# Authenticity is a Must: Re-Examining the Queer Legacy of Danny Kaye



An FTVM Honors Thesis by Elizabeth Starks

**Acknowledgements**

As much as I would like to pretend that I completed this project with no other recourses but my own resources, with firm application and determination…the truth is, I would have made a fool of myself without the support of my Honors advisors Matthew Noble-Olson and Daniel Herbert. Their insights have been invaluable not just to the process of developing and writing this thesis, but also to helping me take my first steps into the trials and tribulations of academia. As I leave Michigan, I will sincerely miss working with them…I will, however, look forward to pestering them at many SCMS conferences in the future! Many thanks also to Christopher McNamara for lending a hand as this year's Honors chair, as well as to Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes for stepping up to serve as a third reader.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge all the other faculty who, in their own ways, have supported me throughout my time in Film, Television, and Media, and made it possible for me to pursue this Honors thesis. To Yeidy Rivero, Victor Fanucchi, Giorgio Bertellini, Mark Kligerman, Carleen Ling-Hsu, and Padrick Ritch - thank you all so much for everything!

**Introduction: There's Maliszewski, Rubinstein, Arensky, and…Kaminsky?**

When scholars, critics, and audiences alike have spoken of Danny Kaye, certain descriptors have persisted above all others: inimitable, irrepressible. From his beginnings as a performer at the Jewish summer resorts of the Borscht Belt to his transition to Broadway, his earliest contemporaries noted that Kaye had a particular *je ne sais quoi*. A.B. Marcus, a showman who had sponsored the up-and-coming Kaye during the 1930s, claimed he "always knew [Danny] would be a Broadway success" (*South China Morning Post*). Never one to disappoint, Kaye put his abundant talent and energy into making sure that these prophecies came to fruition. By 1943, he had already been named one of the "top-salaried personalities in show business" (*Variety*), thanks to his success performing for packed houses at some of the most illustrious venues in the world. Shortly thereafter, he would rocket to greater mass popularity with his leading roles in numerous Samuel Goldwyn-produced musical comedy vehicles throughout the 1940s. Heading into the 1950s, Kaye was on top of the world and ready to go further. In 1954, he was elevated to an incomparable level of international stardom by the beginning of his celebrity ambassadorship for the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). Kaye would remain involved with the organization for the rest of his life. Upon his passing in 1987, not one obituary failed to mention his decades of tireless advocacy on behalf of children across the globe. Inimitable and irrepressible indeed.

Considering these accomplishments, taking a performer as unique as Danny Kaye as the subject of a critical theoretical reading might appear cynical, even anathema to the goodwill that his star power once represented. Maybe, then, it is not so shocking after all to discover how little headway has been made into academic analyses of his storied career. Turning to what little of a popular conversation there has been about him in the decades since his death, one finds that any

remembrance is almost always punctuated with certain speculations...say, was he really, you know…? In truth, it is impossible to talk about Kaye without some recognition of rumors that have long circulated surrounding his possible real-life homo- or bi- sexuality. While it is not the goal of this thesis to investigate the veracity of any such claims, does acknowledging them mean admitting to at least the possibility of a sexually queer Kaye, and that, as Matthew Tinkcom writes, his "dissident sexualities have a bearing on the final product" (Tinkcom 44)? Many of his characters do behave in a stereotypically prissy or flamboyant manner, which one might intuit as giving at least some legitimacy to the gossip. Even so, considering these means the topic at hand is not only Danny Kaye, née David Daniel Kaminsky, the 'real' man; he and his work both on and off-screen must be examined with respect to what Richard Dyer refers to as the "structured polysemy" (Dyer 3) of his celebrity persona.

Here, it should first be illustrated how his cultural queerness manifested itself. Alexander Doty outlines cultural queerness as "a flexible space for the expression of all aspects of non-(anti-, contra-) straight cultural production and reception" (Doty 3). Often, these non-straight expressions were expressed through Kaye's song-and-dance numbers. *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (1947)'s "Anatole of Paris" sequence leaps to mind as an example, wherein Kaye fantasizes about being an effeminate, bourgeois (and very successful!) French hatmaker, who snidely declares to the camera: "Strictly between us, *entre-nous*…I. Hate. Women!" (*The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,* 1:20:52). Moreover, we must also consider how any perception of Kaye's queerness was, and remains, tied to his Jewishness. As Eric Goldstein writes, "to white Americans of the pre–World War II era, Jews were a racial conundrum, a group that could not be clearly pinned down according to the prevailing racial categories" (Goldstein 1); however, they were certainly not accepted as simply 'white'. Kaye himself was othered by his Jewishness from

the outset; upon arriving in Hollywood, he was pressured to alter his physical appearance to fit in with a 'whiter' look. Even as his films almost always elided any direct mention of his Jewishness[1], much of their comedy plainly drew on (false!) assumptions that Kaye's Jewish features made him less normatively attractive: in effect, his Jewishness, in tandem with his queer performance styles, barred him from being pictured as a truly desirable or romantic leading man in the way many other stars of the 1940s and 1950s were. I would like to suggest that Kaye has so far proven challenging to study precisely because of these myriad contradictions and complexities that the polysemy of his star power continues to present. How could it be that someone who read so eminently 'queer' as Danny Kaye was so beloved amidst the sexually repressive context of the 1950s? And why have we all but forgotten him?

My thesis attempts to answer these questions by tracking the evolution of Kaye's cultural queerness across the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Namely, I argue that Kaye served to figure a diverse range of troubling issues surrounding America's hegemonic cultural conceptions of race, gender, and sexuality amidst the context of World War II and the Cold War that followed. During these years, those categories of personal identity came to stand in for the identity of the *nation*. In effect, America was refiguring who could project its power across the globe, an especially pressing issue as the nation worked to organize coherent ideals of 'Americanness' as a counterpoint to the looming specter of Communism during the 1950s. Kaye's queerness, rather than upsetting these efforts toward coherence, aligned with projections of American power. Most notably, he came to embody the nation's striving for a coherent, linear future through the *soft* power of UNICEF and the figure of the Child. However, these notions of a coherent nation and benevolent power were profoundly upset by the social and cultural upsets of the 1960s; as the

[1] Kaye would play explicitly Jewish characters only twice in his career. The first was the WWII drama *Me and the Colonel* (1958), and again much later in the made-for-television film *Skokie* (1981).

Vietnam War ripped apart America's ideals of itself both at home and abroad. Kaye's silly, Child-friendly persona now seemed painfully out of step; no longer able to provide a comforting reassurance of the rightness of American futurity. It was only much later that he would return to once more uplift the ideal of the Child and the family, amidst the reignited cultural conservatism of the 1980s.

Chapter One details the historical and cultural context of Kaye's feature film debut, *Up in Arms* (1944). We follow Danny Kaye as the hapless Danny Weems, a new World War Two draftee who is trying (and failing) to integrate with his macho military peers. The film's narrative simultaneously confronts us with the trouble of understanding how Danny's race, gender, and sexuality will fit in within the *internal* figuration of the nation, while we must also determine how those understandings will work to support the war effort, or America's *external* projections of power in the years to come. Danny Weems/Danny Kaye's character arc, then, speaks to how his queer differences could ultimately be made permissible by their being sublimated into exerting American power, particularly because they helped solidify white, heteronormative masculinity as the ideal figuration of that power. I conclude the chapter by transitioning to the House Un-American Activities Committee's paranoia in the late 1940s, demonstrating how anxieties over maintaining the hegemonic power of that identity paradigm, and, by extension, the nation at large, were dressed up in the paranoid ideologies of anti-Communism.

In Chapter Two, I discuss how Kaye renegotiated the significance of his queerness amidst those political and cultural struggles as they continued into the 1950s. I begin by discussing the queer ruptures of gendered performance made visible in Kaye's first film of the decade, *On the Riviera* (1951). As would soon become the case across the board for Kaye's films, *On the Riviera* was not very well received. What was Kaye to do? He began to refigure himself as a

‘children’s entertainer’, a persona solidified by his UNICEF ambassadorship in 1954. This was a role unlike any other he had played before: it did not end when the movie cameras stopped rolling, nor when audiences filed out of their seats at the end of a night at the Palace or the Palladium. As Kaye himself would put it, “‘children are the common denominator of mankind and their welfare is the common concern of all of us’” (*New York Times*). While he and UNICEF positioned the Child as an apolitical, universal figure, Lee Edelman will tell us this is hardly the case; rather, the “fantasy subtending the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought” (Edelman 2).

During the 1950s, the Child therefore took on several political significations around which America once again reorganized its politics of internal and external national coherence. At home, there was precisely the matter of the *home*; the picket-fence suburban family now figured as a microcosm of the nation. The Child at once came to signify hope for the nation and a threat to it: were they a righteous, innocent symbol of futurity, or were they going to grow up to be limp-wristed Communist sissies? By the 1950s, American culture held that “there was a direct connection between communism and sexual depravity…according to the common wisdom of the time, 'normal' heterosexual behavior culminating in marriage represented ‘maturity' and ‘‘responsibility’, therefore, those who were ‘deviant' were, by definition, irresponsible, immature, and weak” (May 96). It also had to be asked how Children abroad would react to these ideological conflicts: would they accept the controlling hand of American hegemony or be lured into an unholy alliance with the queer specter of Communism? UNICEF worked to (ideally) prevent this by establishing a paternalistic guiding hand over the Children of the world, with Danny Kaye the emblematic figure of its soft power. To this end, his fictional films also began to allegorize the mission of uplifting the Child, as I posit in my analysis of *The Court Jester* (1955).

Much as in *Up in Arms*, any lingering queerness within the narrative could slip by so long as it ultimately served to uplift the Child, and by extension, the nation.

Chapter Three concludes with a history of what is surely the most neglected aspect of Kaye's career: his television work. He began appearing on television in the mid-1950s, not as a comedian or entertainer, but as a supplement to his role as a UNICEF ambassador. By the 1960s, Kaye began starring in his own primetime variety show, *The Danny Kaye Show* (1963-1967). Much as Kaye's films had been doing for years by this point, *The Danny Kaye Show* floundered in the ratings and reviews from the outset: what was happening that made audiences suddenly cold to the warm and inviting Kaye? Unfortunately for him, his transition to television coincided with several major *disfigurations* of the soft power he and UNICEF had been working toward for years. It hardly seemed likely that the children of Vietnam would be comforted by any more of his clowning, while the rise of the youth counterculture made the middle-aged Kaye seem like a square relic of a bygone era. It was only much later - about twenty years later, to be precise - that Kaye could once more return to television and reaffirm the rightness of the family, reconciling his queerness one last time. And it really *was* the last time: Kaye would pass away just over a year after his final television appearance, a guest-starring role on *The Cosby Show*.

While his stardom has faded in the almost forty years since his death, the cultural anxieties and pressures that undergirded it most surely have not. Just as in the 1950s, we contend with questions of queer panic, the stability of the heteronormative family, the rightness of American political power; altogether, a struggle to construct and re-construct a coherent national identity, and to imagine a *future* for that identity, even in the face of an ever-more fractured and turbulent cultural climate. Even though Danny Kaye may seem to have been a star for a 'simpler time', this thesis shall show that he was anything but.

**Chapter One: That's Our Danny! *Up in Arms,* Nation, and Identity During World War II**

There are many terms one can use to describe Danny Kaye - 'overnight success' is not one of them. Kaye himself would remark that he had "played every tank town in America, beat my brains out all over the world…for twelve years before I became a movie star. If that's overnight, then the Punic Wars were just a skirmish!" (Gottfried 95). During his teenage years, he honed his skills by working as a 'tummler' at various Jewish Borscht Belt resorts, before touring Asia in the early 1930s. By 1939, the twenty-eight-year-old Kaye would return to his native New York City to try his hand at its Broadway stage. It was there that he met and soon married Sylvia Fine, a pianist and composer who became the brains behind much of his most acclaimed musical comedy material. In 1941, he got his big break with his casting in the musical *Lady in the Dark*. Though Kaye spent only a few minutes onstage in a small supporting role as an effeminate fashion photographer, he would later recall that just "thirty-eight seconds of it made my career" (Gottfried 65). Those pivotal seconds were his rapid-fire performance of the patter song "Tchaikowsky (And Other Russians)", which became an immediate and uproarious hit.

As quickly as Kaye had rattled off the names of no fewer than fifty-two Russian composers, he became a hot ticket item sought after by Hollywood producers like Samuel Goldwyn, with whom he would sign his first feature film contract in 1943. Throughout the rest of the decade, the musical comedy films that they turned out each year (*Up in Arms* (1944), *Wonder Man* (1945), *The Kid from Brooklyn* (1946), *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (1947), and *A Song is Born* (1948)) overall proved to be among Kaye's most financially and critically successful endeavors. That said, such a meteoric rise to fame naturally raises the question of how, if he was from the outset profoundly queered by both his ethnic and gender/sexual

differences, that queerness was negotiated into something that was evidently more than palatable to his now-nationwide audience. In that turn of phrase is precisely the issue we should turn to: one of *nation*. I argue that Kaye's differences were not altogether so important as the fact that they could be, and indeed were, meaningfully retooled into a figuration that answered several anxious questions concerning both inward *and* outward projections of the U.S.'s power within the historical context of its release: that was, the approaching conclusion of World War II. In particular, I will examine how his debut feature film, *Up in Arms* (1944), doubly figured as an attempt to determine whether the patriotism and power of the War Effort would parlay into a future of stable U.S.-controlled global hegemony, as well as to outline how that national power would be figured along the lines of identity: whether it would be figured as heteronormative or queer, white or non-white, and so on.

