The Dialogue of Courtship in Popular Songs
Author(s): Donald Horton
Source: *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 62, No. 6 (May, 1957), pp. 569-578
Published by: The University of Chicago Press
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2773132
Accessed: 14-12-2019 14:58 UTC

THE DIALOGUE OF COURTSHIP IN POPULAR SONGS

DONALD HORTON[1]

ABSTRACT

The lyrics of American popular songs consist largely of elements of dialogue appropriate to a limited range of situations and relationships in the cycle of courtship. They provide a conventional language in which adolescents may formulate their changing and developing reciprocal expectations and self-conceptions.

American popular songs are frequently written in the mode of direct address, of intimate conversation, in which the speaker and the person spoken to are identified as "I" and "you." In some the "I" is identified as masculine or feminine, while in others no clues to the sex of the speaker are given, and the same verses could be used by either sex in addressing the other. The relationships described or implied in the lyrics are those of dating and courtship. Some merely express an attitude or sentiment of the speaker toward the one addressed. More often the content is an appeal, request, demand, complaint, or reproach, soliciting response, as though the songs were fragments of dialogue. Musical comedies, motion pictures, and television programs such as "Your Hit Parade" regularly dramatize them as intimate conversations between lovers.

We might surmise, then, that the popular song provides a conventional conversational language for use in dating and courtship, one whose highly stylized and repetitious rhetorical forms and symbols are confined to the expression and manipulation of a narrow range of values. The questions asked here are: What can be said in this language? To what situations is it appropriate? What relationships between speaker and others are recognized in it? With what problems of social interaction can it deal?

The important role of language in motivating and directing social interaction has been discussed by numerous social psychologists[2] whose empirical studies have, however, been few in number.[3] The present paper is intended as a discussion of the social-psychological functions of language as found in popular song lyrics but also as a contribution to the analysis of other forms of art, both popular and sophisticated. The data are verses published in the June, 1955, issues of four periodicals devoted to song lyrics: *Hit Parader*, *Song Hits Magazine*, *Country Song Roundup*, and *Rhythm and Blues*.[4] The four magazines contained 290

[1] Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Social Science Research Committee of the Division of the Social Sciences, University of Chicago, for financial aid and to Virginia Olesen for technical assistance in the preparation of this paper.

[2] Cf. Herbert Blumer, "The Psychological Import of the Human Group," in *Group Relations at the Crossroads*, ed. Muzafer Sherif and M. O. Wilson (New York, 1953); Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes towards History* (New York, 1937) and *A Rhetoric of Motives* (New York, 1945); Nelson N. Foote, "Identification as the Basis for a Theory of Motivation," *American Sociological Review*, XVI (1951), 14–21; Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *Character and Social Structure* (New York, 1953); Alfred R. Lindesmith and Anselm L. Strauss, *Social Psychology* (rev. ed.; New York, 1956); George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago, 1934).

[3] For two recent studies see Thomas Burns, "Friends, Enemies and the Polite Fiction," *American Sociological Review*, XVIII (1953), 654–62, and Leonard Schatzman and Anselm Strauss, "Social Class and Modes of Communication," *American Journal of Sociology*, LX (1955), 329–38.

[4] The first two are published monthly; the other two, bimonthly. All have editorial offices at the same address and have some staff members in common. At the time of our study they were the only song lyric magazines on the magazine stands in Chicago. Our examples of *Hit Parader* and *Song Hits* had identical advertising copy and similar editorial content (pictures and biographical sketches of popular singers, "disk jockeys," etc.) and 48 per cent duplication of songs. *Country Song Roundup* is devoted to "hillbilly" and "cowboy" music and its performers and duplicates the first two in only 7 song

lyrics, but with some duplication; a net total of 235 different lyrics constituted the material for analysis. Of these, 196 (83.4 per cent) are conversational songs about love. The various phases or stages of the love relationship represented in them may be arranged as "scenes" in a drama of courtship.[5]

