problem seems to be its unfocused approach, or overall lack of integrity. The pilot was so successful because it established an interesting dichotomy of Karen and Ivy and the dynamics behind the scenes of a Broadway production seemed like a fascinating subject. Rebeck seemed to have completely misinterpreted which parts of it the audiences and critics responded so positively to, prioritizing melodramatic storylines and spending an inordinate amount of time developing characters only tangentially related to the interesting part of the plot (such as the aforementioned Ellis and Leo as well as Karen's boyfriend Dev). The conflict of who will get to play Marilyn in the end seems of secondary importance, and additionally the part is cast and re-cast so many times that it becomes hard to keep track who is currently supposed to be playing her (at one point she is even played by someone other than Karen or Ivy, temporarily removing one of the show's most interesting aspects). In season two it is too late to go back to the original premise and fulfill its potential, so they instead introduce a second musical, hence making the plot even more fragmented and unfocused.

Thus, the quality of *Smash* seems to be low in an aesthetic context with low integrity and poor characterization,³⁷ while its musical qualities are inconsistent and not enough in themselves to argue for *Smash*'s inclusion in the final canon. That means we again find ourselves in a situation in which camp emerges as the only potential saving grace. So, is *Smash* camp enough to be valuable? The short answer is no. The longer answer is that, while *Smash* exhibits certain camp elements (artifice, excess and a misguided seriousness), it is not ambitious enough, not passionate enough, not marginal enough and not entertaining enough. Too many aspects of the show are not of high value in an aesthetic sense nor a camp sense. It can also be summarized by

³⁷ In addition to various other elements of low aesthetic value such as the acting skill; one of the main characters is primarily known for winning American Idol and showcases again and again that her acting and singing skills are of reverse proportional values: Her acting is as bad as her singing is good.

the concept of artistic ambition: While the pilot indicated a desire to be something unique and somewhat daring, that is not reflected in much of the rest of the series. It relies too much on tired tropes and contrived storytelling, rarely utilizing the talent at its disposal to the fullest and occupying a familiar, uninteresting territory for far too much of its runtime. To put it plainly: *Smash* at its best has value, but as an entity, as a whole work, there are too many negative factors weighing it down for it to be included in an evaluative canon of TV musicals.

7 Final canon

Thus, the exclusionary process is finished, and I am ready to present my final canon. This does not, however, conclude my thesis; Just as I have argued for the exclusion of series in this section, I will now have to argue for inclusions as well. The structure will be similar: I will present the aesthetic and/or camp criteria most relevant for the judgement and provide specific examples which demonstrate the series' value. So, without further ado, here is the list of series I deem worthy of inclusion to an evaluative canon of TV musical series:

Pennies from Heaven

Shangri-La Plaza

Cop Rock

Lipstick on Your Collar

Blackpool

Galavant

Crazy Ex-Girlfriend

Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist

7.1 *Pennies from Heaven*

The first entry is perhaps the decision which was easiest to make. The conclusion that Dennis Potter's *Pennies from Heaven* is a work of tremendous value can be reached by studying its reception (it is still regarded as one of the best British TV series ever made), its influence (not only did it pave the way for Potter's other musical TV series as well as *Blackpool*, but as a part of Potter's *oeuvre* it shaped and forever changed the British TV landscape), or, for most people,

simply watching it. It's a work of depth and wit, fantastic performances in front of and behind the camera, and a quality of writing and integrity level with the very best art has to offer. It is innovative (nothing quite like it had ever been done before), artistically ambitious and all over uncompromising; Potter paid no mind to those critiquing his so-called perversion. The musical elements are successfully integrated both thematically and narratively. It, along with most of the rest of Potter's work, was ahead of its time, tackling subjects which are still relevant to this day. As so much of *Pennies'* strength is readily apparent in the text, and seemingly almost universally agreed upon, I want to focus my analysis on three aspects which are not necessarily the ones with most influence on the judgement, but the aspects I find the most interesting and/or unique: Authorship, and its relation to camp.

A main function of authorship in television is ensuring the integrity and unity of the series by being formed primarily by one creative voice, one coherent vision. However, there are also ways to look at authorship more closely tied to the tradition of *auteur* studies: The claim of *auteur*-oriented criticism, aside the obvious one that even collaborative artworks such as films and TV series can (and maybe should) have an author (thus assigning the artwork to one artist), is that by examining the author (both as a person and as an artist³⁸) one can uncover additional levels of meaning which contribute to its value. In *Pennies*, through familiarity with his previous work as well as his persona, one can interpret the series as a reflection personal and artistic development. The most important contextual piece of information, then, is that whilst writing *Pennies*, Potter was in the hospital being treated with a new drug for his psoriatic arthropathy (Carpenter, 1998, p. 345). This treatment improved his physical state tremendously and seemed to provide him with a new sense of optimism, thoroughly reflected in *Pennies*. That is not to say that it is an overall happy series; The main character is, after all, sentenced to death for a murder he did not commit, and the characters constantly find themselves in miserable situations (Arthur feels trapped in a dead marriage and ends up condemned unjustly, his wife Joan is mistreated and cheated on by Arthur, and his lover Eileen moves to London to be with him only to be completely ignored and having to resort to prostitution to survive).

However, what is prominent in a degree to which it never had been in any of Potter's earlier works, is hope. The characters make the best of even horrible situations and maintain a demeanor

³⁸ Meaning to explore artist's *oeuvre*.

of hoping, and also believing, that everything will work out. What perhaps best exemplifies the general attitude of the series is the titular song, “Pennies from Heaven”, lip-synced to by the homeless accordion man in the first episode. It goes “A long time ago // A million years BC // The best things in life // Were absolutely free // But no one appreciated // A sky that was always blue”, positing that endless happiness is not possible nor desirable; Good things are only made such by the contrasting existence of bad things. Thus, it summarizes much of the series’ ethos by ascertaining that reacting with hope and positivity is the right way, indeed the only way, to handle the grim realities of life. That attitude is also reflected emphatically in the final scene of the series: After being hanged, Arthur is resurrected and reunited with Eileen. He states that “We couldn’t go through all of that without a happy ending, now, could we?”, the two perform “The Glory of Love”, and walk off into the distance together. Hence the series manages to end on a happy and optimistic note, despite its dark subject matter.

When it comes to camp, I need to make an initial clarification: *Pennies from Heaven* is valuable by aesthetic criteria, and does not need to be viewed from a camp perspective in order to be perceived as valuable (additionally, it was neither marginal nor unsuccessful enough to ever attain the camp label). What I seek to highlight, then, is that even though *Pennies* is not altogether camp, it exhibits and reverses multiple camp traits, which serves to add value to it from that perspective also. The most obvious way in which *Pennies* adheres to camp style is in its musical numbers. For one, they are artificial and excessive, as most musical numbers are. More importantly, however: They are androgynous. There is no necessary relation between the character seemingly performing and the voice we hear. Intended originally to disorient the audience, this also has the effect of effeminizing the males and masculinizing the females, erasing the lines between genders. This is also achieved outside the musical numbers by reversing traditional gender roles: Arthur is not the main breadwinner in his home (he has to beg his wife for money to start a new business), Eileen provides for her brothers and father instead of the other way around, and Eileen loves sex (a trait rarely accentuated in women on screen, especially in the 1970’s).