*Up in Arms* (1944) is a service comedy which initiated Kaye's typecasting into the bumbling, neurotic, far-less-than-phallic - in a word, *queer* - characters from which he would rarely ever break away. Here, he plays Danny Weems (even his name emanates wimpiness), a gravely hypochondriacal and sissy young man whose worst problem in the world is that he cannot get the girl he likes to even look at him: that is, until he gets drafted (despite his purported laundry list of ailments and afflictions, he is a bona fide 1-A). At once, he is whisked away to the "strenuous training, fresh air, regular hours, and nourishing food" of life in the Army. Does any of that make him, as the film's narrator proudly declares, "a new man" (*Up in Arms*, 00:26:20)? Hardly: he still whines, frets, and fusses his way through every obstacle he encounters. Given this ironic juxtaposition, Kaye's persona surely read as queer to his audiences even in 1944. I would like to argue that Danny Kaye/Danny Weems' own persistent queerness retroactively queered the national institutions that *Up in Arms* likely intended to celebrate. After all, what was

to be said of the Army - or the nation it served - if it could not 'straighten out' a sissy like Danny Weems? Could such a failure imply that the U.S. was unable to organize its own national identity, and in turn, also be unable to project its own power in the years to come?

These questions raised deep uncertainty both on- and off-screen, but uncertainty was (and is) characteristic of queerness writ large, especially in the historical context of the early 1940s. As Steven Cohan has written, "'effeminacy' and 'manliness' were still indeterminate categories at this historical juncture", and the distinctions between heterosexuals and homosexuals "had not yet acquired their full hegemonic force" (Cohan 3). Though in real life, Kaye had been "adjudged 4-F" (*Variety*) - unfit for service[2] - *Up in Arms* put his stardom into a different kind of service. He acted to figure something which was, with the end of the war incoming, also still very much indeterminate: the question of national futurity. With an explicit politicality centered upon a war effort that was "All Out For Freedom", *Up in Arms* attempted to resolve its queer dilemmas by figuring a decidedly *un*-queer *consolidation* of the U.S.'s political power upon the world stage, its own 'full hegemonic force' taking shape. The process of this consolidation left the film in a liminal cultural space, from which it could balance the ideological work of affirming Kaye's queerness and negating it: he can make a gloriously camp spectacle of himself in musical numbers like "The Lobby Number" or "The Jive Number", yet the only glory that gets recognized in the film comes when he finally helps his Army comrades best the enemy Japanese, asserting unquestionable U.S. dominance over them.

*Up in Arms* is, in fact, told in flashback: it is narrated like a newsreel, so that from its opening seconds we know this authoritative victory is a history already written. It inscribes a

[2]Kaye devoted time, as did many entertainers, to USO performances and war bond fundraising. He helped to raise $2.75 million in war bonds at one 1943 performance; one of the "most successful show biz benefits" (*Variety*) ever staged for the cause. See below for a more detailed discussion of how Kaye's draft status became a topic of controversy after HUAC's anti-Communist paranoia ramped up during the latter half of the 1940s.

clear narrative of maturation both for Danny - in the narrator's words, he has grown up from his wimpy state of arrested development, into a "fearless fighting man" (*Up in Arms,* 00:01:50) - and for the nation he serves, which gathers around him to unanimously cheer on his triumphant capture of the Japanese soldiers. I suggest, however, that this retroactivity is yet another queering; this time acting upon our normative notions of the forward progression of history itself. *Up in Arms* instantiates not merely the fantasies of a continuous, linear progression from childhood (or at least, childishness) to manhood, or from national power to global power, but also shows that those fantasies are haunted by the specter of *repetition*. It is as if the film is compelled to retrace its steps to reassure us that Danny is a worthy avatar of American power, yet that very act troubles his heroism by unraveling what seemed already confirmed beyond any shadow of a doubt.

Danny Weems/Danny Kaye's queerness figures as a *negative* force in that, in Lee Edelman's words, it "[reduces] the assurance of meaning in fantasy's promise of continuity to the meaningless circulation and repetitions of the drive" (Edelman 39). Here, it will be useful to define the death drive as that which, beyond simply undoing Danny's narrative, "figures the undoing of civil society" (Edelman 17) at large. This is done by discombobulating promises of logical, linear continuity, identified by Edelman as a predominantly heteronormative framework for our notions of cultural organization and progress. The power of Danny's queerness to disorganize and undo these social relations is made most visible by the film's outrageously camp musical numbers. They are literally all showstoppers, sometimes even going so far as to totally break off into dream or fantasy sequences. As Steven Cohan describes, these numbers are blatantly incongruous with the plot and character development of the rest of the film: they "function as detachable set pieces through which [Kaye] displays more talent, physical and vocal

dexterity, intelligence, and charisma than his characters seem capable of possessing" (Cohan 4). The film, however, seems unable, if not outright unwilling, to deal with the queer implications of these numbers. Danny is sometimes ridiculed or punished for his performances (though afterward they are summarily forgotten), or else his friends treat his outbursts into hyperactive song and dance as only a passing oddity or quirk. There is, then, a perpetual tug-of-war between Kaye's queer aptitude for reversing and stopping the progression of his story - or *history*, as it were - and *Up in Arms*' need to negate his negativity by steering him, and by extension, America itself, to continue marching on to the victory we know must eventually be achieved.

A more forgiving reading might suggest that, regardless of context, it was a triumph to see a queer character like Danny Weems lauded as a hero. However, we would do well to recognize that his queer differences were most celebrated once he figured an affirming answer to these anxieties over national identity and futurity, iterating what Jasbir Puar terms as a form of ''homonationalism' - that corresponds with the coming out of the exceptionalism of American empire" (Puar 2). Worth mentioning is the fact that Puar's analysis is focused upon a much more recent historical context, that being the intersection(s) of post-9/11 Islamophobia and queerphobia. Although there are certainly some parallels between the two eras, the pressing need for America to "continue or extend the project of U.S. nationalism and imperial expansion" (Puar 2) is the most pertinent. In applying these ideas to Danny Kaye, we should recall the earlier quote from Cohan on the historically blurred boundaries of queerness in the 1940s. When Puar further argues that homonationalism "regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects" (Puar 2), we must recognize that such norms, and hence the 'regulatory scripts' utilized to enforce them, were *not* so solidified. For Kaye, however, we shall find a precursor to these

scripts of race and sexuality in the ways his sexual subjectivity is inextricably bound up in the matter of his Jewishness. For most of *Up in Arms* (although this is true of most of his films in general), he is queered not only by his musical performances, but also by his figuration as a largely *desexualized* subject, until his ultimate embrace of a more heteronormative masculinity connotes his assimilation into a dominant configuration of whiteness. In other words, his conversion into an acceptable sexual subject in *Up in Arms* is conflated with reifying the U.S.'s future national power as both white and heteronormative. The subsequent need to *maintain* this power, both at home and abroad, would later become another pressing source of tension, as I shall return to in Chapter Two. For Kaye, that struggle was intertwined with a cultural figure so powerful, so universal, that it is figured as superseding our notions of what constitutes the political or the ideological: the capital-C Child.

When we first meet Danny Weems, his life is a simple one. He works as a hospital elevator operator (to be close to the doctors at all times) and pines over blonde-haired, all-American nurse Mary Morgan (Constance Dowling, also in her screen debut). Unfortunately, not only does he somehow manage to miss every sign that she simply is not interested, but he also fails to notice the one woman who *is*: fellow nurse Virginia Merrill (Dinah Shore). When he is not busy sending the unsuspecting patients who board his elevator into frenzies over their own minor symptoms, Danny shares an apartment with his best buddy Joe Nelson (Dana Andrews). In an early sequence, the four friends go out on a double dinner-and-a-movie date. When Danny and Virginia step away, Mary confides in Joe her true feelings about Danny's affections: "I don't know what to do about it. He's got the funniest way of twisting your words around...besides, he's got so many other troubles. At least, he thinks he has… well, I don't wanna hurt him" (*Up in Arms*, 00:11:44). Mary's claim that he 'twists her words around' seems to suggest that Danny

may be best understood as, at least initially, a socially *disorganizing* force: his queer fixation on Mary both petrifies and perplexes her. Perhaps most importantly, his obsession also hinders her ability to openly romance the man she *really* wants to be with: Joe. From this point on, their unions are framed as clandestine meetings which must take place without Danny's knowledge (a few are even unwittingly interrupted by him), lest he be upset by the truth. Danny, it seems, is more or less the child of the group: his lack of sexual maturity or knowledge about women relegates him to a socially liminal space, somewhere in between whatever hazy conceptions we might have of his childhood (the film never expounds upon his backstory - again, Danny's queerness disjoints from anything we might be able to understand as a 'history' of his life) and the more mature adulthood of his peers. Everything the group does together must be reworked to placate Danny's bizarre obsessions, such that his queerness brings the machinations of their everyday lives to a grinding halt.

This is made even more apparent when the 'dinner' part of the date segues to the movie. Only, there is no movie: what we have really transitioned to is the film's first musical number, one of many to be penned by Sylvia Fine. "The Lobby Number", alternatively known as "Manic Depressive Presents", is a title certainly fitting of Danny's pathological neuroses. The theater lobby (indeed, this could be said of all the film's scenes so far) is a space left utterly untouched by the war raging overseas, as well-dressed patrons are happily corralled into line by the theater ushers. Danny is having a wonderful time, too: he makes fast friends with another moviegoer, Mrs. Willoughby (famed Marx Brothers collaborator Margaret Dumont), and continues pondering his plans to propose to Mary, much to Virginia's dismay. When Joe and Mary return to join him, the group suddenly gets cut out of line, losing their place in a brief chaotic shuffle. Danny shrugs it off, telling Joe he cannot understand why they came in the first place: "These

musical pictures are all alike! If you've seen one, you've seen them all!" (*Up in Arms*, 00:13:18). Danny launches into the "Lobby Number", cavorting around the grand staircase like a man possessed. As Cohan has told us, the queerness of this scene is legible in that it is a totally unwarranted diversion from all the narrative logic we have seen thus far, cued by the sudden appearance of nondiegetic music and some quite clearly dubbed singing from Kaye. Still, the theatergoers, likely not so dissimilar from the real-life audiences coming to see *Up in Arms* in 1944, are transfixed by the sight of it all. Normal life has come to a full stop, giving way to the queer pleasure (there surely is not a *straight* face in the house) of his absurdly excessive, mocking imitation of movie musical tropes and stock characters. Danny maniacally narrates a nonsensical story that somehow covers everything from romantic fruit puns like "I know we cantaloupe/so honeydew be mine!" (*Up In Arms*, 00:14:55), to the daring exploits of our hero "Cowboy Dan, a galloping, yodeling, buckaroo / his horse, of course, is a baritone too" (*Up in Arms*, 00:15:05).

Danny's queer fantasy, however, cannot be allowed to last for long. When he tries to join a group of patrons who are finally being allowed into the theater, still screaming "Conga! Conga!" (*Up in Arms,* 00:18:55), all the while, the ushers finally haul Danny away. He is only exciting or alluring when he is an object of spectacle: the minute he attempts to engage others in his queerness, he is expelled from their midst. When the final shot of the sequence lingers on Joe, Mary, and Virginia continuing to laugh as he gets tossed out, one has to wonder what they are now really taking joy in: is it Danny's wacky hijinks that still amuse them, or is it relief in the fact that the dominant social order retains its power to hide away his queerness once they have grown tired of it?

If “The Lobby Number” was but a silly diversion, then what is to come could only be a total queer hijacking of narrative logic and coherence. Once Danny and Joe are back at their apartment, Danny notices a letter addressed to him amongst the mail. The sender is none other than the U.S. Army Draft Board! In a panic, he begs Joe to go to the draft office and tell them he simply *cannot* serve, because he is far too sick to go to war. Somewhat begrudgingly, Joe agrees to go. The conceit of Danny passing the Army’s muster is so unrealistic that *Up in Arms* has to admit it, as Joe tells the draft board men, “I can’t figure it. You take fellas like Danny, and me, I’ve been here dozens of times, and nothing!” (*Up in Arms*, 00:25:44). They agree he has a point and enlist him on the spot. Joe’s comment, along with his and Danny’s near-simultaneous acceptance into the military, gestures toward the real-life ambivalence the military held toward its queer service members, especially during this time when the boundaries of that queerness were not so rigidly defined. Rather than their sexual behaviors, the perception of queerness for men enlisting during World War II was centered upon stereotypes of sissiness and effeminacy, which became the de facto “index through which the Army screened homosexuals under the assumption that they were visibly different because of their gender demeanor” (Cohan 161). Conversely, men who *were* heterosexual could still be profiled as gay if examiners perceived “gender deviance” (Cohan 160) of any sort, meaning that they would be deemed unfit for service: if Danny really did not want to serve, what he ought to have told the draft board men was that he suffered from a limp wrist.