THE DRAMA OF COURTSHIP

Prologue: Wishing and Dreaming.—A few songs belong to what might be called a prologue to the drama; they voice the anticipations of youngsters who have not yet begun to take part in love affairs. "Someone To Watch Over Me" is a girl's prayer for a lover ("I hope that he'll turn out to be someone to watch over me"); in a complementary song, "A Girl To Love," the boy may sing, "Here I wait with open arms for a girl to love." Two of the lyrics seem to represent lines to be said by a more experienced actor to a reluctant neophyte. A girl may quote from "Dance with Me Henry" (subtitled "The Wallflower"), "Hey baby, what do I have to do to make a hit with you?" and advise the timid boy to "get the lead out of your feet," for, "If you don't start trying, / You're gonna end up crying." In the other the boy who knows from experience tells the one who does not: "If you ain't lovin' then you ain't livin'." To the prologue belong also some general recommendations of the state of love: "When You Are in Love" ("When you are in love / You will discover a wonderland") and "Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White" ("It's cherry pink and apple blossom white / When your true lover comes your way").

Act I: Courtship.—We might expect a boy and girl on first meeting to go through a period of friendship preceding love; but such a stage is not provided for in our songs, or at least there is no characteristic dialogue for it. The more aggressive of the two prospective lovers is provided with gambits for winning the reluctant other which might be called the "direct," the "sweet," and the "desperate" approaches. No doubt one might be used successfully without the others, but in the hypothetical drama they are successive scenes.

In Scene 1 the direct approach is provided with words like "Oh, what I'd give for a moment or two, / Under the bridges of Paris with you" ("Under the Bridges of Paris") or "I'd love to gain complete control of you, and handle even the heart and soul of you" ("All of You"). For the brash and boisterous there is "Here Comes All My Love," in which the lover can say: "You been teasin' long enough—now I'm gonna call your bluff," or "Main Event," which says: "Now that we've done a little fancy dancin', / Sparred with each other to our heart's content, / If you intend to do some real romancin' (Boing), / Let's get to the main event."

We may doubt that this kind of attack is often successful. At any rate, the current crop of songs provides the sweet dialogue of Scene 2, in which the lover makes some show of devotion and offers simple declarations of love in a variety of dialects: "I love you, / For sentimental reasons" ("I Love You"); "I love you more than Jambalaya Creole shrimp and crawfish pie" ("I Love You

---

lyrics of a total of 68. *Rhythm and Blues* appears to be published primarily for Negroes (most of the performers and correspondents whose photographs are reproduced are Negroes, and some of the advertising, especially that concerned with hairdressing devices, is obviously directed to Negroes). This magazine duplicates the others in 9 songs of a total of 69. Though the country-song and Negro magazines belong in different musical subcultures and address different audiences from those of "standard" popular songs, all our major content categories are found in strikingly similar proportions in all four magazines (Table 2). There are minor differences in vocabulary and thematic emphasis but nothing to invalidate the supposition that these songs belong to a common universe of discourse. Differences in the accompanying music and in the relative popularity of a given song or type of song are not relevant here.

[5] This arrangement is possible without overlapping because most of the songs contain a single (and usually simple) "message." Where analysis would disclose more, one is usually manifestly dominant, as shown by repetition and emphasis. In the quotations that follow we have not used the same song in more than one category or "scene."

More and More"); and "Honey Bunch, I go for you" ("Honey Bunch"). The lover's demands may be excessively modest: "A little love that slowly grows and grows / . . . That's all I want from you" ("That's All I Want from You"). He asks for a return of love ("Do, do, do what your heart says, / Love me as I love you" ["Do, Do, Do"]) but may accept a policy of gradualism ("Little by little our dreams will come true" [*ibid.*]) and patience ("Someday you may love me the way I love you" ["It's Your Life"]).

When neither simple appeal nor gentle persuasion wins, the heroic and desperate songs of Scene 3 are available. In the language provided here the lover may plead, "How can I make you love me, / What can I say or do?" ("How Can I"), or "Your love is all I'm needing, / Why can't you hear my pleading?" ("Your Love"). If these supplications fail, he may make heroic promises: "For you my love I'd do most anything" ("For You My Love"); "I would laugh, I would cry, / For your love I'd gladly die" ("Sweet Brown-eyed Baby"). He may humble himself with "I'm just a fool,[6] / A fool in love with you" ("Earth Angel"); "I confess pretty baby 'cause I'm just a fool for you" ("I Confess"). Reaching the depths of self-pity and self-humiliation, he may cry, "Bring me tears, bring me pain, / Fill my days with never-ending rain, / But bring me your love" ("Bring Me Your Love"); or "Treat me like a fool, / Treat me mean and cruel, / But love me" ("Love Me").