This brings me to another way in which *Pennies from Heaven* relates to camp interests: its explicit focus on deviant sexuality. A considerable part of camp is related to abnormal forms of sexuality, or “queerness” (it just so happens that homosexuality is the most prominent form of

queerness and has thus dominated this part of camp expression) (Drushel et al., 2017, p. 10). Queer sexuality is an extension of the camp focus on marginality, as queerness is found in the margins of sexuality. Though queerness seems to primarily be associated to abnormal sexual orientation, it pertains also to all kinds of sexual abnormality, a subject which is brought up several times in *Pennies*. The aforementioned focus on Eileen liking sex (she becomes a prostitute and remains one because she likes it and is good at it) is one such example. It represents a (at least then) marginalized group (women who are not ashamed of their sexuality) with a main character who, by most estimations, the audience is supposed to be cheering for and identifying with.

Two other such instances seem of particular relevance. One regards Arthur, who seems to think of little else than sex. His sexuality is a defining trait of this character, and comes into focus particularly when his request for Joan to cover her nipples with lipstick and walk around the house with no underwear is revealed to the police in the beginning of episode five. “A man like that seems capable of anything. This puts an entirely different complexion on the whole affair.³⁹ He seems a very sick chap indeed” is the reaction of the police officer. The other is about one of Joan’s friends, Betty, in the second episode. Joan suspects that Arthur is having an affair with her, something another friend of theirs agrees is a possibility. “She is practically a nymphomaniac She told me herself she had gone to bed three men before she was married,” she explains, causing Joan to react with shock and ask “What is it, I mean ... a disease or what?”. These two instances both showcase socially abnormal, but morally defensible, sexual urges being revealed and reacted to with shock and horror. The reactions are so extreme that they become satirical, making fun of the members of society who would react in such a way to learning about someone’s sexual marginality. Thus, *Pennies* shares a motivation with camp: To normalize and foster acceptance for (and assign value to) marginalized impulses and people, who are abnormal but in no way immoral.

³⁹ The affair being that Arthur’s store was found in ruins after he and Eileen trashed it after deciding to run away together.



Pennies from Heaven, episode one⁴⁰

These are some of the ways *Pennies from Heaven* can be said to share characteristics with camp expression. In other words, though it cannot be said to *be* camp, it exhibits camp traits and reverses a camp aesthetic, making the connection interesting even if not necessary to *Pennies from Heaven*'s inclusion in the TV musical canon.

7.2 Shangri-La Plaza

Moving on, we have another series which is related to the concept of camp. Before I get to the camp aspects of *Shangri-La Plaza*, though, I want to quickly discuss it in a regular aesthetic perspective. Two aspects in which it scores quite high is innovation and artistic ambition. Starting with the former: Even if the entirety of the episode was entirely spoken, it would be an abnormality within the sitcom genre at the time. As established by Newman & Levine, multi-camera sitcoms was the norm until at least the 2000's, and even though there existed single-

⁴⁰ This image hints at *Pennies* being aware of its campiness and is an explicit hint to its camp interests.

camera sitcoms earlier, they always featured a laugh-track (Newman & Levine, 2012, p. 84), fortunately absent in *Shangri-La*. If we compare it to the only preceding musical sitcom, *That's Life*, it is very clear which one veers more from the genre's conventions. *That's Life* is filmed in front of a live studio audience and follows a very typical multi-camera sitcom structure; *Shangri-La Plaza* does not. It is also telling that two aesthetically successful (partial) comedies in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* and *Galavant* has much of the same approach as *Shangri-La* with originally written songs and a propensity for mixing comedy and drama.

This ties into the artistic ambition of *Shangri-La Plaza*, because its refusal to conform to sitcom conventions is a sign of its attempt to be something more than a normal, safe TV comedy. I will look at two things which exemplify this in particular, starting with its tone. For a sitcom, *Shangri-La Plaza* is not that funny. This is not primarily a judgement of its comedic quality (although some of its most traditional jokes constitute some of its weaker moments⁴¹), but rather an assertion that it might not actually fit that well into the classification of a sitcom (though there is no established TV genre within which it fits better; The closest might be the 30-minute dramedies which have increased in popularity the last few years⁴²). A minority of the musical numbers make an attempt at being humorous, and there is a general lack of obvious set-ups and punchlines. Additionally, the show veers from sitcom conventions with the end of the episode which, while setting up the rest of the (never-to-be) season, is more sad than happy as Amy's dream of moving to Paris is crushed. There even seems to be a conscious decision to attempt some dark humor, a refreshing change of pace in the realm of network comedy TV.⁴³

The other part of *Shangri-La Plaza*'s artistic ambition is the visual elements of the series. There are several sequences with camera-work way more ambitious than the norms of a TV comedy (a genre which used to be defined by extreme visual simplicity, relying almost exclusively on dialogue to convey information). The most significant examples of this are, unsurprisingly, found in the musical numbers.⁴⁴ The mirror shot of Ira during "Gotta Go" and the shot of George

⁴¹ One such example being Ira arguing for Jenny helping them in the workshop starting "it ain't..." before knocking over some tools and passively finishing "dangerous".

⁴² Series like *You're the Worst* (2014-2019), *Transparent* (2014-2019) and *Togetherness* (2015-2016)

⁴³ 8-year-old Jenny asking her mother "Did dad go to heaven?", getting the curt response of "No." and then answering back "Good" is one of the episode's funniest moments, partially because it is in such abject contrast to the expectations of a network sitcom.

⁴⁴ Unsurprising because they offer a unique opportunity to experiment visually, but also because musical numbers comprise about 80% of the episode.

in profile during “Ain’t it Always the Way” are two examples of cinematography more ambitious than that of an average sitcom, but the very best example is the final shot of “The Wait is Over” which is beautifully composed.⁴⁵

However, even though some aesthetic criteria are fulfilled I would find it hard to argue for the inclusion of this series on a basis of pure aesthetic evaluation. Part of this is simply its length; It only consisting of one episode removes several elements from discussion,⁴⁶ and makes it difficult to back up judgements with multiple examples. More importantly, though, is the fact that when I saw this episode, the reasons why I liked it (and why I want to include it in the canon) were mostly not based on specific aesthetic judgement; it was more of an instinctive reaction. This, of course, could be said to be part of Beardsley’s affective reasoning, but a more interesting, and potentially more fruitful, way to look at it is through the lens of camp.

If we go through the list of camp criteria previously stated, it quickly becomes apparent that *Shangri-La Plaza* ticks nearly every box. Its musical elements make it artificial and unreal, it seems to have an ambition to exceed the expectations of its genre, it was an abject failure, its characters are excessively stereotypical, and it is massively entertaining. More importantly, however, is that, as established, it is serious (at least more serious than expected), and this seriousness fails. This isn’t to say that that every serious element falls flat (in fact, there are some moments of genuine emotional resonance which successfully evoke sympathy), but simply that it, as an artwork, cannot be taken altogether seriously because of its ridiculousness. Much of this, I believe, has to do with time. In 1990, much of *Shangri-La Plaza* wasn’t (as) ridiculous because it represents something which, then, was normal. Jenny being allowed to help start a car and responding with an enthusiastic “Fresh!” was probably not funny, or intended as a joke, in 1990 because that was part of the every-day terminology. Later, however, this term has been known as very typical 80’s slang and its use today is almost entirely parodic, making *Shangri-La Plaza* an unintentional parody of itself and its time.