The simultaneous rigidity and laxity of the regulations meant that as long as a man could act ‘masculine’ enough, no one would feel too perturbed about turning a blind eye to the fact that they had a homosexual in their midst. *Up in Arms*, however, puts even that standard up for question: it is not just Danny who has a peculiar queerness about him. Later, when the men are

preparing to ship out, one kisses his bedside photograph of actress Veronica Lake goodbye. “Hey, what am I talking about?” he realizes. “You’re comin’ with us!” Another man pipes in, squeezing himself between his comrade and his beloved Veronica: “I’m goin’ too!” (*Up in Arms,* 00:40:21). He promptly shoves him away, but it is as if *Up in Arms* cannot reckon any further with the implications of the moment. We fade to black, the form of the film itself dissolved by even this minuscule gesture toward queerness.

When the picture comes back up, all of the soldiers are already marshaled into line, waiting to board the ship that will send them off to war at last - all except Danny, that is. He has snuck off to complain to Mary that Virginia will be going along with them (both women have quite conveniently been drafted, too), muddying his plans to continue pursuing her during their voyage. As Danny fumbles about the deck, the other soldiers launch into one of the only musical numbers *not* to feature him as the star, “All Out for Freedom”. Contrasted against the wild, illogical excesses of the earlier Lobby Number, “All Out for Freedom” makes painfully clear the stakes of the war our heroes are heading off to fight: “That which we carried / was not one to bury / we need to keep it / or die” (*Up in Arms*, 00:45:25) the soldiers proudly sing in patriotic unison as they march up onto the ship. The sequence quite literally visualizes the need for America to shape up and organize its power internally - *we* need to keep our freedom, or die - and, at the same time, exert itself against the rest of the world. As the soldiers go on to tell us, “ten million Yankees are standing pat / and the world knows that is a pain” (*Up in Arms,* 00:45:52). Despite the insistence on freedom, a fight against the tyrants, no soldier stands out either physically or vocally amongst the lock-step formation - except for Danny. His squeaky, cracking voice pierces through as he scrambles on board, only barely making it by the officers

with a shaky salute. As we shall see, the rest of the film will continue to problematize the queer Danny's struggle to fit into the missions of figuring national power.

On this note, we should also consider how Kaye's Jewishness queered him and initially problematized his stardom. Under the pre-war standards of Jewish representation in Hollywood cinema, "the Jewish moguls [of the studios] evaded anti-Semitism by simply eliminating Jews from the screen" (Rogin 209). Before *Up in Arms* was released, there was therefore an uncertainty over how to 'handle' the matter of Kaye's Jewishness whilst promoting him as an exciting new star. Or, as Samuel Goldwyn once put it more pointedly, the big problem was how to sell him as a romantic leading man when "nobody wants to fuck Danny Kaye" (Gottfried 134). Dubious as Goldwyn's claim may be, it must have played some role in forming the logic that would dictate how the studio manipulated Kaye's literal physical image. Before filming began on *Up in Arms*, Goldwyn insisted that Kaye dye his red hair blond and get his nose 'fixed', while Columbia executive Harry Cohn would deride him for looking "like a [Catskills] mountain comic" (Gottfried 85), which he had been. In the end, Kaye would concede to dyeing his hair and refuse the nose job demand, at the cost of it becoming the butt of far too many of the less amusing jokes of his career. Indeed, *Up in Arms'* poking-fun at Danny's appearance queers him just as much as his sissiness. In other words, we could say it polices Danny's sexuality by repeatedly suggesting that he is not all that physically attractive within a normative heterosexual framework. "I know I'm not the best looking guy in the world" (*Up in Arms,* 00:07:59), Danny laments in one early scene. Much of the anxiety around Kaye's physical appearance had surely insinuated fears that he would be *seen* as Jewish, demonstrating that even as America and Hollywood promoted their newfound tolerance, pressures to erase open Jewishness lingered.

Critics and audiences were nevertheless uncertain what to make of his new, 'whiter' look. One fan letter would describe him as "anemic-looking" (*The Atlanta Constitution*), while *Chicago Daily Tribune* writer Mae Tinee would be somewhat more flattering in her review of *Up in Arms*: "Danny isn't handsome. But he's the perfect example of handsome is as handsome does…he's a one man show" (Tinee). If the ambivalence of these responses should tell us anything, it is that the very notion of 'stardom', and the identities that could be allowed to embody it, were just as much in flux during the early 1940s as the other figurations of identity and nation we have discussed so far. What, then, could be enough to make Kaye's Jewishness a non-issue, as it seemed to largely later become?

To determine this, we should once again look to the broader historical contexts through which the war effort altered figurations of race and ethnicity. In real life, military units remained racially segregated during World War II. Jewish men, however, would be slated to serve alongside white comrades, to the effect that their "thorough integration…helped cement the public's view of these groups [Goldstein is referring to Catholics here as well as Jews] as unambiguously white" (Goldstein 193). Even so, Jews were only permitted to play "small, sympathetic, nondemeaning roles in movies made during (and about) the war" (Rogin 209). This would usually suggest that Danny should have been playing second banana to his more manly WASP friend, Joe. *Up in Arms* compromises on this usual dynamic, allowing Danny to become the star by placing him in a position of ethnic *indeterminacy*. It never confirms nor denies that he *could* be Jewish, and this would remain the case for nearly all of Kaye's film characters in the years to follow. Alternatively, we might say that the erasure of Kaye's ethnic specificity provides an alibi for the near-endless bullying that Danny receives. If, after all, Hollywood wartime cinema upheld the "American values of equality and tolerance as the antithesis to Nazi racism"

(Rogin 209), any overt anti-Semitic bigotry would have unraveled the coherence of this mission altogether. What *does* remain an acceptable target is Danny's sissiness. Other men laugh at him for his intense medicine regimen, his physical weakness, and his insistent crush on Mary. In one scene late in the film, Danny is caught imitating the voice of a woman on a record player he has borrowed (really, stolen) from one of his comrades. As payback, Danny gets beaten up and knocked unconscious.

This leads into what might be the film's final and most astonishingly camp musical number of all: "the Jive Number". Here, we should briefly define camp: according to Susan Sontag, it is a playful "love of the unnatural, of artifice and exaggeration" (Sontag 275), and most importantly, it encodes a queer sensibility, for she writes that "homosexuals, by and large, constitute the vanguard–and the most articulate audience–of camp" (Sontag 290). The aesthetics of dreamlike artifice and excess, in tandem with the narrative disjunction of the number, solidify its campiness: it is the pure joy of performance, rather than romance, that hails the camp or queer spectator just as easily as the heterosexual one. With a runtime of eight minutes, it is by far the longest number in the film, yet it is broken off entirely from the narrative by being framed as a dream sequence. Reality and logic have been cast aside in favor of Danny's surreal, pastel Technicolor dream, an excess for the sake of excess - or is it?

We open on a flashing montage of girls' faces before fading back to Danny, who has traded in his fatigues for an effete, pastel-purple suit. Surrounded by a gaggle of Goldwyn girls, he watches his Army bullies parade by in their own colorful costumes, now laughing, smiling, and dancing. It is the polar opposite of anything we have seen from them so far; hence, the queer power of Danny's fantasy is reiterated through this undoing of the rigid discipline of masculinity they have fought so hard both to embody and enforce. However, the dream cannot offer him a

complete escape. Just as Danny begins to fantasize about his long-awaited marriage to Mary, he suddenly sees himself replaced by Joe, another suggestion of the conflict between Danny's queer marginality to the sexual/social life of his white friends and his almost desperate desire to fit in, to be allowed to become a desirable and desiring heteronormative subject like his friend. Danny stands aside, devastated, until Virginia appears, quite literally bearing a torch for him, telling him that his story is "just like tortured Tess's" (*Up in Arms,* 1:28:18). Danny takes the torch, throws it down, and descends into the Jive Number proper in a blaze of hellfire.

Danny appears upon a stage, populated only by Goldwyn Girls who sit atop abstract pillar-like objects. The interplay of his balletic and more unsteady, jerky dance movements as he runs about underneath them mocks high art in a manner befitting of camp, but it also makes it look almost painful to perform; an effect which continues as Virginia reappears to remind him once more of Joe and Mary's 'betrayal'. He is only able to echo back the words she sings to him, trapped by the logic of a world that has been unable to accept him. Danny only literally and metaphorically finds his footing as the number progresses away from the topic of the failed relationship into the pure scat nonsense that was employed in many of Kaye's most iconic numbers. While the incongruousness with Danny's usual meek characterization and the more flamboyant personality brought to life in these performances has also been read as suggestive of a "regressive" or "immature" state of mind (Cohan 15), the Jive Number is not necessarily restrictive or critical of a more feminine element for Kaye's persona. It can "allow Kaye to become *Kaye"* (Cohan 7), for he is a song-and-dance entertainer first and foremost. The 'real' Danny Kaye is aligned most definitively with his camp dream-self, but this seeming authenticity plays into the ideological work of the film at large by once again refiguring our understanding of his sexual subjectivity. The camp energy of the scene is ultimately directed back toward a

heteronormative mission - “I’ll find a new gal!” (*Up in Arms*, 1:30:39), Danny exclaims. The number provides the narrative motivation for Danny to give up his infantile crush, accepting Joe’s pairing with Mary and his with Virginia/Dinah Shore, whom we should note as the only other Jewish star in the film. Though this would appear to be an equally happy ending for all, it too reiterates the concerns the film has expressed so far about how to manage America’s internal organizations of racial and sexual power. By getting together with Virginia, another Jewish woman, Danny realizes his own heterosexuality in such a way that he no longer transgresses the hegemony of Joe and Mary’s WASPishness. Moreover, the following sequence will illustrate how this realization of Danny’s ‘authentic’ heterosexual desire also figures the transfer of that heterosexuality into *outward* projections of power, with America’s ‘other’ or enemy again constituted primarily along racial lines.

Danny awakens from his dream, only to be promptly jailed in the brig. He remains imprisoned even after the ship arrives at its destination, awaiting court-martial on the fictitious island of Baguna in the Pacific. While Mary and Virginia attempt to argue Danny’s case, he (for no particular reason) is spirited away from his jail cell by a band of Japanese soldiers. Back at their camp, he refuses to give up any Army secrets, going through his hypochondriacal ‘what’s-that-clicking-in-your-throat’ running gag with a Japanese officer before bonking him over the head and escaping. He hastily disguises himself in yellowface makeup, which fools the Japanese soldiers into following him. They unquestioningly obey his every command, from falling into booby-traps to jumping into pools of mud. The sequence concludes with each of the Japanese soldiers, still following rank and file, falling into a very large pit: quite literally, an elevation of Danny and America over the downright buffoonishness of the Japanese. The day is

saved: Danny's comrades laud him as a war hero, and all of his court-martial charges will be dropped.

Underneath the silliness of the situation lies the "properly directed hatred" (Doherty 122) which Hollywood used to position the Japanese as an inferior Other: being visibly non-white meant that they were not so much a people as a "pestilence" (Doherty 134). By turning in the Japanese soldiers, Danny proves his allegiance to America, confirming that he is 'white enough' not to be counted as a racial other. The process is analogous to the ways that Jewish people, even as they became more accepted, were expected not to "offend the sense of unity and homogeneity" (Goldstein 194) that white society promised (or perhaps, inflicted upon) its constituents. Danny is only valuable to his peers insofar as he reasserts the hegemonic power of American whiteness to remain safely and securely positioned above whomever it felt it needed to be. Once Danny returns to camp, he reunites with Virginia and confesses his love to her for real. The film ends on a brief reprise of the two performing the Jive Number, again associating Danny's realization of his heterosexuality with his investment in the exertion of the U.S.'s power. At the same time, it also subjugates the lingering queerness of the number under that national power, when the Jive Number fades to black and another reprise begins over the closing credits, this time of "All Out For Freedom". The individuality or authenticity of Kaye and Shore's performance can be admired only so long as it is cordoned off, bound to cede to the hegemonic power of the nation. Ultimately, *Up in Arms* made Kaye's queerness and Jewishness acceptable by demonstrating its amenability to integration into power structures which upheld white heteronormativity as the identity paradigm that would dominantly come to figure 'Americanness', both at home and abroad, in the years to follow.

Such a solidification of these racial and sexual boundaries, however, would eventually come to have almost disastrous consequences for Kaye. If the overall goal of *Up in Arms* was to integrate him into the popular imagination, then it undeniably worked - for a time. The film was a smashing success, praised as “not only a hit, but a holdover sensation” (*The Daily Film Renter*). He continued starring in musical comedies, and his live shows simultaneously skyrocketed in popularity. Now a solo act rather than a Broadway character actor, he was breaking records at venues across the country. By the late 1940s, however, the need to define ‘Americanness’ - and its enemies - had ramped up into a paranoiac frenzy. During the war years, it had been seen as a duty to promote tolerance and equality as American values, coming hand-in-hand with the assimilation of Jewishness into whiteness. In the wake of the Cold War, this new figuration of race meant that persisting anti-Semitic attitudes took on another, albeit politically veiled, significance. When right-wing politicians like John Rankin claimed that "Hollywood Jews presided over ‘the greatest hotbed of subversive activities in the United States’” (Brackman 5), it was presented such that what was most at issue was not Jewish people’s racial or ethnic difference. Rather, the hatred was reframed around the apparently insurmountable *political* difference which would come to define the anxieties of the Cold War years: the insidious specter of Communism versus America’s supposedly noble hegemonic power.