Before the beloved yields to these entreaties, he (or more probably she) may ask, in Scene 4, further reassurances and commitments. The developing love relationship may seem dangerous and overwhelming: "First you think its fun to try to kiss and run, / But each time you do, then love comes running after you . . . / That's why I tried to run away, / Fly with panic in my heart" ("Boomerang"). Are the lover's avowals genuine? Can he be intrusted with love? Will the new relationship be founded on mutual respect and mutual obligations? "Are you in love with me honestly, honestly? . . . / Is this dream a perfect dream that we can share? / Is it love or is it just a love affair?" ("Honestly"); "If I give to you my kisses, / I've got to know that you know how to handle it. . . . / Whatever we arrange, / Let's make it a fair exchange" ("Fair Exchange"); "Darling, say that you'll be true, / Let each kiss express, / Just how much I mean to you" ("Fill My Heart with Happiness"); "Handle me with gentleness and say you'll leave me never" ("Softly, Softly"). The lover who cannot give these assurances is resisted: "Please stay away from my heart, / And please don't let me love you, / 'Cause I know you'll be untrue" ("Please Don't Let Me Love You"). Marriage or the promise of marriage may be added as a condition to these questions and pleadings, although only two songs in the present collection go so far: "You gotta walk me, walk me, walk me down that well-known aisle" ("D'ja Hear What I Say"); and "If I'm only dreaming, you'll make those dreams come true, / On the day I'm hearing wedding bells, / Walking down the aisle with you" ("Wedding Bells").

The ritual responses to these demands are provided in songs like "Pledging My Love" ("Forever my darling, / My love will be true") and "I'm Sincere" ("I'm sincere when I cry that I'll love you 'til I die"). Fidelity is sworn in such words as "Never will my lips be for any one but you" ("You're the Heart That Loves Me"), and considerateness is promised in "I'd never forgive myself / If I ever made you cry" ("I'd Never Forgive Myself"). In the song "Are You Mine?" a section of dialogue has alternate lines for the boy and the girl: "[Boy] Are you mine? [Girl] Yes, I am. [Boy] All the time? [Girl] Yes, I am. [Boy] Mine alone? [Girl] Yes, sirree. [Boy] All my own? [Girl] Yes, sirree." Only one song provides a specific answer on the marriage question: "So, baby, if you'll just tell me you want me to, / I'll book a weddin' for me and you" ("I've Been Thinking").

[6] In the lexicon of song-writing "fool" does not mean silly or stupid but rather not responsible for one's condition—a helpless, though willing, victim.

It is quite possible, of course, that the actors may go through this drama more than once. The same lyrics, read with different overtones and connotations, may serve at different (should we say "higher" or "lower"?) levels of experience. The metaphors of "heart," "love's wonderland," "make your dreams come true," "make you mine," and so on are serviceably ambiguous to confound the censors. In the songs themselves, however, references to prior loves or conflicts between a new love and an old are scarce. It is perhaps in Scene 4, the scene of appeals, promises, reassurances, and final commitments, that we should note the songs in which a struggle of loyalties is expressed. In "Make Believe" the lover sings: "You belong to another . . . / I belong to someone too, / But they can't seem to see / That our love has to be. / We'll make believe 'till / We can make it come true." In "Conscience" the conflict is more agonizing: "Conscience, keeper of my heart . . . / Let me live and let me love . . . / Please don't treat a love like ours / As just an evil thing. . . . / Will I choose the one I love / Or the one I'm tied to?" If this conflict is resolved, then the songs of pledge and counterpledge quoted above may be invoked.