This seems a central part of making the series valuable from a camp perspective, but not necessarily an aesthetic one: much of what makes the series enjoyable seems partially

⁴⁵ Again, this is all relative to a genre with very limited focus on visual expression but still speaks to the ambition of the series.

⁴⁶ Most notably the concept of integrity, but also consistency in other areas such as characterization.

unintentional (which hurts its aesthetic, but not its camp, value). Three African-American teenagers dancing a sexually charged hip-hop-number aimed at Jenny might be intended to be funny, but I find it hard to believe it was an attempt at being quite as ridiculous as it turned out. The same can be said of the in the donut shop's patrons' involvement in "How You Make A Donut Hole": They are intended to contribute to the song's comedic nature, but their enthusiasm is so pronounced and exaggerated that they become funny in a way different to what may have been intended. When Ira sings "You wanna hold on to something? Hold on to your wrench" and tossing George a wrench is an example of surreal humor so out of place in an otherwise serious and tragic song that it being intended as such almost seems impossible.

Ultimately, what makes this series valuable from a camp point of view is its entertainment value, the sheer enjoyment it is capable of evoking in its viewer. I have seen it at least a dozen times, and still have yet to not be entertained. If camp is supposed to be the antithesis of aestheticism, to legitimate art which is hard to argue for in a traditional evaluative paradigm but nevertheless enjoyable, then *Shangri-La Plaza* should definitely be embraced by the camp sensibility. Somewhat ironically, then, it must be said that the inclusion of *Shangri-La Plaza* is probably not in spite of it only being one episode, but *because* of it. *Glee* and *Smash* were excluded because their campiness became tiresome, that there eventually was too much non-camp to really argue for them *as* camp; *Shangri-La Plaza* never had the opportunity to reach that point. One final caveat on the inclusion of this series: If it, by now, seems unjustified, it must be due to my discussion of camp and not the series specifically. Camp, the way it is in my head and the way I have tried to convey it, is intended to assign value to art which may lack traditional aesthetic qualities, but which is frivolous, ridiculous and entertaining; *Shangri-La Plaza*, at the very least, is that.

7.3 Cop Rock

Next, we have an inclusion which may come as a surprise to some. In 2002, TV Guide pronounced *Cop Rock* the 8th worst TV series ever made (CBS, 2002), and when it from time to time is referenced in media it always seems to be as the punchline to a joke.⁴⁷ These prejudices, however, seem mostly based on its commercial, rather than its artistic, failure. Artistically, *Cop*

⁴⁷ For example, in *Community*'s "Home Economics" Jeff Winger says "TV's the best dad there is! TV never came home drunk. TV never forgot me at the zoo. TV never abused and insulted me – unless you count *Cop Rock*".

Rock was part of the process of experimentation which allowed for the diverse nature of television today and as a part of Steven Bochco's *oeuvre* undeniably follows in a tradition of quality TV. By looking at its artistic ambition, authenticity and social criticism I will seek to convince you that *Cop Rock* was ahead of its time and deserved (and deserves) acclaim far greater than it received (and receives).⁴⁸

Starting, then, with the concept of artistic ambition, I want to highlight one aspect in particular: its musical structure. As Bochco wanted it to be as much a musical as a cop show, *Cop Rock* features five originally written musical numbers in every episode except for the eighth which features four. This is, of course, ambitious to a level not found elsewhere within the genre: Writing five songs per episode⁴⁹ is unmatched, only *Galavant* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* come anywhere close and they still only average about three.⁵⁰ Although this does have bearing on the songs' quality (most of the later episodes include one, two or *maybe* three good songs while the rest are uneven), it speaks to the uncompromising nature of the series that it stuck with the approach till the end. Another ambitious part of *Cop Rock*'s musical aspect is its method of recording. All the songs were recorded live on an elaborate soundstage (Bochco, 2017), which meant the actors had to perform the numbers again and again to produce the final result. Though, again, this may be said to have negatively impacted the musical quality (not only are the voices not edited, but they are also performed while acting and dancing instead of in a studio with ideal conditions), it also contributes to the show's authenticity. This is both due to performances seeming real (there are some instances of quite poor lip-syncing in *Glee* and *Smash*, for instance, which add another layer of unreality to the performance), but also impacts its ability to convey genuine emotion, bringing me to my next point.

On top of the authenticity provided by the musical numbers' live recording, there seems to be a general emotional authenticity present in *Cop Rock*, a trait it shares with most of Bochco's other series. One of the things he excelled at as a writer was complex and relatable characters and situations and utilizing them to evoke emotional reactions in the viewer. I want to highlight two

⁴⁸ Though it is not explicitly mentioned as a criteria here, the analysis will be based on and informed by the context of Bochco's authorship, his *auteurism*.

⁴⁹ On a network TV schedule this implies having to write five songs over the course of a week in some instances and a few weeks at best.

⁵⁰ A notable exception is *Shangri-La Plaza* who has an average of ten musical numbers per episode, but this being over only one episode cheapens it quite a bit. It does, though, speak to the artistic ambition of it as well.

examples of this being done successfully in *Cop Rock*, both taking place during musical numbers: One takes place in the pilot, when Patricia sits on a bench and sings a lullaby to her baby (“Sandman”). The scene is touching in its own right, but the emotional component is magnified greatly when a car arrives, revealing she has sold her baby for 200\$ to buy drugs. Despite her doing this abhorrent thing, there is an element of sympathy provoked in the viewer; Her addiction is treated not as a choice or, even, a fault in her personality, but as the disease that it is. It is difficult not to feel sympathetic towards a woman who had a baby in impossible circumstances and is so strongly imprisoned by the grasp of drug addiction. The other example is found in episode eight, after a young boy is caught in the crossfire of a gang-related shooting. His mother, upon discovering her son is dead, breaks into song, questioning God’s motives and, by association, her own faith (“Why Lord?”). The performance is visceral and feels very authentic, immediately invoking an emotional reaction in the audience on behalf of this character unknown to them mere minutes ago.

Finally, we have the aspect of social criticism. Not unlike the works of Dennis Potter, Steven Bochco’s series features frequent depiction of societal issues, or social realism. What is most striking about *Cop Rock*’s handling of these issues is the complexity, the series’ refusal to assign moral value to one side or another. Of course, some issues are presented as one-sided, such as racism within the police force, but for the most part the series abstains from judgement. For instance, in the episode on homelessness (episode six), there is not proposed an easy solution to the problem it poses: The situation is depicted as challenging for both sides. Obviously, there is focus on humanizing the homeless, advocating that they are treated as people, but it is also asserted that the problem is systemic, that no one person is responsible or can be expected to rectify the situation. Another example is the over-arching storyline of LaRusso’s trial. In the first episode, a person guilty of killing a police officer is detained in illegal fashion by two rookie officers, and detective LaRusso decides to kill him rather than letting him go (later claiming self-defense). Throughout the series we follow his legal trial, a trial which I found myself alternating in how I wanted to turn out. There are two main conflicting thoughts that contribute to this: He was a ruthless murderer and drug-dealer and should not be a free man due to the incompetence of two police officers, and that this does not equate him deserving to die. This conflict is mainly depicted through the struggles of detective Potts, who witnessed the murder and has a hard time deciding whether to come forward with the truth or not. In general, there is an impressive amount

of issues addressed throughout the series' run: Drug addiction, corruption, body image, police brutality, sexism, law vs. morality, intergenerational marriage, sexual harassment, racism and religion, to mention some. Nearly all of these seem to be handled in a complex but appropriate manner, a feat it shares with few other series of shared denomination.