The House Un-American Activities Committee typified these reworked anti-Semitic attitudes in its dogged effort to root out ‘Communists’ in Hollywood, which inevitably meant targeting Jewish stars and directors. Danny Kaye would be among the many Hollywood stars who protested the Committee, signing a 1947 petition in support of the Hollywood Ten. They retaliated with the essential moves of their playbook: calling him a Jew and a Communist.

Granted, the former was true, but Rankin clearly framed his public revelation of Kaye's birth name - David Daniel Kaminsky - as though he had been hiding an insidious secret from his audiences, and he was therefore not a 'true' American. In 1949, Kaye would once more come under fire from the Committee, which cited him as being "within the Stalinist orbit" (*Daily Boston Globe*). The article gives no specific reason for the label, but one could infer that it referred to Kaye's involvement in anti-HUAC Hollywood groups such as the Hollywood Independent Citizens' Committee and later the Committee for the First Amendment. However, Kaye had resigned from the ICC in 1946, stating that on account of his regular need to travel, he had "neglected my duties as treasurer…I believe very strongly that if one holds such an important office in a vital group such as the I.C.C. is absence [*sic*] from it does not make the organization grow stronger" (Kaye). While this resignation read like an apology, a 1952 letter to Samuel Goldwyn would prove a sharp change of tune. Kaye changed his story, stating that he had left because "many Communists had infiltrated the committee and showed signs of dominating its policies", before reassuring Goldwyn that he would have "nothing further to do with it" (Kaye).

Similarly emphatic was Kaye's disavowal of the Committee for the First Amendment later in the same letter. On the subject of his signing an anti-HUAC petition for the organization, he argued that "I was unwittingly drawn into this activity by reason of an appeal which at the time seemed to involve a decent American principle…I never would have authorized the use of my name if I had known the true import of the group's activity" (Kaye). Although it is impossible to tell from these letters whether Kaye truly wished to denounce Communism on his own terms, or merely did so to protect himself from further allegations, the truth likely lies somewhere in the middle. There can be little doubt that if Kaye had continued to vocalize

dissent, he would have come under even greater scrutiny. If nothing else, the repetitive denunciations of his letter should serve to illustrate the tensions endured in the transition from the war to the almost schizophrenic paranoia of the post-war years. Whereas America had figured itself during the war years as a tolerant and diverse nation, 'all out for freedom', as it were, now those very same 'decent American principles', as Kaye puts it, were becoming suspect. Communism, meanwhile, was increasingly figured as a shady, conspiratorial antagonist to American power. In effect, these changes meant that Kaye now had to walk a tenuous line between all-American innocence and perverse Communist guilt.

Also at issue was the legitimacy of his draft status. As a 4-F, he did not see combat; yet to the outside observer, the ever-energetic Kaye probably seemed perfectly healthy. In the same 1952 letter to Samuel Goldwyn, he wrote at length on the topic. Kaye stated that "postponement of my induction date was granted in order to allow me to complete your picture, *Up in Arms*" (Kaye). He goes on to state that he experienced fatigue and weight loss during filming. Upon reporting to a draft board doctor in New York, Kaye explains that "at the conclusion of my examination I was told I had been rejected…at no time after that was there any change in my draft status" (Kaye). He concludes his letter by reasserting the value of his USO performances during the war as anti-Communist, disavowing his involvement with the Committee for the First Amendment, and promising that "I have always opposed, do now oppose, and always will oppose all that Communism stands for" (Kaye). Kaye's statement pastes over the *in*coherence of his previous narratives by revising his own history to assert a continuous disavowal of Communism. His past, present, and future are now all represented as united in opposition to its spread, once again suggesting that the comparative laxity of the war years was giving way to the Cold War's paranoiac striving for coherence and power.

The end of the 1940s would bring more turmoil for Kaye on both the personal and professional levels. Not only had his contract with Goldwyn ended in 1948, that same year would see him undergo a separation from his wife and longtime creative partner Sylvia Fine, for reasons that tend too much toward gossip to discuss at length here (but if the reader really must know, it was because he had been having an affair with his *Kid From Brooklyn* costar Eve Arden). With the myriad disjointed threats of Cold War paranoia looming over him, Kaye would begin his UNICEF ambassadorship in 1954, rocketing to new heights of international fame. In this role, he was to become aligned with the interests of a cultural symbol far more beloved, and far more demanding, than he could ever have imagined: the Child. Chapter Two will examine how Kaye's queer excesses were again reworked through this transition to becoming a children's entertainer. By becoming known during the 1950s as Mr. UNICEF, he balanced the 'natural', authentic appearance of apolitical Child-friendliness with the demands of a carefully constructed, anti-Communist political mission.

**Chapter Two: For a Jester's Chief Employment, is to Kill Himself for Your Enjoyment…**

If the 1940s had ended on an odd and somewhat unsettling note for Danny Kaye, then we would do well to begin our analysis of the 1950s with something equally so. Picture, for instance, a musical number from his first film of the decade, *On the Riviera* (1951). Enclosed within the borders of a television screen, we see a figure dressed in gaudy, clownish makeup and a bright, baby-blue clown costume. Hanging limp from a set of red marionette strings, he sticks out like a sore thumb against the pitch-black background of the stage set. Suddenly, he leaps to life! Bouncing and flailing around the void-like space, he announces himself as "Popo the Puppet". Not only is Popo's *appearance* childish, but he himself *is* a child. Youth, however, is no hindrance for Popo. In his high, nasally voice, he proudly declares that he can "do anything / when somebody else pulls the strings!" (*On the Riviera,* 0:58:04). This was bizarre, even by Kaye's standards: why was he, an entertainer now entering his forties, aping the mannerisms of a small child?

To be sure, Kaye's performance of "Popo the Puppet" flies in the face of everything typically imagined as characterizing 1950s American masculinity, an era when men were prescribed the role of the virile, hard-working breadwinner, a loving (but always firm!) husband to his wife and father to their two-point-five children. It is easy enough to point out that the culture of the decade "put a new premium on hard masculine toughness"; and that an "exaggerated cult of masculine toughness and virility" (Cuordileone 516) still holds clout in our cultural discourses around masculinity even now. That said, we must also recognize that the emergent figurations of masculinity during the post-war era were fraught with contradictions. The trend of "equating a single normative masculinity with the American character" (Cohan 14) meant that any threats to that masculinity signified threats to the family, and then to the nation as

a whole, in an endless spiral of paranoia that characterized much of the culture of Cold War America. Although such anxieties had their beginnings in the 1940s, as with the previously discussed HUAC hearings, the 1950s were when the extent of their implications for the discourses of gender and sexuality became most clearly apparent. For men, queer(er) expressions of their masculinity came to be seen as incontrovertible proof of sexual queerness, both of which were equated with a creeping subversive (read: Communist) influence upon society: "homosexuals were perverts, and the threat they posed could be contained only by excluding them" (Lewis 4). In effect, "gender loyalty and national loyalty blurred together" (Loftin 578), such that queerness came to signify a damning incompatibility with America itself. However, this also had the effect of figuring queerness as a *necessary* counterpoint to the supposed strength, vitality, and coherence of heterosexual masculinity. Though it would seem that this dynamic merely instated heteronormative hegemonic power - indeed, allegations of queerness *were* often more than enough to ruin one's life - it also reflexively delineated the boundaries of heteronormative masculinity by threatening men with "clearly punitive consequences" (Butler 522) if they failed to live up to its exacting standards.

Many American men could not find respite from these pressures even in the privacy of their own homes. The years following World War Two have famously become known as the era of the 'baby boom', when Elaine Tyler May writes that the "child-centered family took its place as the embodiment of the postwar American dream. The most tangible symbol of that dream was the suburban home—the locale of the good life, the evidence of democratic abundance" (May 172). Fatherhood became one of the highest callings of a man's life, a "new badge of masculinity and meaning" (May 155) for all to aspire toward. Underneath this squeaky-clean, *Father Knows Best* facade of the all-American family, there still lay yet more unease centered on men's *failure*

to fulfill the demands of their new role as the head of the household. Refusal to settle down with a family was contemptible, and "childlessness was considered deviant, selfish, and pitiable" (May 146). A man's ability to exert paternal authority over his home reflected his commitment (or, God forbid, lack thereof) to the nation. If he failed to do so, his children would consequently grow up as overly-mothered 'sissies' who "allegedly were likely to become homosexuals, 'perverts,' and dupes of the communists" (May 155). Once again, the fears of homosexuality and Communism were conflated, revealing that the stakes were far greater than just personal fulfillment or pride: the future of America hinged upon the correct rearing of its new masses of children.

Kaye's performance of "Popo the Puppet" evidently conforms with none of these expectations of normative masculinity. After all, what was to become of a star who had built his persona on being a 'sissy' when sissiness or queerness had become anathema to the hegemonic figuration of the American male? Surprisingly, the rigid gender and sexual politics of the 1950s did little to stop his rise to ever greater heights of fame. His live performances remained as wildly popular as ever. By 1954, his role as the first goodwill ambassador for UNICEF made his image internationally recognizable and synonymous with goodwill and humanitarianism. Would not all of this mean that the stardom of Danny Kaye was as culturally incoherent during the 1950s as it ever was? In truth, it does, and this incoherence is where I argue we shall locate an evolving figuration of his queerness during the decade. I argue, however, that Kaye's 1950s persona obfuscated that incoherence by refiguring him as a 'children's entertainer', one whose extant sissiness or queerness could be plausibly excused as long as his stardom functioned to glorify the figure of the Child.[3]

[3] I capitalize 'Child' from here onwards to account for the fact that we are discussing the Child in relation to its significance as a political, ideological, and social figure, "not to be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children" (Edelman 11).

Certainly, there was also something off-putting about this association, and the uncanniness of "Popo the Puppet" did not go unrecognized at the time of the film's release. *Chicago Tribune* critic Mae Tinee wrote that while the number was "charmingly costumed and handsomely photographed", it also "offer[ed] lines that are quite appalling" (Tinee), no doubt referring to the childishness of the lyrics. Other reviewers were more pleased with the number, with one calling it "the most rollicking stanza of the musical" (Dash). These contradictory reactions suggest that the number betrays some of the tensions underlying the universally wholesome ideology of the Child, which Lee Edelman names as *reproductive futurism*. He argues that the Child's fundamental appeal lies in the ways it can "embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust" (Edelman 11), just as the Child figured prosperity and futurity within the American social order of the 1950s. When we first see Popo, he is hanging loose and limp on his strings, as though he were a corpse waiting to be animated at someone's command - but whose? It is only once an omnipotent, invisible figure pulls the strings that Popo can 'do anything'. In this way, he is operating analogously to the figure of the Child: infinitely able to be repurposed and recycled by society to secure "the absolute privilege of heteronormativity" (Edelman 2).

Still, a glaring element of the sequence remains unexplained - Danny Kaye is not a Child himself, so how could he take on any of its significance? I have already made the argument that he ought to be read as culturally queer, but also that culture figured the queer as dangerous, for queerness was broadly "understood as bringing children and childhood to an end" (Edelman 19), for a culturally queer star like Kaye to figure as a Child reveals that the threat of queerness is *inherent in the signification of the Child itself*. The Child constantly threatens to grow up to one day *refuse* to grow up, as we have already seen reflected in America's anxieties over its 'sissy'

children, figuring a terrifying rejection of the heterosexual social order which endlessly asserts itself as the Child's progenitor and protector. This uneasiness manifests in *On the Riviera* through its segmentation of Popo - quite literally so, as the edges of the frame are overlaid by the edges of the television set - away from the rest of the narrative. As Steven Cohan notes, it had long been the norm that Kaye's musical numbers "were rarely integrated into the narrative and seldom performed with his costars" (Cohan 4), but "Popo the Puppet" is even further disintegrated from the narrative by way of its being framed as a *televisual* performance, not a 'live' one.

*On the Riviera*'s depiction of television is certainly fantastical for 1951, with its vivid color and crystal-clear picture, but its allure would nevertheless have been very real. Television was already shaping up to be a fierce new competitor to Hollywood cinema in the early 1950s, and, like the Child, it figured as many tensions as it did promises. Television scholar Lynn Spigel writes that "many Americans believed television would revive domestic life" (Spigel 192), providing a unifying space of wholesome entertainment. Of course, any mention of domesticity in the 1950s invariably insinuated the presence of a Child, and more handwringing had to follow. It was feared that the television would transmit "debased knowledge and its related encouragement of passive minds and bodies" (Spigel 193) into homes across the country, weakening Children's interest and aptitude for normative social life. In this way, the contradictions of television mirrored those of America's broader Cold War politics: America and its families were figured as a safe, cohesive, and secure unit, yet they were also perpetually vulnerable to infiltration and subversion at any moment.