In Scene 5 one of the lovers is becoming impatient. Mere acknowledgments, mere kisses, are not enough. "How long must I wait for you, / To do what I ask you to, / Baby, how long?" ("How Long Must I Wait"); and "Let's stay home tonight . . . / There's a message in your eyes and if I'm right, / Let's stay home tonight" ("Let's Stay Home Tonight"). To these urgencies the other may respond with some anxiety: "Your love's like quicksand, I'm sinking deeper by the hour. / I'm up to my heart, I'm helpless in your power" ("Quicksand"); or can warn himself (herself) with "Look out, little fool, you're not wise, not wise to love so completely, / Or fall for the look in her [his] eyes" ("Danger, Heartbreak Ahead"). The other may reply: "Come a little closer, don't have no fear. . . . I heard what you told me, / Heard what you said. / Don't worry, my pretty, won't lose my head." The timid, yielding, might whisper: "Take my all, darling, do, / But don't unless you love me too, / There's no right way to do me wrong" ("There's No Right Way To Do Me Wrong"); while the bold, putting all fears behind, might say: "Starting with the 'A, B, C' of it, / Right down to the 'X, Y, Z' of it, / Help me solve the mystery of it, / Teach me tonight" ("Teach Me Tonight").

Act II: The Honeymoon.—"The first thing I want in the morning, and the last thing I want at night, / Is Yoo-hoo, baby" ("My Heart's Delight") sings the intoxicated lover in Scene 1 of Act II; "You sweet as honey that comes from a bee, / You precious as an apple that comes from a tree" ("Nothing Sweet as You"). This is the honeymoon period whose songs describe the exhilaration of mutual (and perhaps fulfilled) love: "Tweedle tweedle tweedle dee, I'm as happy as can be" ("Tweedle Dee"); "Baby when you hold me in your arms I feel better all over" ("Feel Better All Over"). The lover is by turns boastful ("I got a sweetie way over town, / He's so good to me . . . / I feel so proud walkin' by his side, / Couldn't get a better man, / No matter how hard I tried" ["I Got a Sweetie"]) or humble ("I will pray to every star above; / And give them thanks for you / And drink a toast to love" ["A Toast to Lovers"]) or astonished ("I found out since we've been kissin', / All the things I've been missin', / The wilder your heart beats, / The sweeter you love" ["The Wilder Your Heart Beats"]). Here is the appropriate place for the old favorite, "Carolina in the Morning":[7] "No-one could be sweeter / Than my sweetie when I meet her in the morning. . . . / Nothing could be finer / Than to be in Carolina in the morning."

If this happiness is troubled, it is only by a doubt that anything so wonderful could be real, "If you are but a dream, I hope I never waken" ("If You Are But a Dream"), and by the pain of parting at night, for these lovers are not yet legally married: "Please

[7] Originally copyrighted in 1922 but reprinted in *Hit Parader*.

don't say goodnight to me so soon, / Hold me close some more, / That's what arms are for" ("Please Don't Go So Soon"). Even in this euphoric stage only one song refers to marriage: "I'm so happy, so happy, / This is my wedding day" ("My Wedding Day").[8]

Act III: The Downward Course of Love.— The first uncertainties may occur in the new relationship if the lovers are temporarily separated, an event not unlikely among youngsters who do not yet control their own lives. Scene 1 provides for simple loneliness: "There's a hope in my heart that you'll soon be with me" ("The Sand and the Sea"); but loneliness may be touched with anxiety: "I've hungered for your touch a long lonely time . . . / And time can do so much. / Are you still mine?" ("Unchained Melody"); "Don't forget how much I love you . . . / And tho' other eyes may shine, / Tie a string around your heart, / Ev'ry moment we're apart" ("Don't Forget"); "I can't stay away like this, / I'm afraid that you'll get careless, and someone will steal a kiss" ("I Can't Stand It Any Longer").

In Scene 2 forces hostile to love's happiness appear. Parents may intervene: "My mother, she is scoldin' me / Because I love you so" ("Oh, Mother Dear"). Jealousy, even jealousy of past loves, may arise: "How important can it be / That I've tasted other lips?" ("How Important Can It Be?"). Malicious talk is a danger: "Don't listen to gossip whatever you do, / It's usually lies that you'll hear, / What they say about me they say about you, / So kiss me and dry up your tears" ("Gossip"). The lover may be unfaithful or simply unkind: "Give me your love instead of all those heartaches . . . why must you make me cry?" ("Give Me Your Love"); "Mama he treats me badly" ("He Treats Your Daughter Mean"); and, as one of the partners begins to "cool" (for whatever reasons), the other instantly detects it: "A heart may be fickle, / And words may deceive . . . / But kisses don't lie / . . . I know you are changing, that I'm losing you . . . / You don't want to hurt me, / But kisses don't lie" ("Kisses Don't Lie").