All in all, *Cop Rock* presents a secondary world which feels completely real and uses musical numbers to complement this realism (both by contrast and by emphasis). Bochco asserted that the series was rejected before it even premiered, that the audience was “embarrassed” by the premise and never gave it a fair chance (Bochco, 2017), which seems to ring true even today. *Cop Rock* has yet to receive the evaluative reckoning it deserves; it should be considered as an experimental series which succeeded in much of its experimentality (and, yes, failed in some), and which, if released at a more fortuitous time, just might have been recognized as an example of the cultural relevance and aesthetic value a TV series is capable of attaining.

7.4 Lipstick on Your Collar

For the next canonical series, we move back to the *oeuvre* of Dennis Potter for his second entry in the canon, *Lipstick on Your Collar*. *Lipstick* does not seem as obvious an inclusion as *Pennies*, as its reception was not as unanimously adulatory. The most important caveat to this, though, is that the main criticism raised, the main reason why it was deemed disappointing, was that it failed to live up to the expectations set by Potter's preceding works. Claiming this is not, then, to pass judgement on its value as a TV series, but rather as a Potter TV series, raising the bar quite significantly. What I posit in this section is that even a series deemed sub-par to Potter's eminent capabilities can be considered of high value relative to the context of TV as a whole, but also that *Lipstick* was not as “bad”, even in the context of only Potter's *oeuvre*, as critics seemed to suggest. It deserves to be mentioned as a relevant part of his collected works, and by focusing on integration, authenticity, and emotion I hope to convince you of the same.

I'll start, then, by looking at the series' integrative approach. As previously established, it can be difficult for jukebox musicals to successfully integrate their musical numbers. As with *Pennies*, the most interesting of *Lipstick*'s integration is its thematic and atmospheric relevance. The themes accentuated by musical numbers this time around are generational shifts (eradicated in the musical numbers by having older people lip-sync to decidedly youthful music) and love's relation (and indifference) to war. Again, there seems to be focus on the importance of optimism,

of dreaming and hoping, even in times of war, abusive relationships, or plain boredom. Potter also succeeds again in procuring a representation of a time gone by which, at least to someone who wasn't there, seems truthful. Though the contrast between happiness and despair is still present, it has taken a different form in the 50's: Instead of a bleak reality contrasted by the illogical but useful optimism of popular music, there is an air of actual prosperity, but with a potential war looming. This lends importance to enjoying the good aspects of your life when you can (the uplifting musical numbers, for instance), because war may come at any time. Though the integration of *Lipstick* is maybe less successful than *Pennies*', it is still impressive (especially for a jukebox musical).

I want to expand on the series' authenticity, achieved partially through its atmospheric integration. The story of *Lipstick* is one of being young and in love, of being carefree to the point that even impending war doesn't prevent you from being optimistic and seeing the world through the lens of joy and optimism (represented by many of the musical numbers). Even serious situations are depicted through enjoyable, light musical numbers: Even a funeral is lent an air of positivity and humor through the performance of "Sh-Boom (Life Could Be A Dream)". What makes this particularly authentic is that Potter himself, by the time of writing it nearing the end of his life, was once a lighthearted youth in the 50's, falling in love and discovering the pleasures of life in a time otherwise marked by uncertainty and instability. There is a sense that the stories being told are personal, providing them with additional significance and authenticity.

The final point which for me significantly impacts the value of *Lipstick* is the series' ability to convey emotion. As it is not an overly sentimental or tragic series, the emotions usually conveyed is happiness (or pleasure), a trait shared with a majority of Hollywood musicals. First, I want to assert that, in conveying happiness, *Lipstick* rarely resorts to humor. Though comedy and pleasure certainly impact each other and often are interlinked, they need not be. To summarize the difference, one can look at the physical reaction provoked: *Lipstick* is more likely to evoke a smile than laughter; it is a pleasurable experience, but not so much a funny one. There is particularly one important factor in the series' induction of happiness which I want to highlight: characterization.

Through establishing likeable characters, characters with which it is easy to identify and sympathize, *Lipstick* ensures that the emotion evoked in the character mirrors that evoked in the

audience. Primarily, this is achieved through the characters Sylvia and Mickey, who throughout the first few episodes are established as main characters. They are both easy-going and unserious characters, but the most important trait they share is that they are both *unhappy*. Sylvia is married to an abusive man, while Mike is stuck at a job he dislikes with an unfulfilling personal life. This makes their flippancy, their optimistic exuberance, a triumphant characteristic, demonstrating resolve and an ability to remain optimistic even in unhappy circumstances. The audience is thus enticed to feel for and admire them, creating a level of identification, of sympathy, which will pay off in the latter part of the series. Their initial unhappiness makes their eventual happiness all the more impactful and joyous; the series ends with the two of them falling in love, breaking free from the strains which caused them unhappiness. The audience is invited to share in their joy, to experience the happiness the characters also feel, making the ending of the series particularly joy-inducing.

Lipstick, then, succeeds both in emphasizing the importance of remaining optimistic even in dire circumstances, and in assuring the audience that those who do are eventually rewarded (in a more absolute and all over optimistic way than *Pennies from Heaven*): Hope begets its fulfillment; optimism begets pleasure; false happiness begets real happiness. The prevalent optimism provides the viewer with pleasure, making the experience of watching *Lipstick* enjoyable if nothing else (but also much else). Its cheerfulness evokes rightful comparisons to the Hollywood musical (as well as the clear sexual dichotomy, established by Altman as the most important syntactic element of the film musical (Altman, 1987)), but, also like the Hollywood musical, this does not preclude it from deeper levels, from value in other aspects as well.⁵¹ The most important part of its eventual inclusion in my canon is its pleasurable nature, its entertainment value and its ability to evoke positive emotion, but this does not imply that it is vacuous, superficial or cheap. Overall, it is great not in spite of its exuberant expressiveness but because of it, a work of aesthetic value *and* tremendous viewing pleasure, ensuring its ultimate inclusion.

⁵¹ The is, for instance, sharp social criticism, fantastic acting performances, and an overall integrity of the level one would expect from Dennis Potter.

7.5 *Blackpool*

The inclusion of *Blackpool* is somewhat of a unique case. Most of the series included in my canon are so due to some specific, extraordinary qualities, some undeniable strengths which elevate them above those series excluded. In *Blackpool*, however, it is more difficult to separate these qualities, harder to identify which elements work better than others, and thus decide where to put focus in this analysis. In a way, *Blackpool* can be said to be an inverse case of *Hull High* and *Rags to Riches*, which were excluded not primarily because they were abject failures based on aesthetic criteria but because they exhibited no traits of particularly high aesthetic value: *Blackpool* is included not primarily because it is supremely successful in any particular aesthetic criterion, but because it is somewhat successful in all of them. *Hull High* and *Rags to Riches* were excluded because they fail to exceed mediocre quality in any aspect; *Blackpool* is included because it fails to subceed high quality in any aspect.

This isn't to say that none of *Blackpool's* elements are of very high quality, but that these elements don't particularly stand out in the context of the show and that is the main argument for its inclusion: The artistic consistency, the success in virtually every aesthetic aspect makes it nearly impossible to overlook when constituting an evaluative canon of TV musicals. I would, nevertheless, like to call attention to two aesthetic criteria in which *Blackpool* excels, those being acting skill and integration.