Crucially, television entertainment also began to blur the boundaries between Childhood and adulthood: "if in everyday life adults represented rules, knowledge, and the threat of

punishment, on television they represented mayhem, entertainment, and prizes" (Spigel 203). Mayhem and entertainment Popo surely brings in spades, but he can offer no 'prize' as far as reproductive futurism is concerned. Instead, questions of television's power to destabilize and debase receive their dangerously queer answers in the form of Popo, whose childishness marks him as a "liminal character… somewhere in between child and adult" (Spigel 203). Popo's liminality, his failure to 'grow up', figures a disfiguration, as it were, of the Child's unambiguous promise to one day carry on the heterosexual social order. We will find that the immaturity for which the queer is condemned is similarly figured by their supposed rejection of reproductive futurism in favor of "sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of meaning and therefore as responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, life itself" (Edelman 13). Whereas Kaye's manic energy in *Up in Arms* had figured a delight in performance that was made mutually legible to both queer and straight spectators by its investment in a form of national futurity; now, Kaye's queer excesses marked him as taking delight in his own immaturity. Through this, he denies futurity, and the outcome can only be his demise - so it goes. Popo is never mentioned again after the number is over, foreclosing the Child to foreclose the queer.

As if to slap a band-aid on this gaping bullet hole in the logic of the Child, the film redirects its attention toward Kaye's more masculine counterpart. At the end of "Popo the Puppet", a spectator who had been watching the television performance gleefully exclaims, "He's going to do Henri now!" (*On the Riviera,* 1:01:10). The camera does not cut back to the Kaye who has just performed as Popo, but to him as the character of the 'real' Henri Duran in the next room over, visibly disconcerted by what he has just seen on television. Granted, he has some good reasons to feel that way, but a summary of the (admittedly perplexing) plot of *On the*

*Riviera* is necessary to explain them. Henri, a French pilot and aviation magnate, had hired a nightclub entertainer by the name of Jack Martin (also played by Danny Kaye) to impersonate him during a party at his mansion that evening so he could sneak off on an urgent business trip. Jack must keep up the facade of Henri's calm, collected sophistication in front of the guests, while stalling a rival businessman, Periton (Jean Murat). Henri discovers that Jack has abandoned his duties to go perform "Popo the Puppet". He orders his associates, Louis (Henri Letondal) and Phillipe (Marcel Dalio), to send Jack away should he return, as if he must excise any possibility of queerness infiltrating his domain. While the film has set up Henri's return as a return to a more 'normal' figuration of masculinity; one that is more 'real' or 'authentic' by virtue of its existence outside the television space, it has also gestured back to the performativity of Popo through the television spectator's line of dialogue, revealing Henri's masculinity to be just as much a construction by Danny Kaye as was Popo's lack thereof.

If the two Kayes' masculinities have both been revealed as constructions, what, if anything, could ever be called 'authentic' about their identities? Gender theorists like Judith Butler have long argued that gender identity has no authentic or inherent constitution; rather, it is constructed through "the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity" (Butler 520): in a word, it is performative. Much of the comedy in *On the Riviera,* therefore, arises from the ways in which seams or gaps in Jack and Henri's performances of one another's identities become visible, the gap being part and parcel of such stylized repetitions. The two Kayes only become distinguishable when their performances can be juxtaposed against one another, and they are made into subjects "*through that act of division alone*" (Edelman 8): Jack is the mild-mannered, more neurotic half of the duo (albeit still drastically tempered down from Kaye's 1940s characters), situated against Henri, a confident, romantic, (literal) straight

man. Although Jack begins his imitation of Henri as a staged nightclub performance, at the party, there are "no theatrical conventions to delimit [its] purely imaginary character…" (Butler 527). We do not know what Jack can or will be able to do as 'Henri' when the boundaries between the two of them are broken. We watch him attempt to construct the most 'authentic' performance of Henri's gender as possible in real time, always with the implication that any misstep may have grave consequences for them both. Henri does not know exactly how to act as Jack either - when each man seeks to 'authentically' perform as his opposite, it causes more chaos and confusion by revealing the impossibility of locating an authentic gender in the first place. By rending in this manner any "fantasy…of an order, an organization, that assures us the stability of our identities as subjects" (Edelman 7), *On the Riviera* admits - if not somewhat uneasily - that it is merely the performed signifiers of heteronormative masculinity that give it its value.

The way it narrativizes this is admittedly quite convoluted. The film opens with Jack performing the title number to a packed nightclub on the Riviera (hence the title), who give him his well-deserved applause. As he steps away for a costume change, a whisper spreads through the crowd - the famous, dashing, and daring French pilot, Henri Duran, *est arrivé!* They all rush off to see him, leaving Jack to stutter out the first few lines of his next number to an empty room. Left with no choice but to see what all the fuss is about, Jack follows. Here, we can draw another connection back to "Popo the Puppet": Henri's first appearance is also televised, and likewise, tied to the signification of 'performance'. Even so, we might be inclined to accept Henri's performance in the scene as the more natural or authentic one. The sequence is littered with the signifiers of an ideal hegemonic masculinity; he is suave, wealthy, and has beautiful women literally lining up to throw themselves at him. These traits become concrete as a collection of *performed acts* that together constitute our understanding of Henri's masculinity, but this does

not make the sequence an authentic manifestation of it. The process of construction depends not just upon Henri's own performance(s), but on a collective social imagination of masculinity. There must be a "tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of its own production" (Butler 522). On television, a crowd of fans roars with applause. Jack also confirms Henri's masculinity, buying into the television performance: "Good-looking chap, isn't he?" (*On the Riviera* 00:08:15)[4]. Henri easily wins his masculine credibility through the crowd's adoration, but Jack is not so fortunate. Suddenly, he is called into his manager's office and told he will be fired from his engagement at the club. The reason: "I no longer find you amusing!" (*On the Riviera,* 00:10:15): the punishment for Jack's failure to enact the 'right' kind of gender, as embodied by Henri, is the loss of his livelihood. Growing desperate, Jack realizes that he could forego his usual musical routine to do an impersonation of Henri. Learning of their striking resemblance, the manager agrees that Jack may keep his job only if he can do a 'sensational' job of mimicking the Frenchman. Needless to say, the act does not stay just on the stage for long…

We learn that Periton is planning to purchase Henri's aviation company and put him out of business. Henri admits to his associates, Louis and Phillipe, that he does not have the finances to counteract this and must go away to get a loan in secret. They enlist Jack's help, paying him half a million francs to impersonate Henri and fool Periton during a party at his mansion that evening. Jack agrees, but on one condition - under no circumstances can it be revealed to Henri's (much-neglected) wife, Lili (Gene Tierney), that he is not the real Henri. He explains that he simply could not perform as Henri if she knew, because he would be too nervous. They agree to the request, before immediately telling Lili of the plan anyway. Henri's identity, we learn, can

[4] One can only assume Samuel "no-one-wants-to-fuck-Danny-Kaye" Goldwyn was quaking in his boots over this development.

only be ‘performed’ in a setting where it is under surveillance - that is to say that not only is gender willfully constructed by individuals within specific historical and cultural spaces, but it is also constantly subject to correction and punishment, making performance into a “situation of duress” (Butler 522). Should Jack fail to perform appropriately as Henri, he will lose his job, and Henri will lose his company.

The performed individual signifiers of Henri’s identity are more important to his enterprise than whatever constitutes ‘Henri Duran’; in other words, the identity of Henri is accepted or naturalized as “real only to the extent that it is performed” (Butler 527). In one scene, Louis and Phillipe instruct Jack to make only a specific thoughtful gesture should Periton ask him any pressing business questions, one of Henri’s signature moves to nudge negotiations in his favor. The performance of the signifier grants legitimacy to the ruse, allowing Jack to construct, however hastily, “a compelling illusion, an object of belief” (Butler 520) for Periton. The performed signifiers of Henri’s business acumen need not ever actually come to ‘mean’ anything to Jack. There is an emptiness at their core; there is no ‘authentic’ or ‘essential’ Henri Duran for Jack to strive toward becoming, because the performed signifiers of Henri’s masculinity have always lacked an ‘authentic’ basis in the first place. As Butler tells us, “there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires” (Butler 522).

Recognizing the malleability of the signifier, however, can also serve to initiate what they term “gender transformation” (Butler 520), a process of contestation and reconstruction of those signifiers. Such reconstruction, of course, does not always necessarily yield obviously ‘queer’ results. We might see this demonstrated by the film’s resolution of Henri’s discontent over his relationship with Lili. He returns from his trip to England empty-handed, convinced he is about

to lose his company for good. Instead of dealing with Periton, he suddenly becomes suspicious that Lili may be more attracted to Jack than she is to him. The loss of control over his business also threatens his control over their relationship, altogether constituting a devastating punishment for Henri's recent failures in performing his masculinity. This impels him to sneakily take over Jack's masquerade for the rest of the evening, as if he must test the coherence of his own identity. Henri, Louis, and Phillipe agree not to inform Lili that Jack has departed, so Henri is now *really* Henri (if this sounds confusing, that's because it is). Testing his theory, Henri goes to bed with Lili that night, and in the morning is furious - she has betrayed him, with himself!

Henri has run across what Cohan describes as one of the core contradictions of 1950s masculinity: the seemingly paradoxical demands on men to possess a drive toward 'hard' sexual virility and conquest, as well as the 'soft' gentleness required to settle down in the domestic sphere. A man's exclusive, driven interest in women was the perfect defense against any allegations of sexual queerness, but a man only became truly 'mature' when he completed a "successful conversion to domestic ideology" (Cohan 279). In Henri's case, we might frame this as a transition away from his seemingly 'performative' relationships with his many female admirers toward a more mature, 'authentic' role as Lili's husband. Authenticity, for Henri, is now delineated by performance of the heterosexual family, thereby affixing it to the figure of the Child. By refiguring Henri's "ostensibly natural 'attraction' to the opposing sex/gender… in the service of reproductive interests" (Butler 524), Jack's reconciliation with Lili promises the authenticity of a prize that reproductive futurism alone claims to one day provide: futurity. The only implication can be that another successive displacement will be conjured up to replace the dangerously queer Popo; that the two of them will, sooner or later, produce a Child of their own,

and that this Child can figure an 'authenticity' of identity that resolves the confusion and chaos of *On the Riviera*. As the final number tells us, it is a "Happy Ending", indeed.

What each of these examples ultimately shows is that the masculine identity's construction via the signifier necessarily opens it to a troubling degree of fluidity and contradiction. There is always, as Lee Edelman would put it, a "constitutive gap in the subject that the signifier necessarily installs" (Edelman 9). While we are unable to directly grapple with this gap in our subjectivity, the Child produces "successive displacements forward of nodes of attachment as figures of meaning" (Edelman 9), thereby suturing us into a narrative of history that secures our identity to the Child's fantastical innocence, its Imaginary wholeness, to fill in the emptiness of the signifier. This retroactively makes the "Popo the Puppet" all the more disconcerting, for in his *removal* from the narrative, Popo becomes "unassimilable to the logic of interpretation or the demands of meaning-production" (Edelman 9). Popo *refuses* to embody a future where the myriad signifying gaps in Jack and Henri's subjectivity would be filled, seeming to deny them access to authenticity or wholeness. However, we should also recall that Jack's viewing of "Popo the Puppet" was what set off the chain of events that led to Henri's reconciliation with Lili. Its queerness indirectly proved generative in helping Henri begin to re-imagine his own masculinity, even if *On the Riviera* negotiates that queerness by sublimating it back into the heteronormativity of the happily married couple.

If *On the Riviera* had queered the figure of the Child, then Kaye was surely quick to rectify this. By 1954, his stardom would become inseparable from Children through his charitable work on behalf of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Kaye's stardom had previously been deployed in a more explicitly political context through his USO appearances, *Up in Arms*, and his opposition to HUAC. UNICEF, on the other hand, relied on the rhetoric that

Kaye's interest in the role was so genuine and enthusiastic that it transcended politics. These promised a vision of political neutrality, a future where it would be possible to "create an atmosphere of international goodwill that cut across Cold War tensions" (Wilson 44). Jennifer Morris, in her history of UNICEF's formative years, describes its signifying power as that of an "apolitical, international effort to provide relief aid for children and mothers throughout the world." (Morris 1). But the Child, as I have hopefully made clear, is anything but apolitical. Morris acknowledges the same, arguing that "UNICEF, and other organizations like it, ran programs that were complicit not only in supporting U.S. foreign policy efforts, but also in influencing social norms by perpetuating the U.S. post-war family ideal as well" (Morris 1).

This, however, did not mean that UNICEF was immune to political paranoia and suspicion. Morris writes that "several UN staffers can be counted among the casualties of the HUAC's investigations" (Morris 155). UNICEF refuted allegations of Communist sympathies by arguing that it could operate in "developing countries as places to be courted as part of the U.S. State Department's Cold War agenda" (Morris 157), fostering pro-U.S. relations by impressing an ideal of America as their protective, paternalistic benefactor. Mirroring the anxieties of fatherhood, America imagined itself as unimpeachable, while also fearing that the nations it saw as its 'Children' were going to grow up to become 'queer' in that they would refuse to reproduce its hegemonic power. Would UNICEF be able to guide the Children of the world into the fold of American hegemony before they were seduced into an unholy alliance with the deadly, dastardly influence of Communism?