The answer to infidelities and unkindness is the threat of leaving (Scene 3) and the offending lover's remorse. "Maybe when I've said my last goodbye, / Your anxious heart will cry and cry" ("Anxious Heart"); "If you can't be true, I'm gonna fall out of love with you" ("I'm Gonna Fall Out of Love with You"); "If you can't give me half the love / That I've been giving you, / You'd better hold me tighter dear / 'Cause I'll go slipping through" ("Butterfingers"); and, finally: "Nobody loves me, / Nobody seems to care. / I'm going to pack my suitcase, / Movin' on down the line" ("Everyday I Have the Blues"). In reply to such threats, one may plead inexperience, as in "Give a Fool a Chance" ("If I make you cry at times, / If I tell a lie at times, / It's my first romance, / Give a fool[9] a chance"), or simply, as in "One Mistake," beg for pity ("Oh, oh baby, why don't you forgive and forget, / Or will I have to spend the rest of my life / Paying for my one mistake?").

Now the final parting occurs, Scene 5 furnishing the melancholy dialogue: "One more kiss before I leave you . . . / You have caused a lot of trouble. / Darling, you have broke my heart" ("Don't This Road Look Rough and Rocky"); "I thought our love was here to stay / And now you tell me / That you don't love me, / And you must go, / And you must go" ("Is It True—Is It True"). The deserted lover may plead, "Why don't you reconsider, baby" ("Reconsider, Baby"), and the other may reply, "Let me go, let me go" ("Let Me Go, Lover"). The braver course is to say: "I'll step aside . . . / Your happiness means everything to me. / I'll step aside just for your sake, / Altho my heart will surely break" ("I'll Step Aside"), or "I'm losing you and it's grieving me, / But I'll say

[8] One song ("Where Will the Dimple Be?") is appropriate to the married state—but only for the pregnant wife: "Now I wake up ev'ry night, / With such an appetite, / Eat a chocolate pie topped off with sauerkraut. . . ."

[9] Here "fool" does imply stupidity.

'Goodbye' with a smile" ("No Tears, No Regrets").

Act IV: All Alone.—"Time goes by and I still love you" ("Time Goes By") is the new motif. "Ever since my baby's been gone, I sure have a hard time living alone" ("Ever Since My Baby's Been Gone"). The forsaken lover still loves and dreams of persuading the other to come back. He may appeal to her pity for his miserable state: "Can't eat no more and my clothes don't fit right . . . / Since you left me baby / Can't sleep no more at night" ("Carry On"); "Since you've gone from me dear / And we've lost the flame, / Tears fall like rain on my window pane. / Please come back, all my dreams are in tatters" ("Parade of Broken Hearts"). To appeals for pity he may add apologies: "I made a horrible mistake / To ever try a new romance, / And now my heart will surely break / Unless you give me one more chance" ("Change of Heart"); "Thoughtlessly I know I hurt you" ("In the Year You've Been Gone"); "I guess I took that gal of mine / For granted too darn long" ("I Gotta Go Get My Baby"). Or, while blaming the other, he may forgive: "I gave you my heart / And carelessly, you broke it so carelessly . . . [yet] / If you'd call again, I'd give my all again" ("Foolishly"); "It may sound silly, / For me to say this, / After the way you broke my heart, / But I still love you . . . / It may sound silly, / But if you 'phoned me and asked forgiveness for doing me wrong . . . / I'd be waiting with open arms" ("It May Sound Silly"). But love, broken, is not easily mended. There are few lyrics for answering these appeals, unless, perhaps, some of the business of Act I may be repeated, with demands for new reassurances and new pledges. There is one song, however, giving an answer in the negative: "Don't ask me while we dance / To start a new romance, / I just can't take the chance, / No, not again" ("No, Not Again").