Acting skill is something quite hard to adjudge concretely. Part of this is that there are multiple facets, multiple places which may be responsible for the success of acting (those being, primarily, cast, directing and the actor's skill). Though there are established schools of thoughts on teaching (and thus evaluating) acting, the aspect most relevant seems to be the authenticity. Authenticity here is taken to mean two slightly different things: For one, the actor must be able to accurately convey something of value. This can be viewed on the very basic level of conveying the dialogue, the literal meaning of the words (concerning matters of enunciation and diction), or as conveying something more complicated such as an emotion or a specific characteristic. The other type of authenticity is whether the acting calls attention to its nature, whether it seems like acting or it seems *real*. This isn't a dichotomy representing value: An acting style which is more superficial, more pronounced or exaggerated than the real-life equivalent would be is not inherently of lesser value than one which is completely naturalistic.

This is especially important to point out in musicals, because the actors *cannot* be authentic in this way during musical numbers. Musical numbers,⁵² by nature, breaks the fourth wall and removes authenticity because, in real life, the characters would not sing and dance the way they are portrayed to.

In *Blackpool*, then, this second type of authenticity shifts constantly. The non-musical scenes are very grounded and affected by conventions of realism, while the musical numbers are decidedly not so. This contrast provides the story with dynamism and variation. Authenticity in the first sense is also successful, particularly impressive during the musical numbers wherein the actors prove capable of conveying emotions non-verbally, only through the choreography and the skill of the actor working in tandem. Finally, I want to highlight one specific performance which left particular impression: David Tennant as Peter Carlisle. His arc as a detective falling in love with the wife of his prime suspect is one which could, in the hands of a lesser actor, seem ridiculous and unrelatable, but his performance perfectly conveys the confliction Carlisle feels. He's being pulled between morality on one side and love on the other, between doing his job and following his heart, and even though his character pretends to have it all figured out, Tennant expertly conveys his indecisiveness, his constant insecurity on which recourse to take.

That leaves me with only one point of analysis remaining: integration. Though *Blackpool* is a lip-synced jukebox musical like *Pennies from Heaven* and *Lipstick on Your Collar*, neither its setting nor its choice of songs are restricted to a certain time period. This means there isn't as much focus on atmospheric integration, but thematic integration is just as important as in Potter's series. Particularly prevalent is the theme of gambling, emphasized by such songs as "The Gambler" and "Viva Las Vegas". There is also a sense of developmental integration which can also be identified in *Pennies* and *Lipstick*: Character development often culminates in a musical number in tandem with spoken scenes. Examples include "Cupid" in episode two, in which Natalie essentially gives up on her marriage for the allure of Peter, "Should I Stay Or Should I Go" in episode five signifying the conflict between Ripley and Peter reaching its breaking point, and "Don't Stop Me Now" in the same episode marking Ripley reaching the end of his rope and making one last desperate attempt to reclaim control of his casino and thereby his life. However, though these musical numbers are integrated to some degree, some of them are less successful

⁵² At least those belonging to an alternative diegesis.

because the lyrics of the songs carry little or no relevance to the specific situation. In these cases, there is still value instilled in the musical number, however, often through the choreography. Take “Should I Stay Or Should I Go” as an example: The lyrics are only obliquely relevant to the situation, but the energy of the song and the choreography (especially the one taking place in an alternatively diegetic space in which Peter and Ripley take turns pushing the other’s head under water in a pool) still ensures that the musical number has a successful function and is, as a whole, quite successfully integrated even though the lyrics don’t pertain to the situation. Hence, with successfully integrated musical numbers, acting of very high quality, and no apparent weaknesses, *Blackpool* is inducted into the canon of musical TV.

7.6 *Galavant*

Galavant is somewhat of a unique case. Aside from *Shangri-La Plaza* it is the only pure comedy in my canon, making its paradigms for evaluation potentially different. However, I do not believe that its generic affiliation should drastically alter the grounds on which it is judged. After all, the genre I am analyzing is the musical TV series as a whole, and I have thus attempted to create a basis on which the value of both comedy and drama series can be assessed. So the question then remains: What makes *Galavant* valuable in the context of the TV musical genre when multiple other comedies were deemed not? Focusing on criteria of humor and emotion, I will now attempt to answer this.

The first element analyzed in a comedy series almost necessarily will be the humor. It is the attempt to be funny which ascertains the classification of comedy and in most cases, entertainment will be the series’ primary objective. However, how does one adjudicate the success of an element so intrinsically subjective? Fortunately, this thesis has at no point claimed to contain an objective evaluation. My hope is, of course, that my opinions and interpretations will correspond to those of other people, but my goal has never been to establish a universal truth, only a personal truth; my truth. However, the trap one could fall into with a mindset like that, is to simply state “I laughed, therefore it is funny, therefore it is valuable”. Instead, I will strive to uncover *why* I find it funny, how *Galavant* has achieved comedic success. Accurately conveying humor textually will be difficult, but I will make an attempt, starting by identifying three central types of humor frequently utilized: musical humor, meta humor and surreal humor.

The concept of musical humor is, of course, vital to the genre of musical comedy. Broadly speaking, musical humor pertains to jokes located within the series' musical numbers, but the more interesting and specific aspect of it is asking "which jokes are only *possible* in the musical numbers?" After all, just because a punch-line is sung doesn't mean it *has* to be sung, meaning the joke may have worked just as well in a non-musical context. There is primarily one song I want to use to exemplify how *Galavant* utilizes its musical numbers to tell jokes it otherwise couldn't have: "She'll Be Mine" from episode one.

"She'll Be Mine", in which king Richard sings about all the horrible things he wants to do to Galavant, is a goldmine for musical humor. The first instance is the ironic juxtaposition of style and content: It is an upbeat, seemingly happy song, but the subject matter is torture and murder. This also goes for the visual style, as accompanying the song is a joyous dance number. That brings us to another musical number-specific joke portrayed here, namely visual musical humor. Richard demonstrating on his guards the specifics of what he'd like to subject Galavant to (as well as his aforementioned cheery demeanor), the chef dancing to his heart's content, and the Gareth straight-faced and seriously participating in the dance number are all well-executed opportunities for jokes, afforded to the series by the existence of a musical number. There is also a third type of joke executed in this song, one pertaining to the nature of song lyrics. Because the song rhymes throughout, when Richard sings "No more 'Galavant is just complete perfection // Gal would never lose his..." and then pauses, the audience fills in the expected rhyme. The show then subverts the expectation, having Richard finish "...Temper". At least two other subtypes of humor are provided specifically by musical numbers: Humorous subjective access (such as "No One But You" giving us unique and funny access to Madalena's narcissism) and emphasis of a joke (such as "Lords of the Sea" allowing the comedic concept of land-bound pirates to be re-stated multiple times and explored from different angles).