UNICEF desperately needed to drum up more good publicity for this mission, and fast. Danny Kaye was convinced to take up the task after a chance meeting[5] with UNICEF Executive

[5] Quite the contrast to the calculated political dealings UNICEF endured at the time, Kaye and Pate's chance meeting sounds like something of pure fate, or perhaps destiny. Both men had been onboard a flight which suddenly

Director Maurice Pate, becoming its new "ambassador-at-large" (Gottfried 208). Press surrounding the ambassadorship tended to stress three main elements: first, a rhetoric of sincerity (or, dare I say, authenticity) behind his passion for the work, which was directly evident in his interactions with the children helped by UNICEF. One writer for *Variety* reported that he took the role "to see what he could do to help sick and crippled children, not to exploit his films" (Kaplan). Kaye venerated his UNICEF experiences in interviews, stating that "to see sick, hungry, and needy children actually flower before your eyes is one of the most rewarding things I have ever seen or felt in my entire life" (Tavel). Second was the universality of children's needs, desires, and behaviors. Kaye's assertions that "kids behave the same all around the world…the motions of children are all the same" (Watts), and that UNICEF would strive to help them "regardless of what they were, who they were, and where they were" (*The Times of India*) were reiterated across countless publications. Finally, they suggested that the generosity of ordinary people was as fundamental to the success of UNICEF's mission as Kaye's whirlwind tours around the globe. One article quoted Kaye as saying the organization "could do more with the money that would be forthcoming if people knew about it" (Hornaday). Though Kaye promises in *Assignment: Children* that no one would directly ask viewers for money, at screenings, "collection cans for UNICEF passed around audience members at the film's conclusion" (Wilson 41). Together, these parts of Kaye's UNICEF narratives again reveal the appeal of fantasies of the Child: the case that its universal and undeniable innocence, its need to be protected and preserved, *must* be imperative enough to allow everyone to put aside their differences and unite to come to its aid.

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became "in danger of crashing into the ocean" (Morris 156). While reboarding to another plane, they began talking about UNICEF, and Pate subsequently offered Kaye the ambassadorship

To quote Kaye once more, “anytime you have sick or hungry kids, you’ll find drama” (Shanley) - drama not merely in the sense of sadness or suffering, but drama in that “fictive form of a narrative” (Edelman 9) which we name as politics. Edelman states that narrative is inseparable from reproductive futurism, and it generates the “generational succession, temporality, and narrative sequence” (Edelman 60) which sutures together our collective understanding of politics. Kaye’s ambassadorship signified a comprehensible and coherent narrative for defending American futurity abroad, achieved through a conservatism which operated not just in the more overt sense of America’s Cold War culture and politics, but also “a sort of nonpartisan conservatism, a will to preserve identity” (Edelman 60). To this end, America sought to use Kaye and UNICEF to preserve its identity by reproducing its ideologies through Children across the globe.

Kaye had irrevocably entered into a position where his screen persona had to be carefully balanced with his ‘real’ one, that of “caretaker to the world’s children” (Gottfried 232). By the same token, the figure of the Child would begin to assume a central narrative role in his films. The narrative of Kaye’s first post-UNICEF film, *The Court Jester* (1955), hinges entirely upon the restoration of a Child as the embodiment of futurity within a royal line of succession. The opening number, “Life Could Not Better Be”, is non-diegetic, even resurrecting the aesthetics of “Popo the Puppet” by featuring a colorfully costumed Kaye inside of an empty, enclosed frame. As he bounces around the opening credits, Kaye breaks the fourth wall, promising the viewer that the film they are about to see is joyful, entertaining, and most importantly, *authentic.* As Kaye tells us, “We did research, authenticity was a must / Zooks! Did we search! What did we find? Achoo, a lotta dust!” (*The Court Jester*, 0:01:54). While it is true that this is the lyric from which this thesis derives its title, its implications are even greater than that. Defining the

'authenticity' Kaye speaks of as the fulfillment of the signifying gap problematized in *On the Riviera*, we know that it can only be figured by the Child, who promises that its "presence would fill up the hole in the Symbolic" (Edelman 15). Conversely, we also know that the promise of such fulfillment is unattainable; it must be endlessly deferred, for we "identify such deferral with temporality itself" (Edelman 141). The Child's future is an illusion, endlessly deferred from one generation to the next and rendered as ephemeral and untouchable as the 'lotta dust' which Kaye and company sneeze at. But the fantasy *must* be restored, for to refuse it would mark one as queer, opposing futurity altogether. The presence of the Child not only restores sequence within the bounds of the story, but it also restores the form of the *The Court Jester* itself by returning us from the nondiegesis of the opening number to the age-old narrative of the Child in crisis - its "innocence seen as continually under siege" (Edelman 21).

The film proper opens, and we learn that this time around, Kaye's character is Hubert Hawkins, a traveling performer who runs with a gang of rebels led by the mysterious Black Fox. They are up against the diabolical King Roderick (Cecil Parker), who has slaughtered the true royal family and taken over the kingdom for himself, an act which queers him by marking him as narcissistically opposed to a future for the kingdom beyond his own rule. He has no queen, and we learn that he also plans to send his only daughter, Princess Gwendolyn (Angela Lansbury), away to the far, far north. Luckily, the Black Fox's gang has an ace up their sleeve - they have rescued the true heir to the throne! The trouble is, the heir is only a baby, one that would be indistinguishable from any ordinary baby if not for the 'purple pimpernel' birthmark on its rear end. The child of the film becomes a Child because we, like the characters, *imagine* it offers a futurity to the kingdom that Roderick has refused. As with all Children, we never quite know for

certain ‘who’ it will grow up to become; only that its promise of a future is more tantalizing than the queer’s promise of *no* future.

Royal politics notwithstanding, the Child’s continued power and legitimacy are again confirmed when Hawkins nervously shows off the birthmark to each of the Black Fox’s followers, who swear to it their unconditional loyalty. Humorous as it is that these outlaws are dangerously close to becoming literal kiss-asses of the Child, the sequence has also destabilized our imagination of Hawkins’ masculinity. He glances nervously at the Black Fox and asks, “Sir, don’t you think it would really look better if this kind of thing were done by a woman?” (*The Court Jester,* 0:12:40). Clearly, Hawkins is uncomfortable with his relegation to the feminized labor of Childcare. Furthering this confusion of gender roles is the arrival of Maid Jean (Glynis Johns). Far from a damsel in distress, she is the Black Fox’s respected second-in-command and the sole woman in the group. She is permitted to wear the Black Fox’s costume and fight on the front lines, both of which Hawkins is forbidden from doing. All of this gender queerness, however, is engendered (no pun intended) by the kingdom’s descent into crisis: when the Child disappears, the social order follows suit. The queerness of Hawkins and Jean can only be permitted so long as it is a stopgap, their service to the Child promising the eventual restoration of heteronormativity. Until then, the Black Fox reassures Hawkins, “each one serves as best he can” (*The Court Jester,* 0:12:48).

It is decided that Hawkins will aid Jean in escorting the Child to safety. Setting off on this quest also begins their journey back toward heteronormative domesticity, as they leave behind the homosociality of the Black Fox’s gang for the modest lodging of a woodsman’s hut. Here, Hawkins sings the film's only ballad, "I’ll Take You Dreaming," to the Child as a bedtime lullaby. As Steven Cohan notes, the use of Kaye’s "‘straight’ or ‘legitimate’ singing voice gives

both his character and his performance a unifying authenticity and transparency" (Cohan 19), linking it to the same authenticity of goodwill that had characterized Kaye's image as a UNICEF ambassador: the gap between the 'real' Danny Kaye and the fictional Hubert Hawkins is closed. We might also take pleasure in the fact that this is the first number in the film to be "formally contained by the action" (Cohan 19), the queerness of "Life Could Not Better Be" giving way to the linearity of the Child. More lyrics of the song further reveal an unbreakable trust in its futurity: "And years from now, when you go dreaming / When you're very old / Though your crown be rich with rubies / Diamonds set in gold / Then we'll shine as bright / As the star we'll find tonight" (*The Court Jester,* 0:18:47). The return of the Child's power is pictured as a foregone conclusion, the crown of futurity already resting - as it always has - upon its tiny head.

Soon, it becomes clear that Hawkins has a crush on Jean. Though they embrace once the Child is asleep, she ultimately rebuffs Hawkins' advances, insisting that they must focus on their mission of getting the Child to safety. Another one of Edelman's edicts rings true: "paradoxically, the Child proves that its parents do not fuck" (Edelman 41). Though Hawkins and Maid Jean are not the Child's natal parents, their restraint is still situated as noble, for it operates in service of a future reward which may or may not ever come to fruition: the Child back upon the throne. Rather than fulfill one another's desire(s), they must content themselves with the "*non*satisfaction that *perpetuates* desire…in the narrative dilation that endlessly begets the future by always deferring it" (Edelman 86). This theme also recurs in another one of the film's romantic pairings, between Princess Gwendolyn and the hypnotized Hawkins. Under a witch's spell, Hawkins swears his devotion to her, promising that they will escape the kingdom and run away together. This never happens, and Hawkins completely forgets about it. Really, it does not matter (or at least, *The Court Jester* would have us believe it doesn't) once the Child's

return to the throne has been secured and the film is over. Hawkins and Gwendolyn's failure to escape the kingdom allegorizes the totalizing force of the Child. Once its power is secured, it becomes impossible for them, as it is for us, to imagine a life outside of its reign, an 'outside' world, for "we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the Child" (Edelman 11).

All at once, when the Child *is* returned to the castle and proven to possess the purple pimpernel (say that five times fast!), there is a rapid "restoration of identities disrupted throughout the story" (Bayless 190). This depends upon subordination to the Child, as every last one of the kingdom's denizens is compelled to bow before it at the sight of the purple pimpernel, King Roderick included. Bringing *The Court Jester* full circle, an ensemble reprise of "Life Could Not Better Be" also begins over the scene - this time, completed by both Kaye and the entire ensemble, as they salute the Child. The signification of 'life' is returned to its proper place at last: the futurity of the Child.

Both *On the Riviera* and *The Court Jester* presented narratives of social settings upset by a multitude of queer confusions, but their approaches to solving those confusions point to the changing signification of Kaye's stardom and his relationship with Children more broadly. *On the Riviera* problematized the contradictions of gender performance, but it only implied the Child's power to resolve those contradictions through the wholeness of authenticity or futurity. Even then, it still complicated the Child's heteronormative significations by utilizing Kaye's performance of "Popo the Puppet" as a site of "gender transformation… a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style" (Butler 520), queering Kaye's performance by denoting him as liminal or immature. *The Court Jester* more overtly situated the

Child as able to reconcile the 'broken' repetitions of gender by Hawkins and Jean, by making the driving force behind the narrative of succession and futurity.

There was more than enough reason to believe that *The Court Jester* should have been a successful film: it boasted a lavish budget of "$4 million…said to be the most expensive comedy ever filmed" (Gottfried 222) at the time. Reviews for the film were also quite complimentary: "it's good fun" (Crowther) and "it's a good show" (Moffitt) were the reigning sentiments. Despite this, the film would end up being a massive flop, "grossing $2.2 million" (Gottfried 222). Kaye would not star in another feature film until 1958, and his films from the latter half of the 1950s were "largely a case of hit and miss" (Forrest), as one writer for *Picturegoer* magazine once put it. Kaye would later refer to the late 1950s as a period of "semi-retirement" (*Chicago Tribune*) for himself, though that description somewhat undersells his activity at the time: rather, the spotlight was shifting from his films to his work for UNICEF. While the Child had promised the world an infinite future, what was on the horizon for Danny Kaye remained uncertain. In the third and final chapter of this thesis, I will expand upon how Kaye's signifying power evolved as he transitioned from film to television, especially in the contentious political and cultural climate of the 1960s. From there, I conclude the chapter with a consideration of Kaye's final return to the medium during the 1980s, and its implications for the legacy of his cultural queerness.

**Chapter Three: …And a Jester Unemployed, Is Nobody's Fool!**

Little has been written about Danny Kaye, and even less about his television work. Of course, the usual nemeses of television studies are to blame in part: no home video release, limited reruns, and so on[6]. Surely, however, obscurity alone has not dissuaded (most) academics from probing into anything before. We must examine, then, what specific theoretical or ideological challenges have thus far made Kaye's television an apparently insurmountable topic of study. I have argued that the most trouble with talking about Danny Kaye arises when we are confronted with the incoherent significations of his queerness and its relationship to figurations of the nation and the Child. During the 1950s, his queerness was made palatable by its being refigured to serve the U.S.'s anti-Communist foreign policies through the humanitarianism of UNICEF and the hopeful futurity of the Child. In light of this, I do not think it is any coincidence that Kaye's popularity finally began to wane by the 1960s. These were the years when the *queer, destabilizing* potential of the Child, so profoundly problematized by the paranoid family politics of the previous decade, erupted in living, bleeding color. The horrors of the Vietnam War revealed the ugly side of the U.S.'s claims to a benevolent 'soft power' abroad; while at home, swathes of American Children who would have grown up on Danny Kaye were now doing just that - *growing up* into something that would have doubtless shocked parents of the 1950s. Kaye's transition to television, rather unfortunately for him, coincided precisely with a moment when both internal *and* external projections of a coherent American identity and ideology were rattled to their cores.