Scene 2 opens a prospect of hopeless love. The abandoned one no longer thinks of winning back the other: "There goes my heart, / There goes the one I love, / There goes the girl I wasn't worthy of . . . / There goes somebody else in place of me" ("There Goes My Heart"); "I'll keep remembering forever and ever, I'll love you dear / As long as I live" ("As Long as I Live"). The symbol of unrequited love appears to be the faded rose petal: "Now our love is a mem'ry / Where it's gone nobody knows, / But I'll hold so dear as a souvenir / Just a petal from a faded rose" ("A Petal from a Faded Rose").

Some actors in Scene 2 are less stoical and more given to tears: "Tomorrow I'll be twice as blue, / Because I'm still in love with you" ("Tomorrow's Just Another Day To Cry"); "When a romance sours, / Smiles are just a lie. / Play me hearts and flowers, / And let me cry" ("Play Me Hearts and Flowers"); or, still more forlornly, "Where does a broken heart go when it dies of pain? / Is there a heaven for broken hearts? / Will it live again?" ("Where Does a Broken Heart Go?").

A bitter dialogue is available as an alternative conclusion of Scene 2 in phrases such as, "I trusted you, believed your lies" ("Unsuspecting Heart"). The other is cruel, unfeeling, selfish: "To each new love a lot of pain is all you'll ever bring, / Because to you one broken heart just doesn't mean a thing" ("One Broken Heart Don't Mean a Thing"). In "Why Should I Cry Over You?" the forsaken one says, "All my love was a waste of time" and ends, with a touch of malice, "Someday your heart will be broken like mine, / So why should I cry over you?" In "I Hope" this uncharitable wish is expressed: "If another fool is blinded by a lie, I hope this time it's you."

In Scene 3, the lover, having thrown off the old love, may face the future with "My baby don't love me no more," but ending with the lines, "Somehow I'll find me a baby new, / And maybe I'll pick on you, / You'll hear me knocking at your door, / 'Cause my baby don't love me no more" ("No More"); or "You done messed around until I've found myself somebody new" ("All Gone"); or, finally, celebrate a new

freedom by singing, "Let me be among the crowd, / I like the way I'm living now, / Untied, untied, untied" ("Untied").

These categories of the content are derived from 196 (83.4 per cent) of the total of 235 songs and include all the songs about love written in the mode of direct address. Among the remainder are 9 narrative and descriptive ballads on love (3.8 per cent), bringing the total of songs about love to 205 (86.8 per cent). In addition, there are 6 religious songs, 8 ballads on other themes, 6 "dance songs," and 3 "tune songs."[10] In Table 1 the "acts" and "scenes" are entered as categories, and the frequencies and percentages for the four magazines, taken together, are shown.[11]

Table 2 shows the distribution of songs according to content in the four magazines.

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF SONG LYRICS BY CONTENT

Content	No.		Per Cent	
Prologue: Wishing and Dreaming		9		3.8
Act I: Courtship		76		32.3
Scene 1 (direct approach)	6		2.6	
Scene 2 (sentimental appeal)	13		5.5	
Scene 3 (desperation)	21		8.9	
Scene 4 (questions and promises)	23		9.8	
Scene 5 (impatience and surrender)	13		5.5	
Act II: The honeymoon		19		8.1
Act III: The Downward Course of Love		34		14.5
Scene 1 (temporary separation)	5		2.2	
Scene 2 (hostile forces)	11		4.7	
Scene 3 (threat of leaving)	9		3.8	
Scene 4 (final parting)	9		3.8	
Act IV: All Alone		58		24.7
Scene 1 (pleading)	25		10.6	
Scene 2 (hopeless love)	29		12.4	
Scene 3 (new beginnings)	4		1.7	
Total love songs in conversational mode		196		83.4
Narrative and descriptive ballads on love themes	9		3.8	
Religious songs	6		2.6	
Other ballads	8		3.4	
Comic songs	4		1.7	
Dance songs	6		2.5	
Tune songs	3		1.3	
Miscellaneous	3		1.3	
Total other songs		39		16.6
Total all types		235		100.0