Moving on, we have meta humor. These are jokes which reference *Galavant's* fictional nature, or where characters in some (direct or indirect) way address the audience. In the case of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, these cases are usually found within musical numbers, which is somewhat true for *Galavant* as well but not to the same degree. There are many meta jokes in songs, generally divided into two categories: Songs whose mere nature are meta (such as the recaps sung by the jester who seems aware that *Galavant* is a TV show with the purpose of, as he puts it, "catching

people up”), and singular meta jokes (such as in “A Good Day to Die” when Galavant sings “It’s a good day to die”, to which the response is “We won’t, there’s one more episode”). However, there is also a plethora of meta jokes separate from the musical numbers: Isabella stating “They plan to invade us on Sunday January 31st, 8 PM Eastern⁵³, set your DVR” (masked as her joining in the “guess the future”-game the others are playing) in the episode “Love and death”; Matt Lucas’ character in “Aw, Hell, the King“ saying “Though I can’t imagine a free people ever voting to send an army into an open-ended foreign conflict which profits only the few” before looking straight into the camera and finishing “that would be madness” (referring to The US repeatedly sending troops to such situations; Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and so on); and one of Richard’s childhood friends in “The One True King (To Unite Them All)” saying “Would you like me to write you a theme song, my king?”, leading Gareth to respond “Shut up, Menken”, referring to Alan Menken who composed the series’ songs. In addition, there are the cases of the series referencing to the fact that they are singing even outside the confines of a musical number, such as Galavant exclaiming “That was a long song” after performing “A Hero’s Journey” in episode two. The fact that *Galavant*’s explicit self-awareness is not necessarily tied to its musical numbers means that there are more opportunities for meta humor than in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, which relies on verisimilitude whenever the characters don’t sing. Finally, we have the category of surreal humor. This contains jokes which aren’t grounded in logic or reality, jokes which are funny either in spite or *because* of the absurdity. To illustrate, here are some example of surreal jokes found in *Galavant*: Galavant putting his gloved finger in his mouth and then in the air (as if to feel the wind), before stating that “It’s going to be dark soon” in “Joust Friends”; the sequence in which Wormwood, Barry and Sid find themselves in “the forest of coincidence”, where their every wish conspicuously comes true (also serving as a meta joke making fun of the existence of completely unrealistic “destiny” in fairytales) in “About Last Knight”; and king Richard repeatedly inserting his sword in a stone and withdrawing it to Galavant’s amazement in the series finale. The prevalence of such jokes has drawn comparisons to Monty Python on more than one occasion (Messer, 2015) (Lowry, 2015) (Radish, 2015).

⁵³ The premiere date of the season finale.

So *Galavant* succeeds in the most important aspect when it comes to evaluating comedy series: Not only is it funny, but it is funny in original, clever and creative ways. However, the same can be said for a series like *Flight of the Conchords* which did not make the cut.⁵⁴ So what separates these? One thing is obviously serialization. *Flight* follows a strictly episodic structure, removing any opportunity for development while *Galavant* is entirely serialized with the plot (and the characters) progressing from episode to episode. Another is the integration, as *Flight* often feature songs only tangentially related to the plot and which serve little function, while *Galavant*'s musical numbers both drive the narrative and work toward the same end as it (there is also the previously discussed reverse integration in *Flight* which I view as a negative factor, and which is nonexistent in *Galavant*). However, the most important thing that separates the two series is that *Galavant* is more than its jokes. *Galavant* often uses emotion both in contrast to and tandem with its humor, thereby transcending the traditionally dismissed (in terms of artistic value) sitcom label.

The mere attempt to integrate silly humor with deeper, emotional moments is an indicator of artistic ambition higher than that of *Flight of the Conchords*, itself a sign of quality and value. To ascertain whether, and how, this is done successfully in *Galavant*, I will consider three such moments from the second season⁵⁵, all tied to a musical number: "What Am I Feeling" from the episode "Bewitched, Bothered, and Belittled", "I Was There" in "Giants Vs. Dwarves" and "Will My Day Ever Come" in the series finale.

Before I tackle the individual examples, I want to establish two concepts which they all benefit from. The first is the general character focus prevalent in *Galavant*. Throughout the series we follow a main cast, all of whom are relatable to some degree. Even those that start out as quite dislikeable (Richard, Madalena, Gareth) eventually endear themselves to the audience. This means that these emotional moments have all the more impact, because the audience has developed compassion toward the characters during the course of the show. The most notable way it does this is through the introspective potential of the musical numbers.⁵⁶ The second

⁵⁴ *Garfunkel and Oates* also could have been used as example here, but I elected for *Flight of the Conchords* because it is more recognized and of higher quality according to most (including myself).

⁵⁵ The second season is altogether more dramatic and thus contains the best examples. However, you can also identify instances in season one, such as the ending of the third episode and the song "Goodnight My Friend" in the season finale.

⁵⁶ Corresponding to the function "subjective access".

concept to establish is that of emotional resonance as a function. Emotionally resonant musical numbers are numbers which make you care for the characters, in other words numbers which exhibit a high degree of emotional relatability.

Going through the examples chronologically, I will start with “What Am I Feeling”. This is a number which grants the audience internal access to Madalena’s thoughts and feelings at the end of an episode in which she was invited to a “roast” by two queens she greatly admires, only to find out that she was the one being roasted. The song, which has Madalena discover that she does, in fact, have feelings (but do not want them), is one of the main instances of the series humanizing Madalena’s otherwise cold and mean-spirited character. The episode, culminating in this number, poses the question if maybe Madalena’s evil nature is not an innate characteristic, but one borne out of a traumatic childhood. She comes from a poor and seemingly cynical home which has fostered an unending desire to break free of her class and join the wealthy, cost what it may. In the end, it seems to have cost her her humanity, her empathy, but “What Am I Feeling” seems to remind her, and the audience, that she once was a girl capable of feeling and she may just become one again. The feelings she has thus opened herself up to are not limited to sadness, however. When, at the end of the song, Gareth comes in and presents her with “the same exact earrings those queens had” (before stating “Oh, I forgot to take the ears off”, inserting comedy into a genuinely touching moment) and Madalena repeats the line “What is this feeling? Is it a feeling?”, the meaning is altered: The feeling to which she is referring is no longer the humiliation and despair felt at being mocked, but the budding romantic feelings she is developing for Gareth. The song has then successfully heightened the audience’s emotional investment in and identification with Madalena, before ending on a positive, hopeful note.

Next, we have “I Was There”, sung to Galavant by his father, Arnold. The song is sort of a reprise of “He Was There”, which was performed earlier in the episode by Galavant and the kids his father houses at his swordsmanship school. The kids insist on Arnold being a perfect caregiver who rescued them from various precarious situations, while Galavant lists all the reasons he was an awful father. This leads to the scene containing “I Was There”, in which Arnold apologizes to Galavant for not being there emotionally, while stating that he was there physically, always following the achievements of his son and being proud of him but never being able to express that pride. “You couldn’t know how proud I was that day,” Arnold says while

they reminisce about Galavant winning “most valuable knight” at a tournament, before continuing “probably because I didn’t say anything”. When asked why, he answers “You know us old school knights, we can really only express ourselves through tapestry,” another example of *Galavant* integrating comedy and drama, before transitioning into the musical number. The song is an apology, with Arnold expressing his regret at his emotional absence and lack of verbal affection. The apology is well-crafted and heartfelt, and, moreover, seems a very timely one. Male affection and sensitive (but not thereby weak) men breaking with the stereotypes of masculinity has gotten increased attention (both in media and generally in our society) in recent years. The apology, and the conversation leading up to it, is one I know many fathers and sons have wanted and/or actually had. It is easy to identify with Arnold’s perspective (a man whose sensitivity (or lack thereof) was dictated by societal conventions and who only eventually managed to subvert them) as well as Galavant’s (a son resenting his father for his flaws finally allowing himself to forgive and move on), leaving the scene with tremendous emotional impact for a comedy series.