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[6] I think it is worth mentioning at the outset that my thoughts on *The Danny Kaye Show* are colored by a vastly different reception context from that of the 1960s. The limited number of accessible episodes I watched in the process of writing this chapter were unofficially released onto YouTube, and I largely had to view them out of their original airing order (if such a thing even matters when there are so many massive gaps in availability). If anything, though, this mode of viewing is perhaps itself a queering of television spectatorship as it might have been most idealistically envisioned in 1963; like "a kind of household cement… meant to reinforce the new suburban family unit" (Spigel 39).

For Kaye, however, it was largely still business as usual. He had quit starring in feature films after the box-office failure of *The Man from the Diner's Club* (1963)[7], but he was in no rush to change his comedic stylings for his television audience later that year, although this was not to his benefit. The fact is, quite simply, that most sketches on *The Danny Kaye Show* are not very good. They are dull, they drag, and, as one contemporary critic aptly noted, Kaye had "a tendency to peddle his own cuteness, which is inappropriate for a man of fifty" (*Newsweek*). However, if this comment reveals anything, it is that even as Kaye's comedy remained family-friendly, something about his queerness was growing uncomfortably visible in his move to television. In the remainder of this chapter, I aim to sketch out a history of Kaye's television work, with attention to how it tracked the evolving ideologies of the Child and their implications for the nation at large in the 1950s, 1960s, and beyond. These, I argue, coincide with formal and generic evolutions in the types of shows Kaye appeared on, as he progressed from the documentary to the variety show, and finally, the sitcom. His initial appearances during the 1950s, in large part, operated in lock-step with his work for UNICEF and the ideologies of the Child. His move to variety television, however, formally problematized the coherence and linearity promised by the Child; a tension which I argue lies at the root of the aforementioned critic's comment. This incoherence was further exacerbated by the time of Kaye's appearance on *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* in 1970, not only by its almost unhinged dissolution of the variety show structure, but also by *Laugh-In*'s fevered efforts to address the far-out politics and aesthetics of America's burgeoning youth culture. As a concluding note, I turn to Kaye's final television appearance, a guest-starring role on *The Cosby Show* in 1986. Airing just over a year before his passing, *The Cosby Show* proved to be a poignant capstone to Kaye's career, suturing

[7] A fun fact: *The Man from the Diner's Club* was also the screenwriting debut of future *Exorcist* author William Peter Blatty. Everyone has to start somewhere!

the recuperation of his cultural queerness in service of Children and the family to the mission of similarly recuperating Blackness within the culturally conservative milieu of the 1980s.

Even as other comedians like Jack Benny and Red Skelton moved their acts to television during the 1950s, Kaye refused to commit to a regular program. Instead, he made his debut with a documentary special in December 1956, *The Secret Life of Danny Kaye*. Unfortunately, like much of Kaye's television, this special remains publicly inaccessible, leaving us with only secondary press sources to surmise its content and reception. Although its title seems to promise some kind of salacious gossip about Kaye's personal life, *The Secret Life of Danny Kaye* essentially followed the same contours of *Assignment: Children*. It was as if to say Kaye was really a man who had no secrets, nothing to hide, and certainly nothing to be ashamed of. After all, by 1956, the public was certainly not unaware of Danny Kaye's UNICEF affiliation, and the program simply provided another opportunity to see him doing what he had already been doing. He once again toured around the world, visiting sick and hungry children while venerating the importance of support for UNICEF's humanitarian aid to the folks at home - quite literally so, since Kaye was now bringing the very message of family and futurity into the very same space that itself had been valorized as an exemplary ideal of family and togetherness.

Just as they had done with *Assignment: Children*, critics praised Kaye's heartwarming talent for working with Children, his universal appeal toward them (and, likewise, suggested the universality of Children themselves): the special was a "vivid affirmation that laughter knows no boundaries and that everywhere children are the same" (*New York Times*). Press also emphasized the selflessness of Kaye's involvement with the program: *Variety* reported that "all coin involved in the TV showings…will go to UNICEF" and that he had even "turned down $250,000 for a spectacular appearance" (*Variety*). Kaye commented that he felt the program was an "informal

debut" on television (*Broadcasting, Telecasting*). The discourses around *The Secret Life of Danny Kaye* positioned it as somehow less constructed, or perhaps more *authentic*, than other television offerings. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Kaye's image of authenticity *was* indeed socially constructed, meant to dispel allegations of the 'queerness' of both himself and UNICEF by redirecting their energies into tacit support of the U.S.'s Cold War containment policies. Now, even those who had (somehow) not heard the good word of Kaye and UNICEF had a chance to get on board with the mission. By watching the program with their own Children at home during the Christmas season, perhaps they would feel a pang of generosity and donate some of the funding that the organization perpetually needed.

Though *The Secret Life of Danny Kaye* was a success, *Variety* reported that Kaye, the "longest holdout against the medium [of television] of any top comic," was still hesitant to do more television work: he was "biding his time until the right idea developed" (*Variety*). By the early 1960s, the time seemed as right as it ever could be, seeing as "plaudits for him, boos for the film" (Hyams) was now the general sentiment surrounding Kaye's movies. Coming to television intuitively seemed like a way to rectify criticisms that his talent onstage was not translating on screen: perhaps the 'liveness' of the medium could more closely simulate the beloved and acclaimed experience of a Danny Kaye show. He would at last commit to *The Danny Kaye Show* as a taped, one-hour weekly series at CBS, which began its run in September 1963 as part of the network's prime-time lineup.

The actual reception of *The Danny Kaye Show* immediately complicated such expectations. From its first season onward, critical complaints that "the sketches didn't seem to go anywhere" (*Variety*), or that "the gag lines [ran] corny or stale" (*Variety*) were abundant. I propose that the feeling of 'pointlessness' or staleness that these critics lamented came about

through the ways that the variety show, through its being structured as a disjointed, non-linear genre of television programming, specifically conflicted with Kaye's extant ideological associations with the Child, figured as a force that organizes our understanding of history as a linear, coherent narrative. Each episode of *The Danny Kaye Show* featured various sketches and musical numbers, led by Kaye and supported by both regular and special guest performers. Oddly enough, these rarely placed him in domestic settings; instead, Kaye most often played a rotation of wacky characters in wackier locales.

Here, we will specifically turn our attention to his character James Blond, a slightly deranged, incompetent parody of James Bond. In January 1967, Kaye would play Blond in a sketch with his famously flamboyant guest star of the week, Liberace. As anyone who knows anything about Liberace could probably predict, this sketch came together as a perfect embodiment of the ethos of 'deliberate' camp: it explicitly played into an unabashed "love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration" (Sontag 275), all conducted in the "spirit of extravagance" (Sontag 283). As it begins, we are once again reminded that Blond is "England's most handsome and most dashing secret agent" (*The Danny Kaye Show*, 15:45). That statement, of course, offers no evaluation of his actual skill(s), because he has none. Instead, the humor hinges upon our delight in his surface *appearance* of elite super-spyness; the sharp tuxedo, the endless gadgets, and so on. However, the sketch is far from an uncritical celebration of phallic masculinity, dispelling any notion that Blond might shape up into a 'real', competent hero when he is literally carried into the sketch by an equally stylish lady friend. Blond's Chief (Harvey Korman) informs him that the mission is to dispatch Mr. 88 (Liberace), the villainous 'man from P*I*A*N*O'. Blonde, for his part, has a very difficult time trying to spell that.

Meanwhile, Mr. 88 is luxuriating in his lavish secret hideaway, a setting that could very well have been modeled on one of Liberace's own famously opulent residences. There is no shortage of decadent decor to look at: silk curtains, a crystal chandelier, gilded fixtures, and colorful flowers all make up, in Sontag's words, a "visual reward" (Sontag 283) for the spectator who cares to admire it. Checking his reflection in the full-length, golden mirror, Mr. 88 laughs at himself: "you're too much!" (*The Danny Kaye Show*, 19:30). That he is indeed: Liberace, much like in his equally camp appearance on *Batman* (1966-1968) the previous year, makes no attempt at anything even remotely resembling 'realism' in his acting here. His sidekick/butler, Mr. 44, bursts in - I hope I need not elaborate on the queer implications of Liberace living with another man - to tell him that their evil scheme is in motion! We learn that simple melodies played on Mr. 88's piano (adorned with the trademark Liberace candelabra, naturally) can trigger explosions at eighty-eight different world capitals. There is no particular motive behind this plot except that it suits his personal style - but should he succeed, the destruction of life as we know it is guaranteed!

So it seems, anyway, until Blonde enters, disguised as his dastardly opponent in a sequined purple-green jacket and atrocious-looking wig. He sneaks around, searching for the secret of the diabolical 'pianoonoo'. All of a sudden, Mr. 88 returns! As Blond tries to escape, he gets stuck in a rerun of the classic mirror gag. While Blond mimics Mr. 88, he grows more upset: "I can't understand it! I look terrible!" Mr. 88 complains (*The Danny Kaye Show*, 22:42). This attack on his looks is enough to stir Blond to action, and he apprehends the evildoer at last. Mr. 88 begs for a chance to play one final song on his 'pianeenee', and Blond agrees, letting him play "London Bridge". When Mr. 88 stops just short of the last notes, Blond insists on finishing the song himself, setting off an explosion in London that is implied to have killed the Chief. Quite

literally, this sketch shows that camp has a very real power to subvert the straight world: rather than supporting the continued existence of the state, as he did with UNICEF, now Kaye has become its destroyer.

As Sontag (among others) is apt to point out, camp is a distinctly queer sensibility. Viewing these two sequences through a heteronormative perspective, such a queer preoccupation with surface glitz and glamor appears as a paradigmatic manifestation of queer narcissism. Queerness, Edelman tells us, is seen as shamelessly self-serving for "[refusing] the social imperative to grasp futurity in the form of the Child, for the sake of whom…everything else in the world, by force if needed, must give way" (Edelman 49). Camp, then, represents an outright refusal of reproductive futurism's demand to delay pleasure, or to deny oneself for the sake of the Children. Moreover, he also says that queer narcissism is figured as "[instantiating] a death drive opposed to the ego and the world of desire" (Edelman 46). The signifiers of camp pleasure are solely *material* objects, from Mr. 88's glittery 'pianoonoo' to Blond's outrageous disguise. The marked absence of the Child in these moments suggests that the queer need not (or even *refuses to*) look to a future signified by it, because they can take unabashed pleasure in what is already abundant around them. While camp appreciation may be zany and exciting for Sontag, it is a world-ending threat to the paradigm of reproductive futurism. As the Blond sketch makes explicit, it has the power to bring about total annihilation of the social order: Blond, through Mr. 88's invention, obliterates (albeit mistakenly) the state apparatus that sends him forth into the world as a model specimen of its own masculinity. Then, the variety format itself instantiates a kind of 'death' of our camp pleasure, revealing how temporary and fleeting it is. The sketch fades to black, and we return to Liberace, who now plays his piano on an unpretentious, pitch-black platform, altogether unlike the wacky set we have just seen.

The queerness of *The Danny Kaye Show*, as Edelman would likely predict, inevitably must give way to the Child. In the final few minutes of each episode, Kaye would address the audience directly, recapping the show or singing a song, and perhaps bringing out one final guest to close the show. While such sit-downs were already a generic staple of the variety show, for Kaye, they also harkened back to a kind of sit-down that had long been part of his live performances, wherein he would stop the show, sit at the edge of the stage, and simply talk with members of the audience for a short while. The moment, though appearing perfectly natural, was always planned as part of the act. On *The Danny Kaye Show*, he again channeled this sense of presence and authenticity into his investment in the Child. Most often, he would bring in a child actress, Victoria Meyerink, to converse with him during the sit-down. The exuberant excess of the sketches and the musical number were gone; now, they sat together upon an unadorned soundstage. Kaye presents Victoria with a new pet turtle: referring to the Blond sketch, he asks her, "do you remember when Harvey [Korman] said before, 'do you think you can thwart this threat'?...Well, this is a *thurtle*" (*The Danny Kaye Show,* 45:40). As we know, Blond failed spectacularly to avert the crisis, but now Kaye *has* thwarted the threat of his own queerness by once again redirecting it toward a spectacle of the Child's innocence.

By the late 1960s, however, the nation was turning its eyes to an entirely different kind of spectacle. The social and political upheaval of the era, centered around the Vietnam War, profoundly recast the significations of Kaye's milquetoast, family-friendly image. Both at home and abroad, all that he and the Child had promised America during the 1950s - coherence, futurity, stability, and so on - raised questions that Kaye simply could not answer. Upon returning from a two-week USO tour in Vietnam in 1966, he initially told the press that "the trip was among the most rewarding of his life", and that the soldiers he visited "were far better attuned to

their mission than the soldiers he had entertained during the Korean War". However, he dodged the question of his own approval or disapproval: "I was there for 14 days. I don't think that's enough time to get well-informed," before eventually conceding that "for entertainers and soldiers alike, Vietnam had been a frustrating war" (Bart). To be more specific, we might say that it frustrated the incontrovertibility of the Child, as well as the authority of Kaye, UNICEF, and the U.S. to claim they acted to serve its needs and best interests. Vietnam brought a profound ideological incoherence to the forefront of the national discourse: how could America possibly claim to care about the future of the world's Children when it sent its own youth to kill and be killed halfway around the world?

Not that one needed to look far to see how the nation was being troubled by the contradictions of its own power. Across America, swathes of young people were reacting to the war by forming into a counterculture that was precisely everything that the conservative parents of the 1950s had dreaded. Many of the criticisms leveled against these youths were predicated on their supposed immaturity. An article in *The Saturday Evening Post* argued that "in trying to protect our children for so long, we let them remain overgrown children, restless and basically helpless. It is this life that the hippies, far from dropping out, cling to" (Cottrell 219). Other sources honed in on more radical contingents of the counterculture - New Left political groups such as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and its splinter group the Weathermen, or the Youth International Party (a.k.a. the 'Yippies') - depicting them at once as both violent, ruthless terrorists, yet also endlessly incompetent. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover had described the former as out to "[spread] their doctrine of hate and revolution" (*Los Angeles Times*). Coverage of the Yippies tended to focus on their many (deliberately) provocative publicity stunts and protests, leading them to be lambasted as "egomaniacs tripping on acid-fed or speed-induced

highs" (Blackstock), unable to enact any of the lasting societal changes they promised. Altogether, these incoherent readings should clue us into the distinct queerness of the 1960s counterculture: that is, the myriad ways that these youths became strangers in a strange land (Heinlein's novel *was* a favorite of the hippies, after all) within their own nation, confounding any clear interpretation by America's hegemonic social order. As a consequence, no matter whether they were pictured as soft, ineffectual sissies or radical 'subversives' out to destabilize American hegemony and destroy the nation's future, the youths of the counterculture were "damned by others as diabolical creatures…little likely to usher in a new millennium, but to bring about the collapse of the social order" (Cottrell 10).

How could Kaye (now approaching sixty years old, I might add) be reconciled with these monumental cultural shifts? His image as a Child-friendly UNICEF ambassador now seemed painfully square, out of step with the collapsing consensus over the role(s) of American power. *The Danny Kaye Show* had been canceled in 1967 due to low ratings, leaving him in a sort of career limbo with no major film roles[8] or television projects on the horizon. At the same time, NBC was busy launching its own hip, new variety series, *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* (1967-1973)[9]. *Laugh-In*'s vivid, psychedelically painted sets, rapid-fire sketches and jokes, youthful cast of performers, and even its very title - a play on the love-ins, be-ins, sit-ins, and teach-ins of the youth movements - indicated its (frankly, almost hamfisted) efforts to appeal to the younger generation. Danny Kaye would be offered a guest appearance on *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* in March 1970, producing a collision of the 'old' and the 'new' popular cultures which "[provided] an intriguing insight into how "*Laugh-In* presented prime-time audiences with the unprecedented means to enjoy countercultural, anti-Establishment

[8] Kaye's final appearance in a theatrically released film was a brief supporting role in *The Madwoman of Chaillot* (1969).
[9] *Laugh-In* began with a one-off special in September 1967 before its regular series run in January 1968.

transgression…and, reassuringly, conveyed the sense that the show represented the Establishment's investment in containing such defiant delights." (Feil 2). In Kaye's case, his *Laugh-In* appearance both problematized and perpetuated the ideologies of the Child with which he had become so closely associated.

Many of the episode's jokes and sketches, fittingly enough, were themed around the generation gap. In one sketch, Kaye plays a crotchety old man who appears to be criticizing his seventeen-year-old daughter (Pamela Rodgers) for her heavy makeup, short miniskirt, and promiscuous dating habits - only for it to be revealed that she is, in fact, his wife. He takes his son (Henry Gibson) to a dirty movie, giving him a smooch on the forehead as praise for his astute reading of the film. In another, he shares a drink at the bar with a stranger (John Brown). "I don't know how much longer it can go on like this. I'm on booze, my wife is on tranquilizers," a decidedly disheveled and drunk Kaye tells him. "The older boy is smoking grass, the oldest girls are on pep pills, and the youngest sniffs glue. We've only got one kid in the whole family who's not on anything."

"Well, what's his bag?" The man replies.

"I-I don't know!" Kaye slurs. "None of us can get through to him!" (*Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In,* 35:02). Each of these sketches, rather than gesturing toward mere anxiety or uncertainty over what *might* become of the family and the Child, instead depicts them as already in moral freefall. The conservative 1950s family politics centered upon normalcy and futurity; those very ideals that Kaye and UNICEF had propagated across the globe seem to have been utterly washed away in a sea of sex and drugs. Kaye now bemoans the future, unsure of 'how much longer it can go on like this' in the wake of the family's dissolution. But, to borrow a fitting piece of contemporary countercultural lingo, the lone Child amongst them who is *straight*

(i.e., sober), remains a bastion of righteous normalcy even when the rest of his family are represented as debased. In this respect, we might consider the sketch as demonstrative of what has been described as *Laugh-In*'s political ambivalence; the way its comedy "oscillated between political and nonpolitical, Establishment and counterculture" (Feil 57). Even as the sketch pokes fun at permissiveness and the upheaval of family values, the joke is never really at the Child's expense - as Kaye himself has confirmed: 'none of us can get through to him' - rather, we are meant to laugh at him and his ineffectualness as a father. Of course, the Child is a him: anyone who takes offense at the sad state of affairs in the fictional Kaye household can always hold out hope that the Child is indeed straight in all the ways that count, and that he will grow up to become a steadier paternal authority of a family of his own. If nothing else, *Laugh-In* characteristically does not linger on the idea of the washed-up Kaye for too long. Before we can begin to ponder whether the sketch is in favor of the family's alleged decline or against it, the show is already onto the next joke.

At any rate, *Laugh-In* did not mark the start of a hip new era for Danny Kaye. His television work slowed to a crawl during the 1970s, and he only sporadically appeared in specials, commercials, and talk shows, which broadly continued to emphasize his work with UNICEF or his appeal as a children's entertainer. Television, it seemed, would go on with or without Danny Kaye. Thus, it did - now, we skip ahead to what would be Kaye's final television appearance on a 1986 episode of *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992). This role resurrected the power of his celebrity image to reaffirm the significance of the family unit, particularly addressing contemporary cultural anxieties over the stability of the Black family.

*The Cosby Show* followed the life of the Huxtables, headed by Cliff (Bill Cosby), an obstetrician, and Clair (Phylicia Rashad), a lawyer. The Huxtables are squarely upper-middle

class, living in a nice Brooklyn brownstone with their five(!) children. They were in every way *respectable*, and this was certainly not by chance. By depicting a wealthy, stable Black family, *The Cosby Show* aimed to "[recalibrate] prevailing cultural images of African Americans as almost uniformly poor in such 1970s programs as *Sanford and Son* (1972–77), *Good Times* (1974–79), and *What's Happening!!* (1976–79)" (Pugh 79-80). The 'classiness' of the Huxtables was also explicitly encoded in their ability to function as a stable nuclear family, moving away from the stereotypical representations within the older Black sitcoms, which "pathologize[d] black paternity" (Pugh 82). Cliff and Clair were privileged enough to be present in their children's lives, there to keep them on the straight and narrow or offer them a gentle, guiding hand when they had trouble.

Enter Danny Kaye, this time making a guest appearance on the second season of *The Cosby Show*. The episode, entitled "The Dentist", follows Rudy, the youngest daughter of the Huxtables, as she attempts to help her friend Peter overcome his fear of (what else?) the dentist. In a voiceover at the beginning of the episode, Rudy informs us that we are watching "Tonight's show starring Mr. Danny Kaye - it's for us kids, but you grown-ups should watch, too!" ("The Dentist", 01:04). Such introductions were not a normal feature of the show, but this one specifically "stresses its family-friendly content in…moments of metadiscourse" (Pugh 92): that is, Rudy's voiceover acts as an invitation to gather the whole family around the television. As the story gets underway, Peter rushes into the Huxtable household, asking Rudy to help him hide in her room. Peter's father soon calls to check up on him, revealing that he was fleeing an appointment with a dentist named Dr. Burns. Theo chimes in that "Dr. Burns is a great dentist!", to which Clair responds, "You know that, and I know that, but Peter doesn't know it" ("The Dentist", 06:44). The Huxtables decide to sit down with Peter and talk him through his fear.

They tell him that they have all been visiting Dr. Burns for years, and that going to the dentist is absolutely nothing to be afraid of. Although the viewer has likely already figured out who this mysterious Dr. Burns really is (a hint: it starts with 'Danny' and ends with 'Kaye'), the conversation generates a unanimous acceptance of the character from within the safe, reassuring, and familiar space of the Huxtables' brownstone home before we have even met him for ourselves. It is the *family* who holds the power to grant Dr. Burns his figuration of wholesomeness. Still, it is a power that must be exercised repeatedly for there to be any hope of impressing it onto the young Peter. Kaye may still figure a sort of queerness as Dr. Burns, but it has been defanged so that it cannot bring any harm or discomfort to the family - quite literally so, as the family assures Peter that seeing the dentist cannot possibly hurt him a bit.

Nevertheless, Peter is still frightened, so Rudy offers to come along and help him through his appointment. Dr. Burns greets the children at his office and guides them on a tour of the space. "This," he first shows them, "is my diploma from dental school - when I graduated in 1776!" ("The Dentist", 13:56). The joke, while no doubt whimsical, also tacitly ties him to a central narrative of American history; the birth of the United States, as it were. At the same time, it gestures toward the notion that whatever he figures is in some way old or outdated: indeed, as I have discussed, Kaye's Child-centric persona *had* already seemed quaint by the end of the 1960s. Peter still does not find the situation quite so amusing, so Dr. Burns cycles through several tactics to get him to sit for his appointment. He shows the boy his model set of teeth, he tells him his dentist's chair is really the 'tooth shuttle', and that if he hops in, he will be able to fly to the moon; he tries to get him to sing a song, all to no avail. Taking Rudy aside, Dr. Burns breaks down in tears in front of the girl. "My whole life, I have been working with children, and my reputation now will be soiled!" ("The Dentist, 18:07).

The episode cuts back to the Huxtable home, where Clair and Cliff are preparing dinner. Suddenly, Theo rushes in to tell his father that a pregnant woman is at their door, about to go into labor at any second, and urgently in need of help (Cliff, we may recall, is an obstetrician, and therefore very literally associated with 'giving birth' to the Child). Cliff rushes out to see the woman, only to be greeted by none other than Dr. Burns. Indeed, the sequence has not only exploited the idea of a woman and Child in crisis to get his (and our) attention, but also associates that anxiety with the reappearance of the queer Kaye. Dr. Burns proceeds to chastise Cliff for being overdue for his own dentist appointment. Cliff, like Peter, seems hesitant to visit, arguing that he is too busy with his adult obligations. It is only once Dr. Burns promises him his own ride on the 'tooth shuttle' and a toy reward that he wins his consent for the appointment. The sequence has recuperated the same fears of the 1950s and 1960s, that endless anxiety over what would become of the Child who grows up. Cliff, we now realize, is a Child who has grown up not into a limp-wristed sissy as parents of the 1950s feared, nor into a radical freak of the 1960s, but into a successful family man with Children of his own. He has successfully fulfilled the linear narrative of history.

Evidently, Kaye's character must have resonated with television audiences. He was nominated for an Emmy Award for his role as Dr. Burns, and soon enough, there were even plans underway to develop a spin-off sitcom centered on the character. It was, for once, a future that would never come. Danny Kaye would pass away on March 3, 1987, just over a year after his *Cosby Show* appearance. Newspapers across the country eulogized Kaye as a great entertainer and an even greater humanitarian. While the legacy he left behind was, on the face of it, one of goodwill and good fun, I have traced how Kaye encountered contradiction upon contradiction throughout his life. Over the course of more than forty years in Hollywood, he faced seismic

social, political, and cultural shifts; weathering each of them with an energy that, to repeat an all-too-common descriptor of an entirely uncommon man, was inimitable. Today, we are left with a backlog of over a dozen feature films, countless musical recordings, and a multitude of television appearances to memorialize the stardom of Danny Kaye, but nevertheless, we often still seem to forget the sheer scope of what he once signified. Perhaps it is that the issues of race, gender, sexuality, the nation, and the Child were insinuated within Kaye's image were 'of his time'. That is true, but only in part, for they are just as much issues of *our* time, and we are perpetually evolving, changing, and adapting to them just as he once did. In an age where the sense of coherence and continuity for the nation seems to be dissolving or even outright collapsing, Kaye still offers diverse historical insights into how these conflicts have been negotiated in the past.

There was no funeral for Danny Kaye: the Kayes requested that "in lieu of flowers…contributions be made to UNICEF" (*Sun-Sentinel*). Even in death, the Child was to be his beneficiary.

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