[10] "Dance songs," are those whose subject matter is the dance, perhaps suggesting the mood of the dance, describing the steps and movements, or providing a chant to accentuate the rhythm. "Mambo Rock" does all three: "There's an island in the Caribbean Sea, / Where the natives dance and rock with glee . . . / You can grab your chick right by the hand, / Then you clap your hand and stomp your feet . . . / Hey mambo, mambo rock. / Hey mambo, mambo rock." Conversely, in "tune songs" the lyrics concern the music, either describing it, interpreting it, or providing nonsense syllables to accompany it: "Keep it moderato / Like that Crazy Otto / Not too hot, oh" ("The Crazy Otto Rag"), or: "Tinkle, tinkle tay listen to him play / Tinkle tinkle tee happy melody" ("The Water Tumbler Tune").

[11] In Peatman's well-known study (J. G. Peatman, "Radio and Popular Music," in *Radio Research, 1942–43*, ed. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank N. Stanton [New York, 1944]) some categories similar to ours were used but rather haphazardly. The main classification divided the songs into those of "happiness" and those of "frustration," a dichotomy which could properly apply to only a few of our songs. Peatman's sample consisted of 90 songs on the "Hit Parade" during eighteen months, and therefore his results cannot be compared with ours, which are not weighted for popularity.

Here the subcategories—"scenes" of the drama and subdivisions of the "other" category—are not shown separately because of the small numbers resulting from dividing the cases among four magazines.

The judgment that the four magazines belong to a common universe of discourse is supported by Table 2. The major categories are represented in similar proportions in all four. The subcategories are not represented, because of the smallness of the sample, but it can be reported that, with very few exceptions, songs for each of these are found in each of the magazines. The only statistically significant difference in the percentages in Table 2 occurs in the "All Alone" category between *Country Song Roundup* (22.1) and *Hit Parader* (10.9) and *Song Hits* (8.8), confirming the common impression that the hillbilly songs largely concentrate upon the doleful condition of hopeless love. Near-significant differences are found in the emphasis on the "Downward Course" in *Rhythm and Blues* (30.5) as compared with *Hit Parader* (20.5), and the converse emphasis in the latter on songs of "Courtship" (31.5 as against 24.6 in *Rhythm and Blues*)—perhaps reflecting a tendency of the public of *Rhythm and Blues* to spend less time on preliminaries and more on the troubles they subsequently get into.

TABLE 2*

SONG LYRICS IN FOUR SONG MAGAZINES, BY MAJOR CATEGORIES

Content	"Hit Parader"		"Song Hits"		"Country Song Roundup"		"Rhythm and Blues"	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
Prologue	4	5.5	3	3.8	2	2.9	1	1.5
Courtship	23	31.5	22	27.5	17	25.0	17	24.6
Honeymoon	11	15.1	14	17.5	7	10.3	9	13.0
Downward Course	15	20.5	21	26.3	18	26.5	21	30.5
All Alone	8	10.9	7	8.8	15	22.1†	9	13.0
Others	12	16.5	13	16.1	9	13.2	12	17.4
Total	73	100.0	80	100.0	68	100.0	69	100.0

* The base for this table consists of all the songs (290) published in the four magazines, including duplications.

† Differences between 22.1 per cent and 8.8 per cent (*Song Hits*) and 10.9 (*Hit Parader*) are significant at the 5 per cent level. No other differences in the table are significant at the 5 per cent level.

In general, identical situations and dialogues occur in the four magazines. The country songs include a few more concerned with marriage or married people and often favor a manly, semiliterate style suitable for "cowboy" and "ranch-hand" singers; but their conceptions are the same—merely expressed on occasion in a folksy patois filled with standard symbols of rural and western life. The songs in *Rhythm and Blues*, too, have their characteristic dialect, the most substantial difference being that a few songs suggest sexual feelings and relations in a less ambiguous language than the usual "hearts" and "kisses" (e.g., "How long must I wait for you / To do what I ask you to?" and "I need love so bad, / It's driving me mad"); and a few verses imply that the lovers are or have been living together. But it cannot be said that these are typical. We are not commenting here, of course, on the distinctive character of much of the Negro music.