Finally, we have “Will My Day Ever Come”, the duet Richard sings with his younger self in the beginning of “The One True King (To Unite Them All)”. This song contributes to the development of Richard from buffoonish king to hero-adjacent, but more importantly it gives us a glimpse into his mind. Narratively it takes place in the middle of the final climactic battle, a battle in which Richard decided to fight despite a plea from his girlfriend to join her on Spinster Island instead (a choice symptomatic of his development). Introduced by a flashback segment to his childhood when he was praised for his every action just because he was the king, young Richard starts singing his lament over whether his day will ever come. After the first verse present-day Richard joins and after being asked a series of questions by his younger edition (“Will I be a good king?” “Not really.” “Loved by all that I rule?” “Nope, sorry” “Do I stand up and fight for truth and right and good?” “Let’s see now... No, no, no.”), leading to his realization that none of his childhood dreams have come true and maybe never will. It is a touching moment of introspection, delving into the insecurity which has affected Richard all his life. This sets up the final development of Richard, bringing his arc full circle: spurred on by the confrontation with his younger self he finally becomes a good king at the end of the series.

These three instances serve as examples that *Galavant* tries, and in my opinion succeeds, to transcend its comedy classification with genuinely emotional scenes complementing (and often intersecting with) the humor. This elevates it above those comedies which were excluded from the canon, neither of which had this second dimension. At its best, *Galavant* is witty, touching and surprisingly insightful; at its worst it is still funny. Thus, it definitely belongs in my evaluative canon of TV musicals.

7.7 Crazy Ex-Girlfriend

Remaining partially in the realm of comedy (and wholly in the realm of emotion), I will now analyze *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. Once again, my focus will be on humor and emotion with specific focus on the role the musical numbers play in their success. To an even higher degree than in *Galavant*, the comedy of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* is tied specifically to its musical numbers. This seems logical: Its creator Rachel Bloom was discovered through her YouTube channel, on which she posted parodic and satirical music videos of songs written by herself. This is translated to the series in that nearly every song has at least a whiff of comedy about it, one joke sprinkled in. Outside the musical numbers, however, the focus on comedy is not as persistent. Many scenes are purely dramatic, a few are mostly comedic, but most of the scenes feature a blend of humor and drama (firmly placing the show within the categorization of “dramedy”). Where comedy is concerned, then, I will focus my analysis on the musical numbers and their parodic nature, before moving on to matters of emotion.

The concept of musical parody is not quite exclusive to *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, but it *is* more prevalent here than in any other series.⁵⁷ Before I can start discussing it in specific terms, though, I need to assert the difference between parody and homage. Though both are instances of derivation, of copying certain aspects of an existing work, the difference lies in the intent: Homages are intended to honor the source, parodies are intended to mock them. However, both can apply at the same time. It is possible to pay homage to something whilst simultaneously mocking certain parts of it. Exhibiting specific traits of a pre-existing object with comedic effect will hereby be considered parody, while doing the same with sincerity will be considered paying homage. In *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, the numbers which draw inspiration from a pre-existing work

⁵⁷ *Galavant*, for instance, utilizes parody from time to time, such as “Finally” parodying (and paying homage to) *Grease*’s “Summer Nights” and “Today We Rise” parodying (and paying homage to) “Do You Hear the People Sing” from *Les Misérables*, but nowhere near as often as *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*.

vary in their relation to the source. Some only honor them (such as “Settle for Me” in episode four which emulates Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers without making fun of them⁵⁸), some only make fun of them (such as “Group Hang” in “Josh and I Work on a Case!” satirizing Shakira’s “Whenever, Wherever” with no apparent admiration), while some combine the two (such as “The Math of Love Triangles” in episode three of season two showcasing admiration for Marilyn Monroe while also making fun of her exaggerated stupidity and general character).

Most frequently, though, there seems to be a comedic element present while using specific sources. Sometimes these sources are entire genres (“Textmergency” in episode 11 parodying hair metal), other times they are artists (“Friendtopia” in “Who Needs Josh When You Have a Girl Group?” emulating Spice Girls), while others yet they are specific songs (“Fit Hot Guys Have Problems Too” in “Nathaniel Gets the Message!” specifically satirizing the song “Hot Problems”). These number cement *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* as a spiritual successor of Rachel Bloom’s YouTube channel, containing sharp, witty and relevant satire as well as pastiche skillfully balanced by its songwriters.

The emotion of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* is not as intrinsically linked to its musical numbers, but they are still of major relevance. Some of the most climactic emotional moments are depicted at least partially through music,⁵⁹ but even more importantly the emotional moments are more effective because of the opportunities provided by the musical genre, specifically by its potential for subjective access. Giving the audience a glimpse of characters’ psyche, having them express thoughts and feelings which otherwise would be impossible to convey naturally, massively strengthens the audience’s bond with the characters and make emotional moments all the more effective and successful. This is, obviously, most apparent with the main character Rebecca Bunch. Because we constantly see things from her perspective and get frequent access to her mind, the level of identification felt for her is immense. That is what makes the most tragic moments of the series so effective, obvious examples being her getting the diagnose of Borderline Personality Disorder and realizing this is an affliction with which she will probably have to wrestle for the rest of her life, and when she makes a suicide attempt at the end of the episode “I Never Want to See Josh Again”. These moments have tremendous impact because the

⁵⁸ The song is funny, but its humor is not created by ridiculing that which it imitates.

⁵⁹ Examples including “You Stupid Bitch”, “End of the Movie” and “What’ll It Be”.

audience is continuously put in the place of Rebecca, making anything that happens to her hit hard and feel personal.

Crazy Ex-Girlfriend is, like *Galavant*, at its very most successful when it comes to mixing comedy and emotion. “(Tell Me I’m Okay) Patrick” in episode 12 of season three is so effective because it mixes aspects of humor, relatability, and emotion. It evokes emotional resonance in the viewer, but at the same time allows for the catharsis of laughter. The series on multiple occasions provokes compassionate laughter, allowing the audience to both feel for the characters as well as draw enjoyment from the experience of watching the show.

Before concluding my analysis of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, I want to call to attention its consistency (in terms of quality). The first three seasons are of high aesthetic quality in almost every regard, featuring humor and emotion perfectly balanced, characters that are relatable and feel real but are still enjoyable to spend time with, the storylines are culturally relevant and well-executed, and the musical numbers are both immensely enjoyable and showcases impressive skill in every department. For season four, however, the story is not quite the same.⁶⁰ It suffers from introducing characters barely related to the main plot (such as A. J. who works for Rebecca), the storylines are fragmented and feel less organic, and there is an overt focus on social criticism which sometimes falls flat. Most importantly, however, is that the development is circular throughout the season. Even after Rebecca is diagnosed, she exhibits the same pattern of behavior, that being falling in love, obsessing too much over said love, realizing she needs to take a step back in order to improve her mental health, handling the situation badly, thus ending the relationship and allowing for the whole thing to start over again.

As with *Glee*, this kind of repetitive storytelling can be forgiven for a while, and if it is executed in creative way and, more importantly, ways which showcase development even when repeating established patterns, but eventually there comes a time when repetition only ensures the series predictability, thus lessening the audience’s interest and investment in it. This happens to a certain degree in season four of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, making it plausible that, if the show were to continue it may eventually have gone the way of *Glee*. However, two caveats have to be made to

⁶⁰ I talk about it as the entirety of season four, but it is particularly episodes three through ten which exhibit a quality quite a lot worse than the rest of the series. The first and final few episodes of season four, while maybe not *quite* as good as the previous seasons are at least still in the same ballpark.

this: For one, the plan was always to do four seasons, so it was never an opportunity for it to deteriorate further over time. This speaks to the series integrity, that it had a set story which it wanted to tell over the course of four seasons, and thus ended after that. In the case of *Glee*, the series becomes a lot less interesting and fun after the original premise disappears due to characters graduating. If they had decided they wanted to tell the story of this specific group of students, starting the series with them joining glee club and ending it with their graduation, the series would probably be better off, just like *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* is. The second caveat is that, while most aspects go down in quality in the fourth season, the musical quality vitally does not. The songs are still as well integrated, still as witty and well-written, and still performed in an impressive manner. This makes some of the more questionable choices in season four way more tolerable, because they, and the series in general, are still grounded by fantastic musical elements.

In summation, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* utilizes humor in conjunction with emotion to evoke powerful reactions from the audience. Its songwriting is of supreme quality throughout its run, and even if it does falter some at times in the final season, the series as a whole is definitely aesthetically valuable enough to warrant its inclusion in my canon.

7.8 Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist

Thus, I have arrived at the final entry in the TV musical canon, and the most recent TV musical: *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist*. In evaluating it I want to draw attention to three aspects in particular: choreography, emotion, and authenticity, starting with the former. I touched upon the quality of *Zoey's* choreography earlier, but without much analysis. I will look at three specific examples in showcasing the strength of the choreography (and, by extension, the musical numbers' visual expression): "Crazy" from episode eight, "Happier" from episode nine, and "American Pie" from the season finale. In all these examples I will particularly put focus on the movement of the camera, which is impressively incorporated into the numbers' choreography.

"Crazy" is the first example of *Zoey's* exhibiting the full potential of its dance numbers. At the center of attention, we find Jane Levy as Zoey. But the choreography is just as much other people dancing for her as it is her dancing herself. She is constantly tugged and turned, carried around by the ensemble, signifying her losing control of her own mind and body. The camera movement, as well as the general movement of the piece, reflects the theme tackled in the song:

Zoey fearing that she is going crazy. The camera moves in circles, spinning out of control just like Zoey herself does, but never losing sight of its main object (Zoey). What is particularly impressive, and a refreshing change of pace (especially compared to, say, *Glee*), is that for the first minute of the number there are no cuts. The camera follows Zoey and allows the choreography to speak for itself and complements it with meticulous, precise movement. Keep in mind, also, that this number features tens of extras who all have to perform satisfactorily in the same take.

This is not even the most impressive musical long-take in *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist*, however. It is topped already in the next episode with the performance of "Happier", featuring only two separate takes. While there are no extras involved in this number, only Simon and Jessica, the number is intricately designed and by no means simple to perform. Particularly Jessica falling backwards, being caught by Simon a couple inches from the ground and lifted back to her feet in one swift movement is impressive in its own right, never mind it being part of a continuous take spanning for more than a minute. The number's impact is also very dependent on the physical acting, the ability of the actors to sell these emotions through dance, and they both deliver with aplomb. There is an undeniable chemistry between the two, and they sell the emotions of the song in remarkable fashion. Again, the camerawork is central to the choreography, moving alongside Simon and Jessica through the space and framing them in creative ways. Two of the shots are particularly well-composed: Simon and Jessica filmed in profile facing each other with only Zoey separating them (signifying Zoey being the reason for their break-up, the thing keeping them apart), and the two of them separated by a wall, symmetrically placed on one side each.

Even this number, though, did not long subsist as the most impressive choreographic feat of the series. The final scene of the finale is a five-and-a-half minutes long continuous take, leading us through the memorial service of Zoey's recently deceased father while the characters sing "American Pie". There isn't much dancing in this number and thus little choreography in the traditional sense, but the achievement lies again in the movement of the camera, both highlighting singular events and signifying the passage of time (the song starts at the beginning of the day, and as it ends only the family is left in the house as the day is over). There is also an impressive choreographic achievement in conducting such a one-take scene featuring many

extras and multiple shifts in scenery, meaning the people unseen are choreographed as much as those on screen. Additionally, this number is a masterclass in integration: Different segments of the song is sung by different characters, with the text often corresponding to their specific situation. This scene is not only a feat within the context of musical TV series, or even TV series in general; It is an impressive accomplishment in the context of audiovisual storytelling as a whole.

There is one other thing which adds value to the final scene of *Zoey's* season, which will bring me to the aspects of authenticity and emotion: "American Pie" was the favorite song of the character on which Zoey's father is based, the father of the series' creator Austin Winsberg. The strongest aspects of the series' first season are those related to Zoey's father, who has a neurological disease causing him to steadily lose bodily function. This is sad in its own right but becomes all the more so when one learns that the creator's father had the same disease. This knowledge amplifies the impact of the storyline, but also lends it authenticity: It is easy to believe these events to be truthful, because they are written by someone who experienced the disease and its effects first-hand. *Zoey's* has been lauded for its accomplishment in depicting the gradual loss of a parent in a tasteful but nevertheless real and emotional way, which makes perfect sense given this information. This is a perfect example of authorship informing the analysis: The fact that Winsberg himself has experienced the events depicted gives the series authority and believability.

All the scenes involving Zoey's father and many of the musical numbers featured in the first season are marvelously effective in conveying, and evoking, emotion. This makes up for the other parts of the story being somewhat less successful; The love triangle is a trope not indicative of quality, and some of the storylines tied to Zoey's job are not of particular interest. However, the achievement in choreography, dancing and cinematography, as well as in emotional resonance, makes this a series impossible to exclude from my final canon.

8 Conclusion

Thus, an explicit evaluative canon of musical TV series has been created. From a revised corpus based on an originally created semantic definition and through focusing on criteria of aesthetic judgement (as well as camp), the eight series which constitute my canon have been established

and subsequently analyzed in order to argue for their inclusion. The goal of this thesis has been to implement musical TV series into the world of media studies, with the (perhaps too optimistic) belief that the genre will be taken more seriously going forward, hopefully being recognized as a genre capable of creating works of great artistic value.

In the introduction to this thesis I wrote about how subjectivity and canons inevitably shape the works of critics. My claim was that this is not negative, but nonetheless something which should be acknowledged. It is somewhat ironic, then, that my thesis is not to a very high degree affected by canons: One of the main reasons for writing this thesis was to develop a canon within musical television because none such already existed. I have, however, tried to maintain an active relationship to other canons which shape my work, such as the quality TV canon or the canon of aesthetically valuable art, but as these are only tangential to the theme, dedicating much time to discuss their particularities seemed a waste. Subjectivity, on the other hand, heavily informs my thesis. The entire final section is based on subjective judgement, judgement for which I try to argue and which people hopefully will find it possible to agree with, but nevertheless shaped intrinsically by my personal tastes, sensibilities and affinity. If successful, this thesis will have convinced its readers of two things: That not only is the TV musical genre capable of producing works of high artistic and aesthetic value, but it already has; and that those works are the ones included in this thesis' final, subjective, evaluative canon of musical TV series.

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10 Addendum 1: Overview of the musical numbers from the canonized series and their functions



MA Musical
Number Functions.x

11 Addendum 2: List of functions with definitions and examples



The functions of
musical numbers.do