FUNCTIONS OF THE SONG LANGUAGE

The dialectic of courtship.—It is striking that in so large a number of instances the dialogue reflects discordances in the relative positions of the lovers in the "career" of love and provides appeals by the one to bring the other "into step." In the earlier scenes of the drama, one lover is characteristically "ahead" in moving toward increasing intimacy and commitment while the other lags

behind. Both parties to this changing and tense relationship are provided with an appropriate rhetoric—the one with devices of persuasion and reassurance, the other with ways of saying, "Go slow. I'm not ready. I'm not sure." In the later scenes, one is typically moving away from the relationship, while the other tries to restore it. There is a lexicon of appeals, promises, self-defenses, and self-accusations for the one; a lexicon of reproaches, refusals, and forgiveness for the other. Only in the "Honeymoon" period of Act II is untroubled mutual acceptance expressed. The drama reflects the dialectical progression of a complex and difficult relationship, and this is undoubtedly the character of romantic love generally and of adolescent love in particular. Not only are those involved developing at different rates and often making conflicting demands upon each other but their mutual adjustment is also subject to environmental difficulties and pressures. However stereotyped and sometimes ludicrous the song may be, it is functionally adapted to this phase of adolescent experience.

Vicarious discourse.—One would not suppose that young people carry on extensive colloquies in verse, although casual observation confirms the fact that they do murmur the lyrics of the songs to which they are dancing and repeat lines or phrases of songs in teasing and joking at social gatherings. In a culture in which skill in the verbal expression of profound feelings is not a general trait and in which people become embarrassed and inarticulate when speaking of their love for each other, a conventional, public impersonal love poetry may be a useful—indeed, a necessary—alternative. It is not essential that such a language be used in direct discourse, for, if two people listen together to the words sung by someone else, they may understand them as a vicarious conversation. By the merest gestures it can be made clear that one is identified with the speaker, and the other with the one addressed. This is undoubtedly one of the chief functions of the professional singer, whose audience of lovers finds in him their mutual messenger.

For the young adolescent, the neophyte in the drama of courtship, everything lies in the future; and in the popular songs of the day he or she finds a conventionalized panorama of future possibilities. These include standard situations and contingencies and the dialogue expressing appropriate standard attitudes and sentiments, for both one's own sex and the opposite sex as well. They offer the opportunity to experiment in imagination with the roles one will have to play in the future and the reciprocal roles that will, or should be, played by the as-yet-unknown others of the drama. Again, it may be the function of the popular singer, in dramatizing these songs, to show the appropriate gestures, tone of voice, emotional expression—in short, the stage directions—for transforming mere verse into personal expression. The singer is at the same time available as an object of vicarious identification or as a fancied partner with whom in imagination the relationships and emotions of the future may be anticipated.[12]

The self as lover.—As the youngster progresses in age and experience, he moves through the successive stages of the drama, finding that in each new situation the dialogue once practiced in play now can be said in earnest. At the same time, the songs appropriate to the stages already passed will have acquired the private meanings of personal history. When the cycle has been completed, the whole of this symbolic universe will have been reinterpreted, its meaning "reduced" from an abstract, conventional possibility to a concrete, completed personal experience. In the course of this continuous translation of cultural patterns of rhetoric into personal expression, the songs, like other formulas of personal communication, may promote a sense of identity.

[12] The chief function of popular literature, confession magazines, motion pictures, and radio and television dramas may be to represent the "universe of experience" (to use Dewey's term) which corresponds to the universe of love's discourse.

The adolescent, especially, is preoccupied with the ceaseless construction and reconstruction of conceptions of who and what he is. He must not only learn the specifications of numerous interacting and reciprocal roles but come to identify some roles as his own.[13] The working-out of a socially valid and personally satisfactory conception of himself and his role in relation to the opposite sex is one of his most urgent and difficult tasks, at least in contemporary America, where so much of the responsibility for this phase of development is left to the young people themselves, aided by their cynical and somewhat predatory allies of the mass media. If television, motion pictures, and popular literature demonstrate and name the roles he may properly assume, the popular songs provide a language appropriate to such an identity.

[13] Foote, *op. cit.*

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO