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Medieval Survivals: Reflections on Ron Hynes, *cryer's paradise*¹

STUART PIERSON

LET US BEGIN, near the top, with angels, and work down from there. Five things I would call to mind about angels: they are immortal, they are immaterial, they are good (when obedient), and they are intermediary. They flourished in the Middle Ages.² These features are interrelated.

The immortality of angels stands as a contrast and reproach to your, and my, common destiny: we are going to die and be no more, at least as we are now. They last forever; for them, death does not enter. Myself, I do not believe them to exist. *If* they do not exist, why, for long centuries, millennia even, have countless millions of people in Judaism, Islam and Christendom accepted them as simple facts of life, venerated them, appealed to them, painted them into their pictures, populated their churches, their manuscripts and their books with them? They were present, and still are. You and I teach their existence to the kids: if Saint Nick is there, angels can't be far behind, or above. Hark! They sing, the herald angels. They are our familiars, our imperishable doubles, our ideal selves projected backwards and forwards forever.

Angels, secondly, live free from flesh,³ and are therefore indifferent to its pleasures and insusceptible to its humiliations. A backrub would be lost on one; an inadvertent fart, out of the question. If medieval and renaissance painting is to be believed, angels inhabit "bodies" — they have a recognizably human form. Yet according to the Aristotelian orthodoxies of the day, the matter of which they are composed, the stuff which their form informs, is so fine and ethereal as hardly to be recognized as matter at all. A serious question arose: do angels occupy space? Can two be simultaneously in one place? How many can dance on the point of a needle?⁴ No satisfactory answer was possible, but one thing was clear: whatever materiality was involved did not include sexuality.

No. In Christendom, at least, humans (with a little help from a serpent) invented sex, which then forever bore the taint of its origin. The account in Genesis is not, however, crystal clear as to details. Presumably the tools were there, the plumbing, at the outset, and it could be that humans only invented *shame*, rather than sex; that is, they are responsible not for the irreducible anatomical differences which divide us so starkly,⁵ but only for clothes. Either way, by their disobedience, their “lapse,” our first parents moved sex into the centre of our relations with the divine. That is where we were first guilty and that is where we still bear the gravest responsibility for our conduct. And it is also where country-and-western is most sensitive and eloquent.

Even if you were to say that the Old Testament only tells charming and sometimes horrific stories of dubious import for us wisened-up moderns: even if you faced the facts of life sternly, with the canonical texts of Thomas Robert Malthus, Charles Robert Darwin and Sigmund Freud behind you on your shelves, you would still have to come to terms with the odd bargain humans make between stringent requirements⁶ to engender as many babies as possible, on the one side, and the equally compelling need to provide decent, traditionally acceptable lives for them, on the other side. Nature and culture. The cats in my neighbourhood and, I suppose, in every other neighbourhood, are governed by built-in rules for conduct in these matters. Females come on heat according to a cycle over which they have no control. Males follow their scent in patterned ways no kitten has to be, or can be, taught. We are different: we have rules that vary from human group to human group, and rituals that express and embody those rules; these rules and rituals which are taught to the young and very often obeyed, aim to satisfy what Freud thought was our overriding cultural imperative: the control of sexuality.⁷

Angels, since they are good, have much to offer us by way of example, we who are so bad. We do not know what is good for us; we let valuable things slip away; we betray where we should cherish. These moral antitheses bring us to “country,” for they are the stuff of which the country-and-western world is made. It is, let us note right away, a Manichean world through and through. Evil and virtue are co-equal forces, and must struggle forever in a cosmic conflict that neither can, finally, win or lose. The beneficent side uses angels: the evil pole, devils.

It ain't all my fault
But I still got Hell to pay
Well it feels like Judgement Day
Speak o' the Devil
He took me out again last night
He got me drunk
An' he got me in a fight
He was chasin' women
I was just there for the ride ...⁸

To be taken “out” means being led into the city. It means being enticed away from the family compound, away from the patriarchy, away from control and protection.

“Drunk” means escaping, or losing, control. “Fight” correlates with this: community gives way to combat. “Chasin’ women” signifies more of the same: to chase is to make prey of. Prey: a being outside the circle, a being to use, or slay; a morally indifferent creature. What ought to draw in, instead casts out; what might unite, instead divides. Predation is the antithesis of love, and angels are not on the side of predation. Hynes: “It’s for lost love that blue angels cry.”⁹ Country-and-western artists, to be sure, have had their quarrels about who may qualify for angelhood — is “Honky-Tonk Angel” an oxymoron?¹⁰ — but no matter how you set the categories, it is plain that authentic candidates for the post are taken seriously.

American pop music of the 1930s and 1940s, by contrast, had made its peace with capitalism, the city and the disappearance of feudal ethics. About sex, this music sometimes invokes enlightenment complacency, sentiment and commitment cheek by jowl:

Love and marriage, love and marriage
Go together like a horse and carriage.

Such realism as entered into songs like this one, which might have sprung from imaginations stoned on too much Samuel Richardson, entered as tacit agreement that the relations invoked are bygone. From the pairs love-marriage and horse-carriage, Sammy Cahn got a handy rhyme, but he could suggest additionally that in the world of motorcars, things would be different.¹¹

Country-and-western mourns the changes involved, maybe nostalgically, anachronistically and phonily, but steadily:

Grandpa
Tell me ‘bout the good old days ...
Lovers really fall in love to stay
Stand beside each other come what may
Promise really somethin’ people kept
Not just somethin’ they would say (and then forget)
Families really bow their heads to pray
Daddies really never go away ...¹²

No wonder the blue angels cry.

And it is no surprise that along Tin Pan Alley angels figure less prominently than in the hankerin’-back of the Ozarks, the Ottawa Valley, the Prairies and the Atlantic region. When they show up, they’re bland, uncensorious and far from melancholy:

I’m content
The angels must have sent you
And they meant you just for me ...¹³

Again,

You speak, and the angels sing
The angels sing the sweetest song I ever heard ...¹⁴

In the blues, Afro-Americans, delivered a less ethereal message:

My baby's an angel

I love it when she spreads her wings ...

Medieval Europeans exercised control over sex in ways consonant with the general requirements of their culture. Two considerations governed them. One was protection against the various gangs and tribes and private armies that preyed on agricultural peoples promiscuously in the absence of the superior force the Roman Empire once wielded. Protection and security took the form of a network of personal and familial agreements having this form: we'll give you a pig at Michaelmas, and we'll let you rest — we won't burn your barn — we'll let you be the biggest landlord for miles around, if you and "your men" will shield us from your (equally rapacious) neighbour. We will even bask in the reflected glory of your "nobility."¹⁵

Now of course all these local lords and their neighbours had also to worry about bigger neighbours, so that the protection racket that was medieval Europe extended itself over large stretches of the continent, eventually to culminate in the territorial monarchies which then became the nation-states of our time.

The medieval order depended for its existence, in the absence of law enforceable from "above," upon personal loyalty. This virtue, like other virtues, needed ritual reinforcement to guarantee its public and private observance. Loyalty was underwritten by formal and public oaths. The primal social, political and legal act in that society was the swearing of fealty, all alone, or as a couple, in a public ceremony. You stood and pledged, even if, as for example in infant baptism, you were not competent to affirm anything (or for that matter to stand.) You committed yourself body and soul in the presence of others, in the name of the one and single Lord, before a subordinate of His, to some permanent condition. By virtue of this act, as in the horrifying tale of Abraham and Isaac, or in the equally horrifying moment at the Last Supper when Jesus says: "one of you shall betray me" (Matthew 26:21) — the root idea involved allegiance, trust and uncalculating fidelity. Judas, remember, betrayed for cash, the antithesis of those self-disregarding virtues.

We have to add another dimension to this complex of values. Besides being personal and centrally dependent upon oaths of fealty, medieval social relations in theory partook of a duality that pervaded the thought, the art and the ritual of the period. Eternity, timelessness, static perfection stood opposed to time, change and decay, as Heaven was opposed to earth, the soul to body, the City of God to the city of man, upper case to lower. We can savour the opposition between the changeless good and the constantly surprising daily flux that we incessantly experience, in classical sources, most eloquently in Plato. The country-and-western crowd, however, innocent, we may presume, of the latter's dialogues, drew on biblical passages to the same dualistic effect. Matthew's succinct derogation of this world as the place where we have to pay, constantly, bit by bit, for changes we can't control, suffices to make the point:

Lay not up for yourselves upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves in Heaven, where moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (6:19-21)

It is probable that this duality was an eastern Mediterranean idea of indefinite antiquity, an idea so pervasive in the region that it is vain trying precisely to locate its origin. Where it came from is one thing, one insoluble thing; where it went, how far and how wide, is another thing, easier traced.

It is a matter of cheating death. All the evidence falls on the side of transience and passing away. Let us then suppose that this evidence illustrates only the world's inflammable, glittery surface, and that a deeper reality guarantees diamonds. At this point, the historical defeats me, because it branches so splendidly in all directions. I am tempted to say that *all* human culture is a dodge to cheat death, intolerable death, intolerant death, which has no sense of justice and spares no fair person, and equally tolerant death, welcoming death, Ellis Island for the lot of us.

Whatever else it did, the act of dividing, mentally and ritually, the temporal from the eternal ensured that things of value had to fall on the shore of the permanent. If anything were good, and exist, it must always have done so just in that form, free from vicissitude. To take a fanciful example: if becoming Canada's tenth province were a good thing, then Newfoundland must have been part of Canada all along, in reality, the reality of the really real, the hidden changeless real. Banks, currency, lighthouses were only signs of an underlying, fixed order of things. What happened in 1949 was not a momentous decision which changed things that might have been otherwise. It was simply a *recognition* of a pre-existing and inalterable state of affairs.

That is how medieval minds worked. It followed that the oaths and promises and solemn declarations upon which the structure rested had to be *forever*. If it is good now for us to be comrades or lord-and-vassal or married, it must always have been good and will in future always be good. The elevation of our vows to the realm of the "good," to the region of the incorruptible, required that they not change. It follows that if they do change, someone has *betrayed* them. This is the key to country-and-western. In the blues, which derives from the musical and emotional traditions of African-Americans, who did not live the European Middle Ages, things happen, people change, emotion and sexual feeling are wayward.

Last Saturday night I got married
 Me and my wife settled down
 Now me and my wife are parted
 Gonna take a little stroll downtown ...¹⁶

This lyric, unimaginable in a country-and-western song,¹⁷ conveys a resignation tinged with humour and melancholy, as also this one, from a woman's angle:

Can't always tell
 When a man's treatin' you right

Man go out from you
And stay out all day and night
Goodbye
Goodbye
Daddy Goodbye¹⁸

The changes and losses here are sad, or worse, but they do not contain the same moral drama as in country-and-western because they never in the first place involved solemn feudal oaths. How many blues songs invoke rings? In country-and-western, when a man or woman goes astray,¹⁹ more is at stake than the mere shiftlessness of human feeling. At the heart of every extra-marital affair lies *treachery*. You are not doing that — honky-tonkin', sleeping around, chippingy — simply in disregard of, and indifference to, my feelings. You are not even doing it just for yourself, for the pleasures and gratifications it brings with it. No: you are doing it *against* me. Since everything you do involves me — we are, remember, according to our vows, one flesh — no action of yours, certainly no sexual action, can be indifferent to me. This is the source of the self-pity in country-and-western. If I am bereft, I am not simply one left out of a network of capricious preferences. No, worse, I am a *victim*. From this we get the tremolo, the breaking voice, the trademark *whine* of this music.

How odd the world is. I teach at a university. The name of this institution comes from Latin words meaning, first, one, single, unique, and, second, turning, revolving, coming round again. "The one version" might be a correct translation, for indeed the university, a medieval invention, was intended to discover, or perhaps uncover, the unitary and correct set of principles according to which everything, from God down the scale of being to worms and mud, worked. This may no longer be the university's purpose. There is a lot of discussion about it nowadays, so much, in fact, and so acrimonious as to pick up a nickname: the "culture wars." Nevertheless, whether agreed or at odds over purpose, university teachers, some of them, might be expected to study life as it presents itself. We don't do badly. We have courses on all manner of subjects; we "cover" a wide range. But we don't, any of us, deal with what obsesses 99% of popular culture, namely, love. All the television talk shows, all the soaps, all the sit-coms, nearly all the movies, virtually all popular music sustain a continuous litany on the theme and on the variations that make it an inexhaustible well of dramatic action and passion. Yet with few exceptions, the university, insofar as it studies human things, human life, human cares, neglects precisely that feature of our experience we get most exercised about.²⁰ Even in language and literature courses which deal with love's literary expressions, the object under scrutiny would be the poem or play or novel or song, rather than the thing itself. This is no accident, and is yet another medieval survival. The university was, in its inception and earliest purpose, a quasi-monastic institution. It was meant to train clerics, ecclesiastical lawyers, church administrators and civil servants who in the ideal case would be priests and remain celibate. Inventing the university was a medieval dodge against the licentious and bellicose warrior aristocracy on the

one hand, and the ever-present threat to rational organization posed by mysticism and religious enthusiasm on the other hand. There was no room for love in this, except love of God.²¹

In fact, there was little enough room for love in the secular world either. In marriage, one served the idealized family, the ancestral line, the "blood." One married whom it was practical for one to marry. Twin imperatives governed the institution. First, the family with its capital — land, dwellings, status, accoutrements (the "trousseau," the "family plate," the marriage bed²²) — must continue in some coherent form. Secondly, all its issue, all the kids, had to be looked after, that is, *placed*, again in accordance with the family's standing.²³ Nunneries and monasteries could absorb into a quasi-family, numbers of surplus younger brothers and sisters who could not marry and procreate without endangering family integrity. Surplus children could not be accommodated within the narrow limits set by the medieval economy. The monastic life was not the only outlet for the excess procreative capacity that might dissipate family capital, but it was a highly respectable one. Some of its ritual and paraphernalia points to the purpose I have just outlined — nuns, for example, were brides of Christ, wore wedding rings, and so forth. Loyalty and service once again to an institution made intelligible by its metaphoric relation to family.

In the face of these denials of what Freud called the "instinctual life," or perhaps dialectically out of them, medieval men and women invented romantic love. If impossible within the system, then outside it, with corresponding and entirely predictable intensification. The stakes were high. Heloise and Abelard, pupil and teacher, protected niece of a highly-placed ecclesiastic in Paris on one side, philosopher, founder of the University of Paris on the other side, violated all the rules of honour and duty in the name of love. Caught, they were both sent to the cloisters, Abelard minus his balls.²⁴ We are in the 12th century.

Tristan and Isolde, principals in a story which first appeared in writing in the same 12th century were drugged into love. They could not help themselves; the system had to be disrupted by an agent external to itself. Disrupted it certainly was. King Mark of Cornwall sent his nephew Tristan to Ireland to escort the future Queen Isolde back to the domain for the wedding. On the way, by chance, they drink a potion that dissolves all barriers; they fall into each other's arms. Tristan, of course, owed Mark fealty as kin. He was also on a mission, which doubled the obligation to his Lord's interests. Isolde was betrothed to the King — "betrothed" means "having-placed one's troth in" — and this added another line of boundedness. When the love drug — akin to booze in the country-and-western world — elevated love above all of those interwoven troths and trusts and oaths — burned them into oblivion — a new force was born into the world; a force powerful again in *Romeo and Juliet* and all its avatars down through *West Side Story*.²⁵ The point of these stories is that true love goes counter to the institutional grain: it is illicit, subversive and destructive. Heloise and poor castrated Abelard were lucky to be

able, or allowed, to live out their lives cloistered. If they had been fictional they would not have been spared. Tristan, Isolde, Romeo and Juliet had to die to restore the social balance. I weep, but I recognize the necessity of these endings — or rather I weep *because* I so recognize.

In the life and literature of the European eighteenth century, an odd twist to sensibility and social practice put romantic love — exclusive, individual and fated — in train with marriage and domesticity. The enlightenment mined in the novel, one of its favourite modes of expression, a vein of sentimentality that made of love a version of bourgeois liberalism: amongst all possible mates in the world, I found and freely chose *you* to make my lasting connubial bargain with. The tension in modern life between “forever” and “as long as it pleases us both” was born. It is easy to see how the side of the dilemma that favours free choice might appeal to someone with a little freedom to move, someone with opportunities outside the social layer-cake created by landed property — someone, let us say, recently come to the city, or someone new to the New World — and how this freedom might threaten someone (usually, but not always, a woman) with nothing to fall back upon if the deal went sour.²⁶ How nice to be able to move; how horrible to be *stuck*.

When I was a way into the second decade of my life, my uncle Fred, the learned one, the notarial one, told me that the first thing to note about the Holy Roman Empire is that it was neither Holy, nor Roman, nor an Empire. I thought that pretty clever. I didn't know, and I'm not sure Uncle Fred knew, that it was one of Voltaire's quips, from about two centuries earlier.²⁷ What Voltaire did not say (neither Fred) was that those adjectives expressed wishes, rather than realities. So with country-and-western. It is neither country, nor is it western. It is urban and southern in the United States, where it began, and its spread in North America has been amongst working-class people wherever capitalism has been least successful — the Canadian prairies, the Ottawa Valley, the Atlantic provinces.²⁸ Wherever it is played and sung it *wishes* it were country-and-western, for old-time reasons. “Country” means land and the peasant's immemorial dream of self-sufficiency on the land; it means freedom from soldiers, tax-men, card-sharpers, landlords, loose women who might lead the sons astray and slick men who might entice the daughters.

A dream unrealizable, of course, because self-sufficiency (or family autarky) is itself a chimera. The division of labour²⁹ is too sensible to resist, supposing anyone wished to do so. No one would tear at the grain with teeth and hands if sickles and scythes were at hand. To get sickles and scythes one must consort with miners, blacksmiths, dealers. The town is born.³⁰

“Western” is a correlative term to “country,” because on both sides of the 49th parallel of latitude, “western” means free or cheap land. The chance to set in place a virtuous social polity in which no one could be bought off (because everybody could be self-sufficient, or a member of a self-sufficient family) depended on stretches of unenclosed arable soil. The “Indians,” who were not family farmers,

had to be driven off, first because they were simply in the way — that's the purely brutal, greedy part — and second because their way of life was less "advanced" — that's the appeal-to-the-forces-of-history part. A whole theory of history and civilization impelled and justified the westward push of white families.³¹ The popular songs which came out of this complex of interests and beliefs were romantic, some of them, and sappy, most of them.

Give me land lots of land
under starry skies above
Don't fence me in ...³²

or

Home home on the range
Where the deer and the antelope play
Where seldom is heard
A discouraging word
And the skies are not cloudy all day ...³³

In all of this, a paradox. Nobody really wanted to live the life of a virtuous, self-sufficient, forty-acres-and-a-mule yeoman or yeowoman. It was a crazy life: men became brutal and incestuous; women went strange.³⁴ At school in the United States in the 1940s I was told about Abraham Lincoln's father, who moved the family further west whenever neighbours got close enough for their chimney-smoke to be visible. I cannot remember how this legend was in my schoolroom evaluated, but I think the eremitic nuttiness it implied was neither pitied nor deplored. One of A. Lincoln's predecessors in the US presidency, a man named Andrew Jackson, had a house he called the "Hermitage," that is, a place for "hermits," the half-crazed characters from early Christianity who forsook human solidarity for the solitary pleasure of being close to God.³⁵ Jackson's house, still there, is on the outskirts of Nashville, Tennessee, the home and headquarters of country-and-western.

To which city, housing nearly the same number of people as the whole island of Newfoundland, Ron Hynes hied himself a few years ago to talk turkey about writing songs, recording them and getting paid for so doing. He returned home bearing a contract with Capitol Records, a very large "entertainment" corporation. It is not strange that huge capitalist enterprises hire people to purvey anti-capitalist art. The men — maybe a few women — in charge of the organizations which bring us our profusion of tapes and discs are not in their daily practice sentimental. They think the "world" to be simultaneously chancy in the extreme, and rock-hard. One person's — even one company's — "fortune" might be dicey, but the institutions — market, corporation, contract — are forever, and are forever because rooted in permanent features of human nature: "look at me!" and "My daddy can beat your daddy" and "Fuck you, Jack, I'm all right" —

Ever wonder whose hand is on the wheel
Ever wonder who negotiates these deals

Ever ask yourself why
Ever ask yourself ...³⁶

By going to Nashville, Hynes signalled his colours. All the soft-rock, celtic-revival, Leonard-Cohen-balladeer material he had flirted with, was put behind. Country-and-western it was going to be. That he could not finally jettison the original, the modern, poetry that was in him is the point of this essay, and will make its entrance in due course.

Of all the North American "dream factories" — Montréal, Toronto, Dallas, Miami, Los Angeles (Hollywood), New York, Casablanca, his was Tennessee. Well, he wasn't alone:

For reasons I cannot explain
There's some part of me wants to see
Graceland ...³⁷

A mansion located in Memphis, Tennessee, no further from Nashville than Gambo is from St. John's.

The compound was medieval in its rules and layout. The king, besotted with the ambiguities of rule, prowls the corridors and can't sleep. Richard II, certainly, rather than III:

Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs;
make dust our paper and with rainy eyes
write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.
Let's choose executors and talk of wills:
and yet not so, for what can we bequest
save our deposed bodies to the ground? ...
For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
and tell sad stories of the death of kings ...³⁸

Elvis Presley, not Richard Plantagenet, was Graceland's proprietor, but, like him, Presley succumbed to an excess of self-pity.

Now "The King" is the hero of the first "cut" on *cryer's paradise*. We start with regalia:

Still got my high school jacket
Still got my high school ring
Tucked in the corner of my wallet
Is a tattered photo of The King ...³⁹

Thus armed, with doublet, symbol of fealty and icon of the royal personage, our hero sets out. He looks back, too, and grieves. He has a "stumblin' blind ambition," for, like any knight, he sees life as a quest, as a challenge.

Taking this upon himself is risky business, even for a hero. It is a serious gamble, because his manhood is at stake. In the complex of values and assumptions which governed medieval minds, the belief, inherited from ancient Greece,⁴⁰ that men can and must conquer chance, randomness, fortune, chaos — this belief ruled people whether they knew it or not. The narrator of "cryer's paradise" gambles. He has a "stumblin' blind ambition": he pushes darkly forward in the face of incalculable

lable risk. But he doesn't really gamble, because his "gambler's intuition" tells him when to quit: "I know when I stay too late." Still, the completely forward-looking mentality of gamblers (whose emotional basis is hope) eludes him. He finds himself "starin' back at silent eyes," the dead silver-nitrate eyes of dead Elvis, who can tell him nothing.

Gambling, in country-and-western, stands second or third in the triad of sins that begins with "other" women or men. At the end or in the middle are narcotics:

Cigareets and whusky and wil' wil' women
They'll drive you crazy, they'll drive you insane ...⁴¹

Here's the third:

Jack O'Diamonds, Jack O'Diamonds
Now I know you of old
You been robbin' my poor pockets
Of silver and gold ...⁴²

Gambling is dangerous. It almost always rhymes with "rambling." And with good reason. "Gambling" rebels against the determinate, predictable, habitual round, in the same way as "rambling" repudiates the settled, orderly, reliable patterns necessary to the running of a farm, a trade, or a city. The two words simultaneously affirm and deny the value of freedom. "Rambling" can seem an easy way out of all responsibility, but ends in dereliction and utter loneliness. Gambling can obsess; it can addict. And no one is less free than an addict or one obsessed. Both rambling and gambling wreck, or preclude, family life.

Gambling has beguiled capitalists and their explainers for a long time.⁴³ It has traditionally been associated with aristocrats, whose architecture, draperies, furniture, chandeliers and rugs are aped in "casinos," and with the working class,⁴⁴ whose members only intermittently subscribed to the ethic of saving, accumulating and planning-for-the-future urged upon them by the hectoring bourgeoisie, a group confident in the conviction that every social status is an earned, deserved one.⁴⁵

How the ethos of gambling cuts across "liberal" ideals may be seen in the treatment meted out to those who win big in the lotteries. A windfall like that, you should invest it wisely, move to Primrose Place,⁴⁶ send the kids to a good private school, install yourself. But people really want you to blow it all in a few weeks or months and return to being a mechanic with nothing to show for your good fortune but an up-scale car and a few press-clippings. The sentiments haven't changed much since Boethius (ca. 480-524 CE) wrote these lines at the beginning of his *The Consolation of Philosophy*:

First fickle fortune gave me wealth short-lived,
then in a moment all but ruined me.
Since Fortune changed her trustless countenance,
small welcome to the days prolonging life.
Foolish the friends who called me happy then
whose fall shows how my foothold was unsure.⁴⁷

Hynes' version of the same complex of feeling is a little oblique:

But what have they all got to lose
Only these gambler's blues
Only these gamblers who never learn
Down the river of no return ...⁴⁸

"cryer's paradise," the first song on Hynes' cassette of the same name, commemorates Elvis Presley's death. It is full of words like "sad," "lonely," "heartbreak," "exile." Elvis was, after all, the King, and kings since Louis XVI and Victor Emmanuel III have had an air of doom about them in the popular imagination. As for Elvis, never mind that his kingdom could not be magnificent. It was only a rock n'roll realm, in which domain there are no deer parks or reserved salmon rivers, or collections of Flemish masters. Still, Presley managed to be Byronic, at least — he had the looks, the domed brow, the curlicue mouth, the cleft chin, not to mention all those *ancien régime* get-ups (Byron and Beau Brummel were contemporaries) — and managed to live royally in the Victorian, domestic sense, retaining love for mama and keeping aloof and private behind iron fences, safe from inquisitive people with no manners, such as are the ladies and gentlemen of the press and the ranks of those half-crazed fans ready to immolate themselves at his feet if only it will get his attention.

Since the French Revolution, an aura of something innocent and beleaguered has surrounded royalty, Victoria and Albert, Napoléon III and Eugénie, Nicholas and Alexandra, the fantasies of the Bavarian Kings, the current soap opera of the House of Windsor (né Wettin). They may ride horses, but not lead troops; they may be heads of state but cannot effect anything. Mostly they are there to be splendid and to be gazed upon: they may be exalted but they are also harmless. Naturally, things are never lost utterly, all at once, so Prince Andrew must needs be a fighting sailor. But it can't last, because the legitimate use of force in democratic states has been delegated downward on the scale of status, and has been turned over to bureaucrats, careerists and engineers: let Robert McNamara stand for the lot of them. Those powerful persons who still strut about in military costume, like Fidel Castro, Saddam Hussein and Norman Schwarzkopf, only succeed in looking faintly ridiculous. Everybody knows that real power dresses in a "business" suit. And every suit proclaims: emotion, feeling, sentiment are for wimps, women and winos; also, maybe, for patriots.⁴⁹

Thus the "Man of a Thousand Songs,"⁵⁰ the king's loyal retainer, has to be simultaneously marginal and conspicuous. He is emblazoned with a "crimson red tattoo." Everything the business suit stands for confronts the tattoo as antithesis and enemy. He has to pretend:

No love songs if you please
But he don't really mean that ...

And, pretending, he sets up in himself, or falls victim to unfaceable conflicts that can be chemically postponed:

42 Pierson

He knows ... this guy you can call
When you're crawling the wall
And the whole town's asleep ...

A lot of romantic conventions enter here.

With the so-called industrial revolution and with the European conquest of the world came the modern narcotics: coffee, tea, tobacco, distilled "spirits," and the hemp, coca and poppy derivatives. William Hogarth's engraving "Gin Lane"⁵¹ with its drunken mothers allowing babies to fall on their heads, its promiscuous street-people, its brawling, out-of-control honky-tonk quality is a country-and-western engraving.

Alongside, or intertwined, are ambiguous hymns of damnation and praise of drunkenness, narcosis and the exaltation-trance-forgetfulness-death equations that you find in Hector Berloiz' *Symphonie fantastique* and Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*.⁵² All of this recalls Tristan and the medieval troubadours, as picaresque as country-and-western performers. Wanderers and singers: men of a thousand songs. Circa 1200 CE they had none of the substances listed above to lift them out of the quotidian; they had to make do with love potions.

The road always leads to the city;
It's a hundred miles to town
Sonny's never been there
he goes to the highway
and stands there and stares ...⁵³

The city, or the Big Wicked City, was as much an anomaly in the medieval world as it had been in the Old Testament.⁵⁴ Urban relations in the European Middle Ages did not necessarily come under the simple protection contract noted earlier — a cut of the produce in exchange for safety from marauders. The city with its walls collectively arranged for its own defense. The city housed many people who lived not out of barns and larders and root-cellars but out of markets; the bacon need not hang from a beam in the kitchen because it could be bought at the butcher's stall or shop. "City air makes free," runs an old German saying, free from the mesh of claims and obligations that bound medieval rural life (or North American small-town life) into a network impervious to strangers. Cities had their own constrictions, of course, but they also had diversities. These fed on one another. A good lute-player will call forth a good lute-maker and vice versa.⁵⁵

A curious drama began, an inexhaustibly fruitful theme for song and political theory: is it better to be free or to be safe? Both are not possible. How many lyrics present this dilemma? Road vs. home, travellin' on vs. stayin' put, the hotel with all the evening before you vs. the putatively stultifying domestic routine, lonely vs. hemmed in. The dilemma repeats itself in stories of love (the realm of freedom) vs. duty (the realm of necessity). The movie *High Noon* comes to mind. The hero must choose between love and the open road on the one hand, and the grim requirements

of meeting force with force for the sake of security, on the other hand.⁵⁶ In other examples from the so-called silver screen, love (supposed to equal a free and spontaneous flow of feeling⁵⁷) overcomes every scruple and strides in at the last minute to save the bride from an alliance advantageous to her clan (but emotionally disastrous for her): *The Graduate* is one; Mel Brooks' egregious *Spaceballs* is another.⁵⁸ In the latter, the medieval connection is explicit, for the right of our man to intervene at the last moment is based upon his having found out that he is really a prince and has been one all along. He is thus deserving. How often characters and motifs from the allegedly buried medieval past — princes, princesses, courts with faceless retainers and militia, dwellings with great halls and lofty ceilings (on a spacecraft! this is wishful thinking *cubed*), culturally hip tyrants displaying exquisite manners in the service of brutally cruel politics — all these inhabit the corridors of supposedly "futuristic" films and series like *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*.

Women were conspicuously unfree in the medieval world. They were the protectees *par excellence* of the system, and the controls over them were justified, as controls always are, by arguments claiming that they were for the good of the controlled. Women could ideally expect "fidelity" in return for a sexual monopoly, and, I suppose, so could husbands.

When free and up-to-date women compose and sing country-and-western "ballads,"⁵⁹ they invoke that bargain, most often to lament its failure:

Does my ring hurt your finger ...
When you go out at night ...?⁶⁰

or:

Don't put your life in the hands of a man
With a face for every season
Don't waste your time in the arms of a man
Who's no stranger to treason ...⁶¹

And, of course, in the BWC, where feudal and family ties are loose or absent, treacherous men and women flourish. Country-and-western warns the young and the innocent to watch out.⁶² Thus Ron Hynes:

No Kathleen
Don't go walkin' down that road
Don't take the hand that reaches
Don't believe the eyes that turn to greet you ...
Because the place where you start out
Is as far as you can go
And the pain doesn't pass
And the promises don't last ...
No Kathleen ...
Don't go Kathleen ...⁶³

This avuncular caution comes from the home side of our dilemma. It also springs from bitter experience; and, offered by man to girl, it patronizes. The

medieval world believed the whole creation, down to its meanest details, to be a system of patronage, which again means protection in return for loyalty. "Patronage," the word, like "patriarchy," "patrician," "patrimony," "patriot" and their cognates, derives from the Latin word for "father" (whose etymology itself arrived eventually on the same Indo-European shore as "*Pater*"⁶⁴), the original source of protection in a world presumed hostile, and the source also of demands for *obedience*, which is the seamy side of fidelity. These relations, it should be noted, once worked into hierarchies of social power, especially the power that comes with property, can supersede gender. A subordinate male could have a "*patronne*" or "patroness," as the troubadour tradition of courtly love attests, beginning in southern France in the 12th century.⁶⁵ These relations outlived the soldiers, wolves and dragons of the medieval period, as the example of Mr. Collins perspicuously demonstrates:

The subjection in which his father had brought him up had given him originally great humility of manner ... A fortunate chance had recommended him to Lady Catherine de Bourgh when the living of Hunsford was vacant; and the respect which he felt for her high rank, and his veneration for her as his patroness, mingling with a very good opinion of himself, of his authority as a clergyman ... made him altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility.⁶⁶

Role was all, in a system which favoured males but could in many respects do without them.

From the other side, the side of freedom, Ron Hynes' lyrics offer a view opposite from the cautionary one found in "No, Kathleen." Home, the region, the small town way out in the provinces, the boonies — all these are stultifying, confining, a jail. One dreams of being sprung; fantasies bloom of being plucked out, or of working one's way out, and of moving to the centre, where "it's" happening, where the "opportunities" are. This leads to the city and to hope. Home meant certainty,⁶⁷ the comfort and frustration of the predictable, even if the happiness it promises is a figment. In "Picture to Hollywood,"⁶⁸ a woman prepares for marriage with all the regalia

... a floor length gown of nylon lace
and a sweetheart crown that held in place
a fingertip veil of illusion
She carried an American beauty rose bouquet
And the piano played "Oh, Promise Me" ...

These lines evoke everything we have been going over — the ritual garb and accoutrements for a ceremony of swearing in, a pledge to the end of time. Preparations for these decisive breaks in the flow of obligation and loyalty are carefully laid. As boundaries on the earth, which one crosses solemnly and in a state of readiness, so boundaries in one's time. Rites of passage.

The bride is pretty. To make the best of this she has sent a photograph of herself to Hollywood, a town in southern California not for nothing nick-named the "Dream Factory," for it was and still is the guardian of medieval ideals and fancies harnessed to a capitalist mode of production. For evidence of the first part of this proposition, have a close look at the recent Disney Studio's re-telling of *Beauty and the Beast*. Beast, in this version, represents the *ancien régime*, decaying castle, quaint, lovable servants and all; Beast's rival Gaston stands for the Revolution, its demagoguery, violence and egotism. The mainspring of the plot is disinterested love, love shorn of the vanity which often enfolds it. First the love between father and Beauty, then Beast's for her and, eventually, her's for Beast. Gaston as the muscle-bound *demos* hasn't a chance. We in the audience know that from his first appearance. He owns nothing but his looks, frequents the village tavern, and bullies, rather than protects, his sub-ordinates. Beast, on the other hand, has property, a retinue of servants fearful of his temper but not of his character, and manners. He is a man of his word, a romantic. The worst sins for him are trespass and the breaking of promises.⁶⁹

As for Disney's capitalism, well, I suppose it is not news that the corporation *owns* Winnie the Pooh, and Peter Pan, and for all I know, Alice in Wonderland. Nor that Disney himself went from being an artisanal draughtsman of cartoon stories to being the director of a factory for producing animated films and for sending out cameramen to shoot loving, neo-Darwinian scenes from a dog-eat-dog natural world. The Disney Studios turn out this kidstuff to enormous profit along an assembly-line whose minute and careful division of labour would fill the heart of Adam Smith with the smugness of a vindicated prophet.⁷⁰

The bride has sent her picture to Hollywood.⁷¹ There was no reply. Our hearts are divided. Suppose Hollywood had beckoned, what then? Do we warn her as earlier on we warned Kathleen: don't go? Is the BWC an opportunity or a temptation? Are our sympathies owing to her, to the groom, to the guests, to

All the crowd
... from Harcourt and Brown's yard
and from the Maritimes ...

or to some ascending trajectory, some "career," up through the gradients of income and attention until ... well, until what? Popular culture is not sure, nor is Hynes. Pursue, pursue, find the adulation (and \$) your youth, beauty and skill deserve; emulate Elvis, Marilyn, Billie Holiday, Lenny Bruce, Janis, Jimmy Dean, Hendrix, Jim Morrison, Kurt Cobain; prepare to die young, and to forego youngsters. In the above list, only Elvis had children. He was, also, among those Werthers and Wertheresses, the one closest to country-and-western. This is important, and we shall return to it.

Hynes has not chosen for himself romantic self-destruction, though he has flirted with it, and he writes about it. That air of innocence — Marilyn's open gaze, her breathless effusions through slightly parted lips ("I think it's just elegant") —

that posture of being faintly too honest, just a shade too good, too sensitive, too loving for this world — all of it shows up in Hynes' (Ron *and* Connie) "Maybe She Went Crazy." A woman whom children remember for "her shining eyes and her sweet smile" went out one night, "and what she brought home was a broken heart." Did she rave and expose the scoundrel who hurt her or, just possibly, knocked her up? (There is a hint of Victorian euphemism about this song.) Did she raise a scandal? No, she did not. She confided it all to a locked diary (more of the lavender-scented genteel here) and then disappeared. Well, maybe she went crazy. The song denies it: "she went all the way to the deepest end." Despite a disclaimer: "rumours abound, history is hazy" — the song knows. Uncertainty, the opacity of another's reasons aside, it says she checked out. This connects her with the central character — heroine, if you want to call her that — of "Atlantic Blue," the last cut on the album. More about that anon.

Suicide ranks low as a cause of death in all countries where statistics are reliably collected. Out of a hundred deaths in a year, one is a suicide, maybe two. Small potatoes, maybe, in quantitative terms. But all other deaths, from accident, "disease," or murder, arrive from outside the will's inner sanctum: all other deaths are invasions. Suicide is subversion of the citadel from within. It ranks with the treachery of Dante's traitors in the deepest circles of hell. Its enduring potency in the regions of the literary and moral imagination stems from this fact. According to Matthew's Gospel, at 27:5, Judas Iscariot, having betrayed Jesus for coin, hanged himself.

And in our century, Ernest Hemingway sucked off a shotgun; Jimi Hendrix put enough heroin into his arm to kill him, as did Lenny Bruce; Virginia Woolf drowned herself like poor Ophelia; Sylvia Plath put her head in an oven and turned on the gas; John Berryman slid over the parapet and into the icy Mississippi at Minneapolis, Minnesota. In what other field of human endeavour besides arts and letters have there been so many? The number of corporate CEO's who each year kill themselves, as also the number of Canadian senators, must be low indeed.⁷²

How many suicides after the readings of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*?⁷³ No one knows, though the textbooks brag or complain of a rash or epidemic of them. In the Second World War, the authorities issued posthumous medals for American soldiers who threw themselves on grenades that their buddies might live and fight on. Simultaneously, *Time Marches On*⁷⁴ elegiacally disapproved of the calculated self-sacrifice of Japanese "Kamikaze" pilots who, sitting in aircraft laden with explosives, piloted them down the runways of American aircraft carriers or into the bridges of cruisers. The one act — falling on a grenade — voluntary and spontaneous; the other coerced, regimented, desperate, required by the hive. That the latter, the deed of a poor pilot astride a bomb,⁷⁵ might have been demanded by a feudal and medieval code of honour as complex as that which got Gary Cooper's sheriff-character out on the street at noon, odds 3-to-1 against, to face, alone, an almost certain death at the hands (or muzzles) of superior force in service of a base

cause — none of this could possibly have entered the minds of “newsreel” watchers in the North Atlantic “allied” world of 1944. To put it less grandly, it never entered mine.

For all of its intimate connection with romantic love, via Tristan, Isolde, Romeo, Juliet and Werther, suicide hardly figures in popular music. Billie Holiday, herself self-destructive at least, but not suicidal, recorded a song of obscure provenance called the “Hungarian Suicide Song,” which became, when it got to labels on records and publicity, “Gloomy Sunday.” It is a most lugubrious lyric. “Sunday is gloomy/with shadows I spend it all ...” No reason is at first assigned for this mood of utter desolation, but it soon appears that the beloved has died, has gone, thus, forever beyond reach. The singer has decided to “end it all” in the second line, to rhyme with “spend it all.”

Angels [again!] have no thought of ever forsaking you
Not where the black coach of sorrow has taken you
Would they be angry if I thought of joining you?

But in the end it was all an illusion:

Dreaming, I was only dreaming
I awake and I find you asleep
in the deep of my heart ...⁷⁶

It was a nightmare. As the *Ocean Ranger* was also, as we shall see, but one from which we did not gratefully awaken.

There is a curious parallel in *Die schöne Müllerin*, Franz Schubert’s song-cycle from a series of Wilhelm Müller’s poems — a short story in verse about a miller, a journeyman (a medieval term for a medieval status: a craftsman who has served an apprenticeship but is not yet a master, not a full member of the guild), who in the opening songs exults in “wandering,” in movin’ on, in being “on the road again.” He learned this pleasure, he tells us, from the brook, from water, which leads him to a flour-mill and to a job with its proprietor. The wanderer falls in love with the miller’s daughter, *Die schöne Müllerin*, and hopes to end, by marrying her, his placelessness. Alas, she falls for a *hunter*. Colour motifs perfume these poems; the miller’s daughter and the hunter move in shades of green, a colour the journeyman hates. The brook is blue. At the end, he and the brook converse. First the journeyman:

When a true heart pines for love ...
Then the angels [yet once more] close their eyes
And sob and sing the soul to rest ...

Then the brook tries to cheer him up, but he knows better:

Ah, dear little brook, you mean so well.
But do you know what love can do?
Below your waves — to find cool peace!
Ah, dear little brook, sing to me.

The brook obliges, in the last song of the cycle, with a lullaby to the wanderer:

Rest, close your eyes, you are at home.
 Faithfulness⁷⁷ is here
 You shall stay with me
 Until we're swallowed by the sea ...
 I will make a cool bed ...
 Good night, good night
 Until all wakes ...
 And Heaven above — how far away!
 The sea is blue, the sky is blue, death is blue.

It is a long way from Vienna, birthplace of Schubert and Müller, to Ferryland, the birthplace in Newfoundland of Ron Hynes. A good few years separate their eras. Wide cultural differences gape between the two places and times. I do not think Hynes has heard *Die Schöne Müllerin*. I once recommended, many years ago, in whacko circumstances that he will not recall, that he listen to Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Gundula Janowitz sing an aria from Joseph Haydn's oratorio *The Creation*. Hynes asked if we could put Boz Skaggs back on. Haydn's music, and by extension Schubert's, is not his idiom. The European literary and cultural world is not his bailiwick. Fair enough. But when I hear Hynes sing I hear echoes. He writes, in a song called "The Story of My Life,"

And when I'm drivin' down the road boys
 Got a thousand miles to go boys
 Got a fever burnin in my head ...

This recalls Yeats:

I went out to the willow wood
 Because a fire was in my head ...⁷⁸

Again, a long way from Vienna, but not such a long way from the core of European romantic modes of yearning. Hynes' song strikes the same note as Yeats' "Lake Isle of Innisfree":⁷⁹ the pastoral poet unhappy in the city, upon which however he is thoroughly dependent for paper manufacturers, printing presses, book binders, recording studios, and the rest.

The echoes go on. Hynes:

Like a scarecrow in the tall-corn
 With that same sad suit of clothes on
 And a limited horizon
 That's the story of my life ...⁸⁰

Yeats:

Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird ...⁸¹

or

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
 A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
 Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
 For every tatter in its mortal dress ...⁸²

These echoes take us into the central difficulties of country-and-western. Lyrics which aspire to poetry but which can be turned out by the yard in the Nashville sweatshop garrets of song; perennial domestic sorrows producing untold quantities of tears, desperations and paralyses reduced to the formulae of hurtin' music; invocations of medieval values assessed for their market value: to write for this crowd you have to do something traditional and new at the same time.

Hynes, faced with these dilemmas, is not facile. When he reels off stuff *à la mode*, literary touches intrude:

Like a participle dangling
When I hit the ground I'm standing ...⁸³

Figures like that one (which makes no sense at all) can go unnoticed among the conventionalities of country-and-western:

If I left you alone with my heart
Could I fall asleep depending
Upon you to do your part ...⁸⁴

The risks in the direction of poetry do not always pay off:

Her time had taken a turn for the worse
One day's a blessing and one's a curse
So like a martyr to a state of grace
She disappeared without a trace ...⁸⁵

One might object that this kind of writing need not cleave to orthodoxy, that it does not matter whether it is possible to be a "martyr to a state of grace" or not. Yet it does matter. The merest doggerel⁸⁶ lasts — and can only last — if the details are right. Hank Williams had to know that "jambalay, crawfish pie, filet gumbo" would play not only in the metrics and rhyme scheme, but also in the lives and habits and supper-times of his constituents.⁸⁷

Country-and-western is as traditional in its metric and poetic conventions as it is in its ethics. A lot of its charm, and a good part of its humour, depend on the elaborate metaphoric architecture of its verses: "Drop-kick me Jesus through the goal-posts of life"; "there's sawdust on the floor of my heart,"⁸⁸ and so forth. Every line, or every other line, must end with a word which rhymes with the one just above, or with one nearby at the end of a phrase in the music.

Dies irae, dies illa,
Solvat saeculum in favilla,
Teste David cum Sibylla ...
Res tremendae maiestatis,
Qui salvandos salvas gratis,
salva me, fons pietatis!⁸⁹

An obvious feature of the songs we grew up with and of all "popular" music and verse.

Twinkle, Twinkle little star
How I wonder what you are ...

Why is it so satisfying? On fleas:

Adam
Had 'em

On brains, as they are distributed between (among?) the sexes, according to an antediluvian view:

Men seldom make passes
At girls who wear glasses ...

On death:

By brooks too broad for leaping
The golden lads are laid
The rose-lipped girls lie sleeping
In fields where roses fade ...⁹⁰

The practice is universal.⁹¹

Consider the opening of a country-and-western lyric, which, while not the most perfect of its kind, may serve as a summary for this part of the discussion. The song opens as the *Inferno* does, *Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*, with these lines:

I'm standing at the crossroads in life
And I don't know where to go
You know you got my heart babe
But my music's got my soul
Let me play it one more time
Tell the truth and make it rhyme ...
Hope they understand me ...

The "chorus" follows, and contains several surprises. The first of these is its breaking into a conventional folkloric idiom, and employing lines we have buried since childhood, but not forgotten:

Now I lay me down to sleep
Pray the Lord my soul to keep

Then, continuing along the familiar track:

If I should die before I wake

And an abrupt intrusion of the aristocratic into the ecclesiastical:

Feed Jake!
He's been a good dog
My best friend
Right through it all
If I die before I wake
Feed Jake.⁹²

The feudal status of dogs I have touched on already: The faithful retainer, symbol of the complex of virtues which orbit around the central bargain: help for loyalty, defense for gratitude, superior force for the benevolence assumed to flow from a secure place in life.⁹³

The song goes on to deplore the BWC:

Now Broadway's like a sewer
Bums and hookers everywhere
Winos passed out on the sidewalk ...

Bums, hookers, winos: men who have so far lost their independence as to live at the whim of strangers; they panhandle. Women whose sex is a market commodity, rather than an entailed property; men again who go under, under the "influence," the same word in its etymology as "influenza," literally to be flown in upon, as it were a property whose dikes have been neglected and breached, an in-flooded estate.

A "liberal" tinge follows:
Doesn't anybody care?
Some say he's worthless [the "wino"]
Just let him be
I for one would have to disagree ...

One halfway expects at this point an invocation of social workers, but it doesn't come. Instead, we hear next:

So would their mamas
And we are back to the ethical cosmos we began with:
Now I lay me down to sleep ...

The Lord, the family, the mother, a system of obligations antedating the law, involving codes of honour no less powerful for being incompletely articulated.

"Honour," the word, does not figure prominently in country-and-western, but "honour," the notion, does. In neither pop nor jazz nor blues nor folk could a confession of faith like the following occur:

I drink my beer from the bottle
I take my friends at their word

— a credo preceded in the song by this:

I don't drink champagne from crystal glasses
I don't soak my beans in a silver pot
I don't go climbing through the social classes
I don't spend money that I ain't got ...⁹⁴

No. Only in country-and-western are these sweeping social and ethical rules proclaimed. These are the canons that commentators given to shorthand call "family values." They derive from aristocratic principles of social solidarity — one's word is one's bond,⁹⁵ one keeps to the duties of one's place, and one resists the corrosive power of money over the whole scheme.

We come around finally to "Atlantic Blue."⁹⁶ Ron Hynes wrote this song soon after the harrowing days in mid-February 1982, when it was borne in upon us that a "rig" called *Ocean Ranger*⁹⁷ had succumbed to a savage Atlantic storm, had capsized

and sunk on the Grand Banks. All “hands” lost, one hundred sixty-eight of them belonging to eighty-four men (there were no women on board), employees of Mobil Oil through its subsidiary ODECO.⁹⁸ This loss has been spoken of variously as a “disaster,” a “tragedy,” an “accident,” an “incident.” Many items have appeared on the news, from then to now, detailing disasters and tragedies and wrecks and incidents and accidents in which more people died than on the *Ocean Ranger*: ferries sunk in the Philippine Islands, airplanes down in Siberia, floods drowning thousands in Bangladesh. Close to home, however, it’s different. The *Ocean Ranger*’s sinking was not simply a news clip, because the intimacy and interconnectedness of lives here meant that everyone one met knew someone aboard and lost. It might seem unlikely: only eighty-four out of half a million. Yet so it was. It was felt as a universal loss.⁹⁹

This sort of thing was not supposed to happen any longer. Newfoundland had confederated with Canada; Newfoundland had joined up. Newfoundland now took part in a world of high and competent technics, a world so deeply capitalized with brains and money as to stand quite ahead of reasonably calculable risk. A recurrent theme in recent public school textbook history: a man jigs cod or pulls lobster traps or clubs “whitecoats” — baby harp seals — in the ice while the *Great Eastern*¹⁰⁰ drops the first successful trans-Atlantic cable just off Heart’s Content, Conception Bay, while Guglielmo Marconi draws in the first trans-oceanic radio signal on a hill overlooking St. John’s harbour, or while John William Alcock and Arthur Whitten Brown fuel up to start what would be the first non-stop flight across the Atlantic in 1919. Newfoundlanders were and are quite pleased to be in on these feats, if only because of geography.

These feats were “firsts,” and belonged to the heroic age of invention, when things were a little rough. By the time all of it worked its way into the everyday, a cleansing had occurred. “Public relations” came in to tame and dispel adult fears of big technology. You may in some slavish part of your brain admire, but you keep the kids close by your side. In the presence of undertakings the size of the Churchill Falls dam and generators, or contemplating the cunning of airplanes capable of hauling hundreds of people thousands of miles before lunch, or the audacity of drilling for oil on the Grand Banks in winter, we have to *conceal* from our most sensible selves their enormous power. The power, rationally deployed, corresponds exactly to the necessities of the task: to “yoke”¹⁰¹ a big, wide waterfall; to take huge loads seven miles into the sky and accelerate them to eight hundred kilometres an hour; to withstand ocean in furious winter. Power on such a scale, comprehensible or not, is magical; it inspires fear and awe. It cannot simply be taken in stride, but must be appeased. In the case of the airplane, one deploys counter-magic: chewing gum, strong drink, the *Globe and Mail*, the seat-belt ritual, vestals at your service, the banquet.

How the workers aboard the *Ocean Ranger* appeased this god of power we can never know. How “public-relations” in general does so is to put before you

photographs of *clean* places, nothing lying around, men and women in white coats, bearing clip-boards, ball-point pens in a row over the heart. The imagery declares: rationality, impersonally inevitable procedures are in charge here. But they weren't, that night, on that rig. Maybe they never can be.

Ron Hynes has said that the germ of "Atlantic Blue" started into his mind quite suddenly after the event, and that taming it into a well-behaved song took months of anguished labour after. He has also said that, compared with the other songs on *cryer's paradise*, "Atlantic Blue" is the "real thing." Somehow he managed to persuade EMI Atlantica to put the song on at the end, as the last "cut" — as it were, the last word — recorded "acoustically" without dubbed-over embellishments; no extra "tracks." Hynes sings his song, and as he sings he plays his guitar.

The song stops me in my tracks. It is deeply affecting because it is poetry carried along by an unobvious totally fitting tune (descending — sinking — lines throughout, as the rig sank, as the "lifeboats" sank, as the hearts of the friends and relatives of the drowned sank) sung directly and in understatement. No formula governs this utterance: it transcends its genre.

The first couplet

What colour is a heartache
From a love lost at sea

sung to that melody that begins high and sinks like a dirge, puts you immediately into a realm somewhere a long way from Nashville —the geography here mirrors the moral landscape: Nashville does not border ocean, and its heartaches are rarely as boundless.¹⁰²

We are examining a song with a tight and complex structure. Two stanzas of eight lines, first, share the same melodic, prosodic and catechismic pattern. Three questions in each stanza are posed in two lines of six to nine syllables each; Hynes sets an end-rhyme for lines two and four and for lines five and six; each stanza ends with the refrain, also a question, also rhymed:

Is that you Atlantic Blue
My heart is as cold as you

The writing lapses occasionally. The couplet cited "what colour ..." and so on, is followed by this:

What shade of memory never fades
But lingers to eternity?

The first of these lines, with its strong assonance, rings true enough, but the second is redundant and seems to come from the necessity to find a rhyme for "sea."

Tell the truth and make it rhyme sometimes means forcing it, as in the second line of the next couplet:

How dark is the light of day
These sleepless eyes of mine survey

This last the weakest line in the poem, with its padded "eyes of mine" and its *recherché*, misplaced verb "survey," again a word fetched from far to rhyme with

“day,” in company with a hope that no one will notice that the darkness of the light of day is not something you “survey.”

Further on, in the second stanza, the line

Who’s the stranger at my door

calls forth

To haunt my dreams forever more

and again, the “forever more” — a country-and-western archaism if ever there was one, reminiscent of Poe and Whittier and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow¹⁰³ — sidles in to provide the requisite number of syllables and of course provide an end-rhyme for “door.”

Apart from these few failings, the song seems to me to be as perfect a lyric as one can expect in a popular song, or maybe any kind of song. I quarrelled at first with a passage in the third stanza, which begins:

I lie awake in the morning ...

Because the second line

As the waves wash on the sand

sounded conventional, maybe even plugged in from “Sonny’s Dream”:

... the waves keep on rollin’

They’ve done that for years

as a facile figure for the ephemeral in the face of the eternal. If the ever-perishing, ever-renewed waves join together with sand, as in “sands of time” the offspring is cliché.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, remember that storms at sea around here drift off northeastward leaving a span of uneventful atmospheric calm, punctuated, however, days after, for those close enough to hear, by waves larger, longer, deeper than today’s wind could cause. They are reminders, ghosts of that vanished storm. The figure waves-on-sand draws new life from the setting: we are not considering *any* victim of the relentless scythe or *any* manner of its swing, we are considering one man’s death in exactly those waters whose waves now bear the attenuated energy once savage enough to carry him and his co-workers away.

The song’s “plot” does not yield its secrets right away. Even more than most popular songs, which one can and at first does “listen to” without close attention, “Atlantic Blue” takes a while to figure out. We are faced with a litany, almost a catechism. Eleven questions in four stanzas, one of them — “Is that you Atlantic Blue?” — posed three times with ever-deepening anxiety, grief and fear, but at the end maybe with resignation, because the song covers such an enormous expanse of emotional time.

Here are the questions. I have supplied the answers, which are in parentheses.

1. What colour is a heartache from a love lost at sea? — (blue)
2. What shade of memory, never fades but lingers to eternity? — (deep blue)
3. How dark is the light of day that sleepless eyes of mine survey? — (as dark as the ocean’s depths, fading to black.)

4. Is that you Atlantic Blue? — (yes, but you barely know it yet; so
So far it is only sorrow, and ocean.)

At this point the narrator responds:

My heart is as cold as you.

The examination continues

5. How is one heart chosen to never lie at peace? — (nobody knows)
6. How many moments remain
Is there not one of sweet release? — (nobody knows)
7. And who's the stranger at my door
To haunt my dreams forever more? — (death, his death, my longing for death)
8. Is that you Atlantic Blue? — (yes, again, but with added meaning).

The response is the same: My heart is as cold as you. ...

The release follows, key as usual to the resolution

I lie awake in the morning
As the waves wash on the sand
I hold my hurt at bay¹⁰⁵
I hold the lives of his children in my hands...

Then at the last

9. Whose¹⁰⁶ plea will receive no answer? — (mine)
10. Whose cry is lost upon the wind? — (mine, as his was also)
11. Whose the voice so familiar
Whispers my name as the night comes in? — (his, and death's)
12. and whose wish never fails to find
My vacant heart on Valentine's? — (his, and death's, and my wish for death)
13. Is that you Atlantic Blue? — (yes)

Atlantic Blue: death, and the wish for death. *Thanatos* himself at your service ma'am.

In a memoir published a year after the *Ocean Ranger* sank, Lorna Ryan remembered the night of 14-15 February 1982. She slept fitfully, and had a dream:

I was standing alone in a large green meadow that stretched as far as the eye could see. Looking down, I noticed ... white flowers growing in the grass at my feet. No one was there ... the whole scene was illuminated by a diffuse golden glow. I felt wonderfully peaceful and content ...

Lots of colour: no blue. Her daughter shook her awake. There was a telephone call. "We have lost radio contact with the *Ocean Ranger*' ... I hung up the phone, and from that moment on I was completely numb ... sleeping was a problem ... for several months."¹⁰⁷

We note here a revelation, six lines into the song. The queries to that point and for some of the distance thereafter might be read abstractly. As though posed by "one" or by the androgynous "I" of much popular music, which can be sung by

either sex, since we are all sufferers: "I'm so lonesome I could cry ..." The first five lines of "Atlantic Blue" run that way, but line six — "... sleepless eyes of *mine* survey" — reveals something whose full force comes a little later: the narrator is a woman. It is not a song *about* a woman, but *by* her, from her place. We may recall here that another memorable Hynes song, the one that he is famous for, "Sonny's Dream," also narrates with a woman's — a mother's — voice, one also sea-bereft and insomniac:

O Sonny don't go away
 I am here all alone
 And your daddy's a sailor
 Who never comes home
 And the nights are so long
 And the silence goes on ...¹⁰⁸

I think you may search the works of Hank Williams, Roy Orbison and "the King" (despite his momma fixation) at length and in vain for so tiny and yet so momentous a leap of the imagination as this one of Hynes' — to tell the story in a widow's voice.

The refrain expresses a kind of welcoming:

Is that you Atlantic Blue?
 My heart is as cold as you ...

Personifying grief, making it into a character or spirit of a "familiar" who *visits*, comes with the polytheism of the "blues." Its origin is probably African rather than European.¹⁰⁹ Whatever its source, there's something cordial, amusing, distancing about it; something wry and wise and humorous in putting misery into exterior form and having it come to call.

Good morning blues
 Mr. Blues how do you do?
 Well, man I feel alright
 And I came home to worry you ...¹¹⁰

Formality protects the home, the centre. Guests may be expected to behave themselves. Horrors of many sorts may be appeased if brought respectfully into the parlour or into the kitchen to have a cup of tea. Billie Holiday recorded a variation on this that is even more accommodating, more teasing, more resigned:

Good morning headache
 You ol' gloomy sight
 Good morning headache,
 Thought we said goodbye last night ...
 Wish I'd forget you
 But you're here to stay
 It seems I met you
 When my love went away
 Now every day I start by saying to you
 Good morning headache, what's new?

And at the end:

Might as well get used to you
Hangin' aroun'
Good morning heartache
sit down.¹¹¹

These and our other examples, including "Atlantic Blue," domesticate grief in order to keep it from being fatal.

Hynes' second stanza invokes a response common enough in life and song: why me? But note the indirectness here and the absence of self-pity:

How [not "why"] is one heart chosen
To never lie at peace ...

As before, there is no question mark in the printed text and, in this couplet, not much querying in Hynes' voice as he sings these lines. He is soliloquizing; he does not here muse about immortality as he does in the cassette's title-song about Elvis:

Now I ask that eternal question
Does the darkness grant release

In this earlier song, the first on side one, Hynes locates the matter squarely inside the infinite fences of Christian belief. The "King's" corpse is off to cryer's paradise, and the narrator wonders whether, in order to get there himself, his heart "must ... be crucified." In "Atlantic Blue," the last number of the set, the other bookend, as it were, or the other bracket or parenthesis, the Ferryland Catholicism of Hynes' upbringing has melted away. There is *no* cryer's paradise.

Two stanzas are followed by what popular musicians — to add an ironic coincidence — call the "release" — a meditative section often (but not here) to a tune different from the main one, between two or more assertive texts. "Atlantic Blue's" release has two couplets with an end rhyme at lines two and four. The last line is extended (11 syllables as opposed to the average of eight syllables or so) subtly and syncopatedly to accommodate and emphasise four words key to the meaning of the song: "lives of his children." The first couplet

I lie awake in the morning
As the waves wash on the sand

Might just barely be accused of the self-pity that is the bane and charm of country-and-western, the not-so-secret secret of its boundless popularity. But as I remarked earlier, the lines seem, on reflection, to work after all. The rest of the stanza requires no reflection:

I hold my hurt at bay
I hold the lives of his children in my hands.

The region of feeling is wider and deeper, the responsibility more inclusive than in hurtin' music, where the injury to self absorbs everything, the lyric, the twangy guitar chords, the nasal, breaking whine of the delivery, everything.¹¹² The essential medievalism of country-and-western, however, controls "Atlantic Blue," at its crux. Even though it feels "modern" in the starkness of its sensibility and in its

rejection of a beneficent providence, the song depicts a woman kept from suicide by a relation of stewardship. "I hold the lives of *his* children in my hands."

The last stanza of "Atlantic Blue" surpasses in its clarity and economy and beauty anything I have heard in popular music for a long time. It would be well not to get carried away here. If I start comparing it to iconic grieving moments in our literature:

Bardolph: Farewell, Hostess [*kissing her.*]
Nym: I cannot kiss, that is the humour of it; but, adieu.
Pistol: Let housewifery appear: keep close, I thee command.
Hostess: Farewell; adieu. [*Exeunt*]

or:

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
And thou no breath at all?

or:

The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the marketplace
Today the road all runners come
Shoulder high we bring you home ...

or:

Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter
Robed in the long friends
The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,
Secret by the mourning water
Of the riding Thames.
After the first death, there is no other.¹¹³

— it may seem excessive. Maybe a more apposite range of comparisons would take us into the bottomless reservoir of "folk" music and popular verse. Disasters at sea have started many songs and poems:

But the father answered never a word
A frozen corpse was he.
Lashed to the helm, all stiff and stark,
With his face turned to the skies,
The lantern gleamed through the gleaming snow
On his fixed and glassy eyes ...

or:

The ship was eager and sucked athirst,
By the stealthy stab of the sharp reef pierc'd:
And like the moil round a sinking cup
The waters against her crowded up ...

or:

Husbands and wives
Little children lost their lives
Wa'nt it sad when that great ship went down ...

or:

Thirty-three souls on the water
Run come see, run come see
Women all prayin' to the Daniel God
Run come see Jerusalem ...¹¹⁴

A shipwreck stirred the Catholic and poetic imagination (to return for a moment to the highroad) of Gerard Manley Hopkins to write these lines:

Into the snow she sweeps
Hurling the haven behind,
The *Deutschland* on Sunday; and so the sky keeps,
For the infinite air is unkind,
And the sea flint-flake, black-backed in the regular blow,
Sitting eastnortheast, in cursed quarter, the wind;
Wiry and white fiery and whirlwind — swivelled snow
Spins to the widow-making unchilding unfathering deeps.¹¹⁵

And in the greatest English poem of this century, a drowned Phoenician sailor presides —

Fear death by water ...
Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!

— over a drama of the Empedoclean elements — fire, air, water, earth — which issues, after endless strife, in peace: “Shantih Shantih Shantih.” The poet in one of his infamous notes, explains: “Shantih. Repeated, as here, a formal ending to an Upanishad. ‘The Peace which passeth understanding’ is our equivalent to this word.”¹¹⁶

We are not far from Hynes’
My heart is as cold as you ...

— that is, the peace of stasis, no change, absolute zero, oblivion. The stillness at the centre, eternal. Death.

Hynes’ final stanza begins with a bleak recognition:

And whose plea will receive no answer?

The catechism goes on, the silence goes on, and the answer is: *mine*, my plea. But no one is listening. In the face of a blind stare and furious unmeaning energy:

Whose cry is lost upon the wind?

The best response may be “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em,” for now the song slides into the love-death temptation. Death, a *stranger* in the second stanza, has crossed the threshold:

Whose the voice so familiar
Whispers my name as the night comes in?

Familiar — of the family, in the inner circle, where one whispers. One does not whisper amongst strangers. Good morning heartache, sit down. The standoff does not come to resolution. Upon whose turf do we end this contest? Is death invited

in, or does the narrator step out to meet and embrace him? We don't know. The last lines of this wrenching song leave us where the first lines started us:

What colour is a heartache
From a love lost at sea?

The last two lines (that is, before the refrain) of the stanza are perfect. Every ancient and welcome device of prosody — cadence, alliteration, rhyme — lends an arm here, all in service of an overwhelming question:

And whose wish never fails to find
My vacant heart on Valentine's?

The whispering double-u's, at the beginning, the fricative eff's in the second half of the first line of this astonishing couplet, just as the vee's of the second line reinforce each other in sound, but of course not in sense. Hynes has compressed a central meaning of the song in that opposition, "vacant" versus "Valentine's." Cupids and flowers console, fourteen February is a wonderful red-and-white, non-holiday, but in 1982, and subsequently for the protagonist of "Atlantic Blue" as for all of us, it signified an absence, an emptiness, a silence, a vacancy. Death.

Responses varied. For many, grief and shock turned into rage against ODECO and against government, which in its belief that Grand-Banks oil was finally the economic bonanza and panacea we'd all so long sought, was less vigilant than it should have been over the only-to-be expected cavalier attitude of ODECO towards the safety of "its" workers. It is not easy to forget the "spokesmen" who hastened to St. John's to put the best face they could on the events. They looked like Mafia chieftains, or middle-size shots in the old Soviet *apparat*. A jowly, grey-suited, cigar-smoking lot, for whom the word "tact" might, for all their acquaintance with it, have been six or seven syllables long. A thick-skinned crowd (one felt a little sorry for Susan Sherk — amongst the heavies, she alone looked as though she saw a moral dimension to the "tragedy" that maybe PR was hopelessly short of being able to square), one for whom JR was the clear hero of *Dallas*. They unhandsomely did what they were handsomely paid to do, and cleared out. No one believed them.

I have heard Ron Hynes sing "Atlantic Blue" as though it were a challenge to, or outcry against the oil companies, government, and anybody and everybody "in charge" who should properly have seen the folly of winter drilling in winds and waters as fiercely hostile as exist on earth. I have heard him sing the line

And whose plea will receive no answer?

as though the question were directed against those institutions, as though the "plea" were somehow a petition they would simply and predictably ignore. The inquiry became an accusation.

Ultimately, though, the song is religious rather than political, and that means the particularity of time and place, that is, the historicity of the song's content, drops away or transforms into an eternal type.¹¹⁷ Hynes had anticipated and accelerated this process. Nowhere in "Atlantic Blue" is there a reference to any of the following: Grand Banks, ODECO, Mobil Oil, Newfoundland, St. John's. The generative words

“ocean” and “ranger” do not show up singly or in combination. I have wondered what the song might mean to someone not privy to the setting of its birth. Maybe not as much as Hynes hopes,¹¹⁸ even though the depth of its appeal to those who do know its matrix might compensate for any narrowing of appreciative range which might follow from its reticence. For it is a masterpiece of understatement. In this it is “modern,” as distinct from conventional or traditional. It is a poem rather than a “number.” We leave Elvis Presley and Roy Orbison and Hank Williams a long way behind here.

Consider the melody. It is, Christine Earle informs me, in c-sharp, and (this surprised me) in the major mode. The “man of a thousand songs” might “keep it all in the easy keys,” but not here. The octave leaps, reminiscent of Joni Mitchell, are taken within a cadence whose main trajectory is a falling one. The musical line descends, sinks, does what the *Ocean Ranger* did. Mozart, in *La nozze del Figaro* staged a big comic number in which the robust hero, Figaro, sends the effete courtier Cherubino off to the wars. In the aria “*Non piu andrai*” the composer and his librettist Lorenzo da Ponte have Figaro tell poor Cherubino that he will in his military career have to traverse some rough territory, will have to climb mountains and cross valleys. The music mimics this ascent and descent:



Another example, from the *Messiah* aria “Ev’ry Valley Shall be Exalted”:



Musical history doubtless offers innumerable examples of this device for extending the expressiveness of the relation up-down; in our present case, we have something similar. After the rising notes

Sha la la

Dum dum dum dum dee doo wah

that comprise the refrain accompanied by drums, strings, amplified instruments, of “Roy Orbison Came On,” the song just before ours,¹²⁰ the melodic lines drop and just the voice and acoustic guitar carry us along.

In the medieval world-picture, “down” meant the wrong direction; it meant a course inward to a cold, dark centre.¹²¹ St. Augustine, one of the principal founders of orthodoxy in the west, writing in the fourth and fifth centuries of the common era, disposed of a Manicheism, current and powerful in his day, by denying that

evil was something with a force of its own, with an ability to act on its own. Evil was privation, a spatial or moral distance from God. Despite St. Augustine's efforts, the idea persisted (and persists¹²²) that evil acts, does things, prompts people. Neither Augustine nor the church which accepted his teaching could entirely banish the idea that evil too has a will, or that evil is a somebody.¹²³ The two ideas — evil as an absence and evil as an actor — are logically incompatible. This does not prevent their occupying a single mind, or simultaneously affecting the products of a single mind, down to single utterances proceeding from it. Atlantic Blue is cold, dark, wet, unfeeling, dead. It is oblivion, total privation. Also, it *beckons*. The devil tempts.

The analysis of modern culture and society as through-and-through capitalist, and as without exception dominated by market relations,¹²⁴ won't do. What lacks is precisely the *society* that Margaret Thatcher repudiated in 1987: "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families."¹²⁵ At least she acknowledged families; Macpherson didn't. Both miss the intricate web of friendships and loves and reciprocities that sustain us and keep us (sometimes) from total self-absorption or, what comes to nearly the same thing, self-destruction. Women do a lot of the work here, mainly because raising children, most of the labour of which has fallen to women, exacts so much effort, shared intelligence and conversation. Read social-contract-theorizing from its beginning in Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau to its current state (Bertrand de Jouvenal, John Rawls) and try to find a woman. There are none; you have to go to the poets and balladeers to find her, or to country-and-western. In much rock 'n'roll, I am afraid, she is still Xantippe: "You just kinda wasted my precious time —/but don't think twice it's all right."

Country-and-western tries to gather us again around the hearth and at the barn dance. Even though the big-shots of the "industry," the Nashville contract-makers, are deeply, manipulatively and cynically capitalist, they trade, and they know they trade, in a commodity that is not a commodity. The paradox of *marketing* the priceless secrets of the heart and of making hay out of the iron, inescapable and everlasting conflict between love and duty, makes for a lot of irony. The metaphoric elaboration of country-and-western songs is no accident: it is an attempt to disguise these contradictions, or to make light of them. The presence of so many women, from Mama Carter and family to Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris and the Judds is no accident either. Women live these struggles every day. Well, so do men, but often from the other side, from the rock 'n'roll side. Women there are sidekicks, they are decorative, they come in threes back of the main action, moving their hips like the three ladies in *Zauberflöte* or like Barker's beauties on "The Price is Right."

If not, if centre-stage, they have to be “outlaw,” defiant, *outré* like Janet Jackson, Cindy Lauper or Madonna.

The culture of country-and-western is a strange mixture of cheap and self-pitying sentiment; contrived musical and prosodic devices; hard-headed and cut-throat financial mores; medieval residues shot through with twentieth-century alienations. Robert Altman got this *mélange* down pat in his acute film *Nashville*.¹²⁶ But Altman was making a commercial film, and was thus speaking from another landscape equally laid out in confused and contradictory vistas. It was wisened-up Hollywood having its way with square old Tennessee as portrayed through a film in which memories of the Korean “police action” flickered side-by-side with images of Iwo Jima and the unforthcoming gallantries of Vietnam. The military references may serve to remind us that though we are a long way from medieval, un-mechanized combat, the essential relation subsists — protection for loyalty. It may not even be easy to decide who protects whom from what, or, consequently, where the lines of loyalty should lie (symbols like flags help). Still, the central exchange remains.

The detachment that makes both *M*A*S*H** (also by Robert Altman) and *Nashville* so satisfying and funny is also the detachment that can afford to be non-committal and above the strife. For all its insight, it is complicit, in the sense that the pain so much at the centre of both films comes over as somebody else’s, as not fully imagined, or, worse, as not worth imagining.

In just such a way does the pain of the New Brunswick woman register who sent her picture to Hollywood. One can feel sorry for her in the conventional way that suits the mechanical tune that goes with it, in the same way one shamefacedly lets go the hot tight tears at *ET* or *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Occasionally, however, the real thing comes along, and someone makes good on the promise “to tell the truth and make it rhyme.” Hynes, in the interview mentioned above, affirmed the distinction. He could not of course say that some of the songs on *cryer’s paradise* were pot-boilers. But he did say that “Atlantic Blue” was by itself; it was the “real thing.” He wrote a version of it in a flash soon after the news broke on 14 February 1982 about the loss, and then worried it, for a year or so after, as an old dog a scrap of blanket still bearing the scent of a departed child. How did Hynes know to intensify its already ready emotions by suppressing all local reference? “Less is more,” said one of the founders of modern art. Hynes pared this song down to its starkest possible minimum. A time comes to tell the truth, to understate, to use short words.

Is that you, Atlantic Blue?
My heart is as cold as you.

I have received help on this project from many people, and wish to extend thanks especially to Joan Butler, Philip Hiscock, Janet Kergoat, Beverly Maher, Peter Narváez, Marcy Reed, Carla Wheaton, Anita Best, and Rosemary Ommmer. I bear responsibility for the errors, infelicities and misconceptions that remain.

Notes

¹*cryer's paradise* (1993), produced by Declan O'Doherty for Atlantica Music. I use the cassette E4 07777 89466 4 9. Referred to hereafter as "CP." The producers seem to prefer lower case.

²They are also all the rage. *Weekly World News*, 10 January 1995, carried the headline "First-Ever Interview with an Angel." At about the same time I found in a local bookstore Sophy Burnham's *A Book of Angels: Reflections on Angels Past and Present and True Stories of How They Touch Our Lives* (New York: Ballantine, 1990) with an epigraph from the *Duino Elegies* no less. At the back of Burnham's book is an advertisement for *eleven* other titles on angels from the same publisher. Then, too, last year Jon Anderson produced for Windham Hill Records a whole CD *In Search of Angels* (01934-11153-2), with a cut by Jane Siberry and (even) K.D. Lang, "Calling All Angels," a treacly number which however invokes the central theme of country music: being left alone. One gathers from this collection that angels have abandoned the harp for the cello. Also, while I was writing this, a woman named Sandra Hamilton, a member of a new-age sect called Astro-Soul, came to St. John's to lecture on "Angels, Their Literal Existence and Their All-around Helpfulness." She told Peter Miller of CBC's Morning Show that one had even found her a parking spot in downtown Toronto. The *Evening Telegram* gave her nearly a full page in its "Lifestyles" section under Jean Edwards Stacey's by-line (25 July 1994). On the scholarly side, try George J. Seidel, *Angels* (New York, Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt, Paris, Wien: Peter Lang, 1995).

³Usually, Richard Buehler informs me that the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:2, who took wives among the "daughters of men," and also the "giants in the earth" at 6:4 might be construed as angels. For a readable introduction to the intricacies of their history, see Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Random House, 1995). Satan, of course, was one of their number.

⁴In the 17th century, René Descartes and Isaac Newton *defined* matter as extended and impenetrable, and persuaded many, from that day to this, of the cogency of their definition. If they were right, two material things axiomatically *could not* be in the same place at the same time. It followed that no two *material* entities could dance in a small compass, except maybe cheek-to-cheek. What started as a serious question about the make-up of these beings ended, in the materialism of the enlightenment, as a caricature of medieval thinking. "How many angels" became a slogan for the vapidty and futility of scholasticism. How many changes can flow from a simple shift in definition!

⁵A fine movie by Neil Jordan, *The Crying Game* (1992), commented on these differences and dismissed their *moral* importance. It is not the plumbing but the quality of feeling between humans that counts. It is a point of view that no country-and-western artist could publicly subscribe to. This is perhaps why, though nominated by the American

Academy of Arts and Sciences for best picture that year, it lost — had to lose — to a Clint Eastwood film, *Unforgiven*, which, however was another film about plumbing, its size, etc.

⁶So we are told by authors like Richard Dawkins, whose book *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford University Press, 1976) was triumphantly re-issued in 1989. “We are survival machines,” Dawkins remarks (at p.v), “robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes,” v.

⁷“... it is impossible to ignore the extent to which civilization is built up on renunciation of instinctual gratifications, the degree to which the existence of civilization presupposes the non-gratification ... of powerful instinctual urgencies,” is how Freud rather primly put it in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). I use the edition published by Hogarth Press (London, 1957) in the translation of Joan Riviere. The passage quoted is on 63.

⁸Bill McCorvey, Rich Alver, and Danny Bear Mayo, “Speak of the Devil,” cut 4 on *Pirates of the Mississippi*, a Capitol Nashville cassette (no. c4 94389, 1990). Hereafter referred to as “Pirates.”

⁹“Roy Orbison Came On,” *CP*, Side 2, cut 5.

¹⁰“I Didn’t Know God Made Honky-Tonk Angels,” the refrain from Hank Thompson’s song “Wild Side of Life” (1952) found a starchy rejoinder in Kitty Wells’ “It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky-Tonk Angels.” Wells made her name with a recording, in 1952, of the latter song. I use her cassette *The Kitty Wells Story* (Willowdale, Ontario: MCA C2-4031, 1982).

¹¹Cahn wrote the lyric of “Love and Marriage,” James van Heusen the music, in 1955 for a TV version of Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*, a play first produced in 1938 but set in the years, often called “halcyon,” just before World War I. The prevailing note is nostalgia. That a new system of courtship, centred upon “dating,” had replaced the one based upon “calling” in the interval between the setting and the composition of Wilder’s play is convincingly argued by Beth L. Bailey in *From Front Porch to Back Seat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1988). Surely this is one of the most eloquent titles in all social science.

¹²“Grandpa,” by Jamie O’Hara, sung by Naomi and Wynonna Judd, *Greatest Hits*, RCA cassette 8318-4-R (1988).

¹³Nacio Herb Brown, “You Were Meant For Me,” written for MGM’s first musical film, *Broadway Melody*, 1929, and recorded countless times since then.

¹⁴“And the Angels Sing,” Ziggy Elman and Johnny Mercer, 1939.

¹⁵Cf. Karl Marx: In the European Middle Ages, “Personal dependence forms the ground-work of society ...” *Capital*, Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 4. I use Frederick Engels, ed., Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, translators, (New York: International, 1967 [1887]) 1:77. Marx, of course, thought that all that was dead by mid-19th century. Maybe his diagnosis was premature. Perry Anderson, an historian who would I think call himself a “Marxist,” has recently written (in an essay-review of, among other works, Alan Milward’s *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* [London: Routledge, 1997]):

Milward now proposes the notion of allegiance — “all those elements which induce citizens to give loyalty to institutions of governance” — as the key to understanding European integration. The substitution is salutary. Compared with the demotic emulsion of consensus, allegiance is an older and stiffer physic. The *feudal cast of the term* Milward now recommends as capable of integrating the different strands involved in the emergence of the community is more appropriate. It bespeaks not

civic participation, but customary adhesion: *obedience in exchange for benefits*: Hobbes rather than Rousseau. This is certainly closer to western realities.

London Review of Books, 4 January 1996: 13-17, 16. My emphases.

¹⁶Huddie Ledbetter and Alan Lomax, "Goodnight Irene," frequently recorded. The song is not musically a blues, but the lyric expresses sentiments typical of blues tunes.

¹⁷Well, maybe until recently. A number like "All my Ex's Live in Texas" written in the 1980s by S.D. Shafer and L.D. Shafer, and recorded by George Strait (*Ocean Front Property*, MCA cassette 5913, 1987) winks at us from an ironic, backstage position somewhere between country-and-western and blues.

¹⁸Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, "Daddy, Goodbye Blues," recorded in Chicago in 1928 and reissued on LP in *Blame It on the Blues*, Milestone MLP 2008.

¹⁹This word's history bolsters the argument. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1980) traces "astray" to Latin words meaning to wander out of bounds. To go astray in the sense of the moral categories here under discussion is to step outside that circle into which one was ritually welcomed by the appropriate rites. Once in, in for good.

²⁰"So far, all that has given color to existence still lacks a history. Where could you find a history of love, of avarice, of envy, of conscience, of pious respect for tradition, or of cruelty? ... Has the dialectic of marriage and friendship ever been explicated?" Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, 1974), 81.

²¹See Walter Rüegg, gen. ed., *A History of the University in Europe*, 4 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1992-); two volumes of this invaluable study have appeared: Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, ed., *Universities in the Middle Ages* (1992) and *idem.*, *Universities in Early Modern Europe 1500-1800* (1995).

²²According to Prof. Dan Vickers of Memorial's History Department, the *bed* was usually, in ordinary families in colonial New England, the most valuable possession. (Personal communication; Vickers' data are from probate records.) FitzRoy Richard Somerset, Baron Raglan (1885-1964), splendid and despised theorizer and speculator, thought that he had irrefragable evidence to show that "the sacredness of the house ... is due to its having originally been the scene of the most important rite in early religion, the marriage of earth and sky, which was in general performed annually, and which was believed to ensure fertility and prosperity ... The bed with four legs is the scene of [this] sacred marriage. The sacred marriage is a cosmic rite, so it must take place in a cosmic setting, and the bridal bed is a microcosm of the cosmos." See *The Temple and the House* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 86, 132. This is why, when you go to a large party, you throw your coat on the bed in the "master bedroom." It signifies that you accept the house's magic, that you agree to abide by its rules, and that, in return, you are under its protection.

²³On the powerful social dynamics that these matters set in train, see H.J. Habakkuk, "Family Structure and Economic Change in Nineteenth-Century Europe," *Journal of Economic History*, 1955, 15:1-12.

²⁴Betty Radice assembled and translated most of the documents relevant to this hapless pair in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974). Radice's introduction to the volume (9-55) aptly sums up the main facts of their story.

²⁵Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, translated by Montgomery Belgion (New York: Harper & Row, 1974 [1956]); Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of Love* (New York: Random House, 1994).

²⁶The trajectory from the anxieties of Jane Austen's Bennett daughters, through the vile gentlemanly seducers of Charles Dickens' novels, such as Mr. James Harthouse in *Hard Times*, down to the bleak futurelessness of Jean Rhys' stranded heroines, is neither long nor interrupted.

²⁷*Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations et sur les principaux faits de l'histoire depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à Louis XIII* (1756):

Ce corps qui s'appelait et qui s'appelle encore le Saint Empire Romain n'était en aucune manière ni Saint, ni Romain, ni Empire.

I use the critical edition by René Pomeau, 2 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1963), 1:683.

²⁸Professor R.E. Ommer tells me that country-and-western is strong also in Glasgow.

²⁹See below, n. 70.

³⁰See Jane Jacobs, *The Economy of Cities* (New York: Random House, 1969).

³¹For the US, see Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); for Canada, Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West* (University of Toronto, 1980). Dr. A. den Otter put me onto the latter title. See also den Otter's own *The Philosophy of Railways* (Toronto, 1997).

³²"Don't Fence Me In" by Cole Porter, of all people, for the film *Hollywood Canteen*, directed by Delmer Daves, 1944.

³³No one knows who wrote "Home on the Range." One of its lesser-known stanzas reinforces the pastoral motif:

Where the air is so pure, the zephyrs so free,
The breezes so balmy and light,
That I would not exchange my home on the range
For all the cities so bright.

(Ralph L. Woods, ed., *A Second Treasury of the Familiar* [New York: Macmillan, 1950], 79.) The tornado at the beginning of *The Wizard of Oz* might almost be a realistic riposte to these lines.

³⁴A precisely imagined portrait of the potential madness at the root of the ideals I am speaking of may be found in Jane Smiley's novel *A Thousand Acres* (New York: Knopf, 1991).

³⁵Dominic Alexander (David's son) is preparing a dissertation at London, on hermits.

³⁶Ron Hynes and Terry Kelly, "River of No Return," *cp*.

³⁷Paul Simon, "Graceland," on the album of the same name (Warner Bros., 1986; I use the cassette 92 54474). There is some uncertainty out there in Elvisland as to what the name of Elvis Presley's manor-house and the estate it once crowned, stood for. I accidentally, while preparing this piece, ran across a poem by Carl Sandburg by that name ("Graceland" [1916], *Complete Poems* [New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950], 11-12) which complains about a multimillionaire who left \$25,000 a year (in 1916 American dollars, remember)

For upkeep and flowers
To keep fresh the memory of the dead ...

Dr. Philip Hiscock of MUN's Folklore Archive, having been consulted on this matter, learned, through inquiries on the internet, that "Graceland" is a rich cemetery in Chicago, and that there are eleven other cemeteries in the United States named that, all of them in the midwest or south. Whether this can be connected with any death-wish on Elvis Presley's part remains to be seen.

³⁸*Richard II*, Act 3, Scene 2.

³⁹*cp.* That "tattered" is exactly the word to connect Presley, Richard II and Hynes. This is a world of vanished quality.

⁴⁰More properly, inherited from unknown and untraceable sources and later articulated and preserved for us by writers who lived mainly in Athens in the fourth and fifth centuries BCE.

⁴¹"Cigarettes, Whusky and Wild, Wild Women," by Tim Spencer, dates from 1947. The lyric appears in Dorothy Horstman, *Sing Your Heart Out, Country Boy* (New York: Dutton, 1975), 96-7.

⁴²"Rye Whiskey," trad. I use the version arranged and sung by "Tex" Ritter on a Capitol LP, SKC 11241.

⁴³John Maynard Keynes, who thought as long and hard about capitalism as anyone in this century, began his literary career with two books, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, 1920) and *A Treatise on Probability* (London: Macmillan, [1921], 1952). In the one he tried to bring economic wisdom into an international system that had lately succumbed to the truly reckless gamble of war with its attendant passions and irrationalities; in the other he tried to tame chance by putting her into the care of mathematics, a determinate realm if ever there was one. Long before Keynes, Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834), one of the grand old men of economic science along with Adam Smith (1723-1790) and David Ricardo (1772-1823), let slip his suspicion that amongst all the pleasant determinancies of economic analysis — so much effort, so much return — life was still a lottery. See *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), ed., Anthony Flew (Harmondsworth: Penguin [1970], 1986), 143.

⁴⁴Ross McKibben, "Working-Class Gambling in Britain, 1880-1939," *Past and Present*, 1979, 82: 147-78.

⁴⁵An unsigned editorial in the *New Yorker* (19 December 1988, 27-8) on the New York State Lottery, with its huge ad campaigns and its generous funding of public schools, put the matter succinctly:

To a teacher, engaged in the daily struggle to persuade children of the value of good work habits and long-term-thinking, the spectacle of a vast public-relations program in which an agency of the state pokes fun at the responsibilities of workaday life and holds out the prospect of a sudden and effortless ascent into the socioeconomic stratosphere — well, it must seem extremely odd.

⁴⁶In St. John's, Newfoundland, Primrose Place and its sister *cul-de-sac* Hawthorn Place are bordered by very large houses in a Disneyland postmodern style which exemplifies and also mocks new money. The houses, and the "places" they border on, stand upon land once the site of a Roman Catholic novitiate. The Church sold the property to finance Pope John Paul II's visit to the province in 1984.

⁴⁷The translation is V.E. Watts'. See the Penguin Classics Edition (Harmondsworth, 1969), 35.

⁴⁸*cp.*

⁴⁹See Anne Hollander *Sex and Suits* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 113: "The suit remains the uniform of official power ..."

⁵⁰*cp.*, track 2.

⁵¹William Hogarth (1697-1764) was as moralistic in his day as country-and-westerners are in ours. See Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth*, 3 vols. (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1991-3).

⁵²On Berlioz (1803-69), see Jacques Barzun, *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little Brown, 1950); on de Quincey (1785-1859) see Robert Lance Snyder, ed., *Thomas de Quincey: Bicentenary Studies* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985).

⁵³"Sonny's Dream." See below, note 106.

⁵⁴The history of fratricidal Cain bears upon our story here. After God learned that Cain had killed his brother Abel, He put upon him a curse. For some reason however, the Lord interdicted direct punishment of Cain; He "marked" him and cast him out: "A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth." The next thing we learn is that Cain doth pretty well:

And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived. And bare Enoch; and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch.

The road leads to the city. The whole story, compressed like soot to diamond by eons of pressure and heat, is told at Genesis 4:8-17.

⁵⁵Jane Jacobs is of course my authority here. See the work cited above, note 30. See also Witold Rybczynski, *City Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995).

⁵⁶The movie came with a musical score by Tex Ritter:

O to be torn 'twixt love and duty
'sposin I lose my fair-haired beauty
I'm not afraid of death but O
What will I do if you leave me?

It was, oddly enough, one of the first westerns to use "western" music thematically. The old western movies, to be sure, had singing cowboys like Roy Rogers or Gene Autry, who would burst irrelevantly into song at times, but when the action got going, the soundtrack waxed Wagnerian.

⁵⁷It isn't only in quote-low-unquote culture that the equation love=freedom plays itself out. Here is a scene from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), a depopulation dystopia, set in the "near" future. Women are enslaved to "commanders" in order that reproduction continue. The narrator, one such slave, listens to her "master":

We've given [women] more than we've taken away ... Think of the trouble they had before. Don't you remember the singles' bars, the indignity of high school blind dates? The meat market ... this way they're protected, they can fulfill their biological destinies in peace ... What did we overlook?

She replies, and the dialogue continues:

Love ...

Love? said the commander. What kind of Love?

Falling in love ...

Oh yes, he said ... but look at the stats, my dear. Was it really worth it, *falling in love*? Arranged marriages have always worked out just as well, if not better (219-20).

⁵⁸*The Graduate* (1967) won its director Mike Nichols an Academy Award that year. *Spaceballs* (1987), an unfunny send-up of *Star Trek* and company, would have disappeared without a trace were it not for video.

⁵⁹Another medieval term, from Provençal *Balada*, dancing song.

⁶⁰"Does My Ring Hurt Your Finger," by Donald Robertson, Doris Clement and somebody named Crutchfield.

⁶¹Linda Thompson and Betty Cook, "Telling Me Lies," as recorded by Dolly Parton, Linda Ronstadt and Emmylou Harris, *Trio* (Warner, 1987).

⁶²So does opera. Consider *Don Giovanni* and *Carmen*.

⁶³"No Kathleen," *cp.* Even the name is old-fashioned. Can you imagine a song, with those sentiments, entitled "No Jasmine," or "No Tiffany," even if these names scanned? But of course he needed also an iamb, and most two-syllable women's names, like Mary and Shirley, are trochaic.

⁶⁴See C.T. Onions, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1966), 347.

⁶⁵See L.T. Topsfield, *Troubadours and Love*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975.)

⁶⁶Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). I use the edition published by Chatham River Press (New York, 1983) where the quote, from the beginning of chapter 15, is on 69.

⁶⁷"Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in."

'I should have called it something you somehow haven't to deserve.'" — Dialogue between man and wife in Robert Frost's "Death of the Hired Man," widely anthologized. I use *A Pocket Book of Robert Frost's Poems*, ed. Louis Untermeyer (New York: Washington Square [1930], 1962), 160-67, 165.

⁶⁸*cp.* Co-written by Connie Hynes (who also co-wrote "No, Kathleen" and "Maybe She Went Crazy").

⁶⁹The movie, directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, appeared in 1991. The tale, though possessing immemorial elements, comes to us (through Disney's version, via Jean Cocteau's 1946 movie *La Belle et la Bête*) from its 18th-century re-casting by Marie Le Prince de Beaumont. The whole story of the story is sumptuously laid out by Betsy Hearne in *Beauty and the Beast: Visions and Revisions of an Old Tale* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), which includes Le Prince de Beaumont's text in a contemporary English translation.

⁷⁰Adam Smith (1723-1790) *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), Bk. I, Ch. I: "It is the great multiplication of the productions of all the different arts, in consequence of the division of labour, which occasions, in a well-governed society, that universal opulence which extends itself to the lowest ranks of the people ... [A] general plenty diffuses itself through all the ranks of the society." — Vol. I, 12-13 of the "World's Classics" ed., 2 vols. Oxford, [1904] 1923.

⁷¹"Picture to Hollywood," *cp.*

⁷²Cf. Mary Dalton's "Sylvia, Virginia":

She put her head in the oven.
She filled her pockets with stones,
Walked into the water,

Into the rippling lake of nothing.
Writerly deaths.
Each its own mad metaphor —
Exiting through images
Of mother.

Allowing the Light (St. John's: Breakwater, 1993), 43.

⁷³Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers* (Leipzig, 1774; reprinted many times; it is Bd. 22 of the standard Leipzig edition of Goethe's *Werke* [50 vols. in 143, 1887-1913, reissued in 1975 by Sansyusya, Tokyo]), told the sad story of a man so bewildered by lost love that he killed himself. Since a copy of the work was found in the pocket of a woman who drowned herself, it was blamed for an indefinite number of contemporaneous self-inflicted deaths. I am indebted to Professor R. Ilgner for some of this information.

⁷⁴As a usual part of movie-going between the introduction of sound in the early 1930s and the availability of television news in the early 1950s, *Time Marches On* (or other documentary series like it), a product of the Luce organization (*Time, Life, Fortune*), was *Time* magazine cinematized. It was portentous, humourless, patriotic, Republican and smug.

⁷⁵The Chill Wills character in Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) caricatures this *kamikaze* move. As the pilot of a shot-up B-52 bomber, Wills, in frontier fashion, fixes (while straddling an H-Bomb), a malfunctioning bomb-release mechanism with a pair of pliers. The bomb falls, Wills still astride whooping ee-ah! and flourishing a ten-gallon Stetson in the air.

⁷⁶"Gloomy Sunday," written by Sam Lewis and R. Seress, *Billie Holiday: The Legacy (1933-1958)* 3 CDs, Columbia C3K 47724, 1991.

⁷⁷It is well to recall that faithfulness — fidelity — was the bedrock medieval virtue. Romantics like Schubert and Müller, at a time when medieval culture was simultaneously being repudiated by scientists and proponents of enlightenment on one side, and revived and extolled by historians and novelists on the other side, might well place the ideal realization of fidelity beyond the grave. Whether it was any longer at the centre of daily practice was open to question.

⁷⁸William Butler Yeats, "The Song of Wandering Angus," *Collected Poems* (New York: MacMillan, 1985 [1933]), 66-7.

⁷⁹"Lake Isle of Innisfree," *ibid.*, 44. Yeats' poem draws upon the same vein of aristocratic longing as we found in Hesiod. The self-sufficient island where I can be master of myself, of my relations with others, and of access. Failing this, flight.

⁸⁰"Story of My Life," *cp.*

⁸¹"Among School Children," 1:8 *Collected Poems* (New York: MacMillan, 1985 [1933]), 244.

⁸²"Sailing to Byzantium" II, 1-4, *ibid.*, 217.

⁸³"Story of My Life," *cp.*

⁸⁴"If I Left You Alone With My Heart," *cp.*

⁸⁵"Maybe She Went Crazy," *cp.*

⁸⁶The word derives from "dog" as in "dog Latin" and implies therefore a species low on the chain of being. Medieval ideas are woven into our very slang.

⁸⁷Among popular artists, Bob Dylan alone gets away with nonsense. One of his best songs contains this example of it:

Yonder stands your orphan with his gun
Crying like a fire in the sun ... ("Baby Blue")

It may be possible to gloss that — a fire which cries because the sun, also a fire, is so akin yet so remote? An orphan in the same estranged condition? — but I think it is mainly word-play. Dylan, in one of his guises, worked the dada side of the "modern" street.

⁸⁸These metaphors serve another, related, purpose, to reconcile the transcendent with the homely, to bridge the chasm between the elevated simplicities of religious conviction or the blinding certainties of erotic feeling, on top, and the mundane circumstances where it all happens, underneath. Flannery O'Connor, southern American novelist (1925-1964), also Catholic, worked this vein profitably, as also did Muriel Spark (b. 1918) Glaswegian Catholic, one of whose main creatures wrote a thesis entitled *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. See "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie" *New Yorker*, 14 October 1961, 52-161. The character in question, Sandy Stranger ("who's the stranger at my door ...") betrayed her teacher in a strange, cruel and utterly un-self-serving way. Sandy became a nun. A former classmate (and disciple of Miss Jean Brodie) came to see her after the teacher's death.

'Before she died' [Monica] said. 'Miss Brodie thought it was you who betrayed her.'
'It's only possible to betray where loyalty is due' said Sandy.
'Well, wasn't it due to Miss Brodie?'
'Only up to a point,' said Sandy. (161)

The dialectic of loyalty and treachery goes on and on.

⁸⁹From the Latin *Mass for the Dead*, attributed to Thomas of Celand (c. 1190-1260).

⁹⁰Jane Taylor (1783-1824), "The Star"; Anon., "Fleas"; Dorothy Parker, "New Item," *Enough Rope* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1926); A.E. Housman, "With Rue My Heart Is Laden," *A Shropshire Lad* (1896) in Christopher Ricketts, ed., *Collected Poems and Selected Prose* (London: Allen Lane, 1988), 81.

Lord Byron, an aristocrat, could afford to make fun of all this (while still observing its conventions):

All these things will be specified in time,
With strict regard to Aristotle's rules,
The *vade mecum* of the true sublime,
Which makes so many poets, and some fools:
Prose poets like blank verse, I'm fond of rhyme,
Good workmen never quarrel with their tools;
I've got new mythological machinery,

And very handsome supernatural scenery. (*Don Juan* I, 201).

⁹¹Traditional Chinese poetry, for example, is strongly rhymed.

⁹²"Feed Jake" was written by Danny Bear Mayo; I have it from a Capitol cassette (CA 94389, 1990) by the "Pirates of the Mississippi." The question arises as to conviction. "Feed Jake" is a bit of a joke. In fact, the whole country-and-western enterprise is riddled with artists and writers who cannot possibly "believe" what they say. Still, their willingness to say it testifies to the persistence of what lies behind it. "Hypocrisy is a tribute which vice pays to virtue," according to the Duc de la Rochefoucauld.

⁹³All of these considerations overlap and cross over in a society divided in various ways against itself. The so-called "pit-bull terrier," for example, is a fierce personal bodyguard of a beast, loyal to no higher authority than its immediate master, and true to the

assumption that the master's associates and acquaintances are enemies until proven friends (and then temporarily and provisionally). Drug "lords" (the medieval terminology feeds into my argument at this point) favour "pit-bulls." See Iain Sinclair "Isle of Dogs," *London Review of Books*, 10 May 1990, 3-4, a review of Scott Eley, *Pit Bull* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990).

⁹⁴"I Take My Comfort in You," by Waylon Holyfield and Guy Clark, *Pirates* (Cited above in note 90).

⁹⁵Cf. Hynes' "If I Left You Alone With My Heart," *cp*:

I been up and down this highway
I seen twenty years roll by ...
I heard every story told
And I never questioned one man's reason why.

⁹⁶On the cassette or CD, "Atlantic Blue" comes next after a number called "Roy Orbison Came On," another tribute, along with the lead-off song and album title *cryer's paradise*, to a Nashville star. In "Orbison Came On" Hynes wrote some lines suggesting a connection between blue and ecstasy, blue and oblivion, blue and sorrow. I think the song is a pot-boiler, but it does send us to Orbison (1936-1988), who wrote "Blue Bayou," a lilting little quasi-cajun piece, and "California Blue." Hynes' "Atlantic Blue" might be suspected of an affinity with Orbison's "California Blue." Rest your mind. Orbison's song is the clunkiest three-chord, mechanical-percussion-track song imaginable. We never learn what or who "California Blue" might be or represent — a person, a dog, an ocean, a mood. Maybe if you put "California" in the lyric you can get away with all manner of nonsense. Cf. "Welcome to Hotel California," The Eagles, 1976.

On "Blue" itself and its many associations and resonances, see William Gass, *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Boston: Godine, 1975). This prose-poem of a book, an inquiry maybe but something short of an argument, contains nevertheless these suggestive lines, after pointing to "blue's" signifying sky, heaven, outdoors:

Occasionally it [nature] darkened like a pit in which the world was thrown, or now and then it threatened us with the come-hither recessions of its vertiginous deeps, and we were small and incomplete before it as men had been in earlier times before their mountain-dwelling divinities. *Op. cit.*, 72.

Blue in the long Christian centuries was the Virgin's colour. She was associated with the sea and sky, and her colour was "the colour of space and light and eternity;" miracles of rescue from shipwreck recur in her cult. See Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: the Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 264-7.

⁹⁷The word "ranger" comes down to us bearing many of the same associations and tenets that we have met with already. Originally the word meant, according to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, a "keeper of a royal park, forest, etc.," and derived from the French "rang," or rank, an obsession in medieval Europe, one scarcely extinct now. Of course "ranger" in the sense of someone who or something which "ranges" was a careless choice of name. An oil rig should not *range*, it should stay put.

⁹⁸See Doug House, *But Who Cares Now? The Tragedy of the Ocean Ranger*, edited by Cle Newhook (St. John's: Breakwater, 1987).

⁹⁹Soon after the sinking, the national and provincial governments appointed a Royal Commission to investigate why it happened, why no one survived, and how its like may be

avoided in future. The Commission, with the Hon. T. Alex Hickman as its chairman, reported in August, 1984. The published *Report of the Royal Commission on the Ocean Ranger Disaster* 4 vols. (Ottawa, 1984) tells a mainly technical story. I will not try to summarize its closely detailed findings. The general statement: "The loss of the *Ocean Ranger* was caused by a chain of events which resulted from a coincidence of severe storm conditions, design inadequacy and a lack of knowledgeable human intervention." (I:139) seems to me, not to blame the victims as it might at first appear but rather to point to carelessness about the whole operation by those who owned it, Mobil Oil and ODECO — over-complicated control devices, lack of survival suits, slipshod training.

There are some hair-raising moments even in this dry and scientific report:

Ken Blackmore, the medic/radio operator on the *Ocean Ranger*, called [Richard] Flynn at Mobil's shore base to say that the crew of the *Ocean Ranger* were going to lifeboat stations and requested that another mayday relay be transmitted. Both the *Sedco 706* [a nearby rig] and the Mobil shore base acknowledged the message. This was the last communication heard from the *Ocean Ranger*. The time was 1:30 a.m. [15 February, 1982].

At 3:38 a.m. the *Nordertor* [a ship close by] reported to the *Sedco 706* that the *Ocean Ranger* had disappeared from radar. (I:65).

Prose superficially unemotional in its understatement, here as in Hynes' song, works to double effect.

¹⁰⁰This white elephant of a ship may stand — or float — as a symbol of technological hubris and gigantism, along with 16-cylinder Lincolns and the Concorde. She was, however, useful for laying cable. See Patrick Beaver, *The Big Ship: Brunel's Great Eastern, a Pictorial History* (London: Hugh Evelyn, 1969).

¹⁰¹The "yoke" brings the brute beast under human dominance and stewardship. See below, note 105.

¹⁰²The grievin' doesn't cut very deep, for example, in Sanger D. Shafer and Lyndia J. Shafer's "All My Ex's Live in Texas." Cf. George Strait's recording on *Ocean Front Property* (University City, California: MCA, 1987).

¹⁰³Here, from Longfellow's poem "My Lost Youth" (which, incidentally, resembles in theme and sentiment, Hynes' "Roy Orbison Came On") is an example of what I mean:

Often I think of the beautiful town
That is seated by the sea;
Often in thought go up and down
The pleasant streets of that dear old town,
And my youth comes back to me.
And a verse of a Lapland song
Is haunting my memory still:
'A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts'.

I use the *Oxford Book of English Verse*, ed. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (Oxford [1939]), no. 694, 817-20.

¹⁰⁴Sand: impermanence, temporality, the condition of weak foundations. Jesus, according to Matthew at VII 26-27:

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

Shelley's great King Ozymandias was such a one:

'Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair'!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Thus we have the sands of time, the sand in Father Time's hourglass, "shifting sands" and so on. One "soap," *Days of Our Lives*, uses the hourglass as its logo. "Footprints on the sands of time" we owe, once again, to Longfellow.

¹⁰⁵The expression "to hold at bay" refers to the control of out-of-control dogs. The taming of wildness, symbolized by dogs or horses, those feudal, ideally serving and protected creatures, re-enacts, in medieval art, the establishment of human culture in the midst of anarchic brutality. See A. Bartlett Giamatti, "Headlong Horses, Headless: An Essay on the Chivalric Epics of Pulci, Boiardo, and Ariosto," ch. 3 of *Exile and Change in Renaissance Literature* (New Haven: Yale, 1984), 33-75, 133-155, and see any number of "western" movies, in which "breaking" a recalcitrant horse establishes the prowess of the "hero." Bullfights and rodeos dramatize this motif.

¹⁰⁶I have in the course of this paper occasionally corrected the printed words that accompany this and other cassettes, for their grammar is often shaky — "it's" for "its," "who's" for "whose," etc. Note also that the printed lyric of "Atlantic Blue" has no question marks.

¹⁰⁷House, *Who Cares*, 13-22.

¹⁰⁸"Sonny's Dream" recorded many times, e.g. on *The Wonderful Grand Band* (Stephenville: Lode Sound Studio, 1978), *Wonderful Grand Band Living in a Fog* (St. John's: Grand East Records, 1981), etc. For a scholarly analysis of the song and its wider bearings, see Peter Narváez, "Popularity, Folksong, and Regional Anthems," in *Popular Music Perspectives III. Popular Music and Social Reality*, ed. Peter Wicke. (Berlin: Electronic Publication of Forschungszentrum Populär Musik der Humboldt Universität zu Berlin and the International Association for the Study of Popular Music, 1995), 85-97.

¹⁰⁹In western France and Brittany there are various legends of *Bonhomme misère*, but he seems not have been so much a "familiar," as an allegorical poor man. See Paul Sébillot, *Le Folk-lore de France*, 4 vols. (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1968), I:8, 185; III, 439. I'm not sure where self-conscious literary use of the trope, as in Françoise Sagan's *Bonjour Tristesse* (Paris: Juillard, 1954), enters the argument. Note that Sagan's title comes from a poem by Paul Éluard which links "*Tristesse*" and "*misère*":

Bonjour Tristesse ...
Tu n'es pas tout à fait la misère
Car les lèvres les plus pauvres te dénoncent

Par un sourire ... (Sagan, *op. cit.*, 12; the original, published first in 1932, is called "A peine défigurée" — see Éluard's *Oeuvres complètes*, 2 vols. [Paris: Gallimard, 1968], 1:365). Note also that our authors use the familiar second person singular pronoun for the "familiar" heartache and misery.

¹¹⁰“Good Morning Blues.” According to Alan Lomax *The Folk Songs of North America in the English Language* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960), 576-7, 586-88, the song is from folk sources, though he reproduces Huddie Ledbetter’s version from the Folkways recording of 1959. It differs in minor ways from the version in my text, which I put down from memory. I didn’t know where or when I first heard the song.

¹¹¹Billie Holiday recorded this in 1946; it showed up again on *The Billie Holiday Story*, 2 LP discs, Decca DXSP 7161, 1972. Irene Higginbotham, Eruin Drake and Dan Fisher wrote it.

¹¹²Kids come sometimes into this music as an encumbrance:

You picked a fine time to leave me Lucille.
Four hungry children and a crop in the field
I’ve seen some sad times
Been through some bad times
But this time the hurtin’ won’t heal ...

“Lucille,” by Don Schlitz; the song that was (and is) good to Kenny Rogers. See Michael Erlewine, ed., *All Music Guide* (San Francisco: Miller Freeman, 1992), 470.

¹¹³Henry v Act II, scene 3; *King Lear* Act v, scene 3; A.E. Housman, “To an Athlete Dying Young,” *A Shropshire Lad* (Cleveland: World, 1947), 34; Dylan Thomas, “Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London,” *Dylan Thomas: The Poems*, ed., Daniel Jones (London: Dent, [1937] 1974), 191.

¹¹⁴Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Wreck of the Hesperus” in *One Hundred Narrative Poems*, George E. Teter, ed., (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1918), 42-5; Dante Gabriel Rossetti, “The White Ship,” *ibid.*, 387-99; “Titanic,” anon., words in Albert E. Friedman, ed., *The Viking Book of Folk Ballads of the English-Speaking World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982 [1956]), 323-4. “Run Come See,” written by Blake Higgs, who sings it on *Blind Blake* (Nassau, Bahamas: Art Records ALP 3, 1951); plus numerous songs in the Newfoundland repertory such as “Golden Vanity,” “Henry Martin” and so on. A recent anthology of verse, *Wild on the Crest: Poems of the Sea, Newfoundland and Labrador*, ed., Mary Dalton, Kristina Fagan, Ken Munro and Peter Walsh (St. John’s: Jeroboam, 1995) has only a few pieces on shipwrecks, but it does contain the following lines reverberant of our present soundings. Boys scale a headland:

... and face
The reluctant sun
Until the vast inverted bowl above
Whirled in giddy vertigo ...
A feverish grip tightened to hand holds
Saved the body from being flung forever
Into the blue and nameless void
By the wind, the wind.

— J.C. Feltham, “Popplestone,” 67-70, 69.

¹¹⁵This is stanza 13 of Hopkins’ long poem “The Wreck of the *Deutschland*: to the Happy Memory of Five Franciscan Nuns/Exiles by the Falck Laws/Drowned between Midnight and Morning of Dec. 7th, 1875.” (The Falck — actually Falk — laws comprised the anti-Catholic legislation that Bismarck promulgated as part of his “*Kulturkampf*.” Adalbart Falk (1827-1900) was Minister of Public Worship and Education at the time.) I

use the Penguin *Poems and Prose*, ed., W.H. Gardner (Harmondsworth, 1974) which was first published in 1953 and since then reprinted many times.

¹¹⁶“The Waste Land.” I use T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber, 1962), 61-86. I know how dinosauroid it is to praise Eliot’s poetry these days, for his reputation stands so low it can hardly be said to stand at all. His reactionary politics, his ersatz Britishness, his anti-Semitism have all been exposed and, in the last few years, for the first time (since all has been known for decades) seen fatally to discredit his poetry itself. See Christopher Ricks, *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice* (London: Faber, 1988); Cynthia Ozick, “T.S. Eliot at 101,” *New Yorker*, 20 November 1989, 65:119-154; Kenneth Asher, *T.S. Eliot and Ideology* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Anthony Julius, *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form* (Cambridge University Press, 1995). The large-format, newsprint reviews have been quick to notice this last title, not least because Julius was Princess Di’s lawyer. See Tom Paulin, “Undesirable,” *London Review of Books*, 9 May 1996: 13-15; Louis Menand, “Eliot and the Jews,” *New York Review of Books*, 6 June 1996: 34-41; Stephen Medcalf, “Eliot and the Punk Aesthetic,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 June 1996: 13. My friend Professor David Boxer of Humboldt State University, Arcata, California, is a little less prolix than these authors on the subject: “Eliot? Ptui [spits]. Anti-Semite. Ptui [spits again].”

¹¹⁷I do not mean anything deep or teutonic by this. In the old folky standard “Midnight Special” one stanza goes into some detail about its historical circumstances:

Man if you ever go to Houston
 You better walk right
 You better not stagger
 And you better not fight
 Sheriff Benson will arrest you
 And he’ll take you down
 If the Jury find you guilty
 You’re penitentiary bound ...

Doubtless there was a Sheriff Benson in Houston, but do the facts of his life matter to the song? No: he has metamorphosed into Everysheriff. Cf. John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (New York: Macmillan [1934], 1958), 71-5. “Instead of Houston, the singer may substitute the name of whatever town he was arrested in, and instead of Benson the name of the Sheriff who arrested him.” (73)

¹¹⁸I sent a copy of the song to Max Ferguson, in the hope that he would like it, play it on his Saturday-morning show on CBC Stereo, and thereby expose it to an audience that might otherwise not run across it. Ferguson wrote back a bit sniffily that he thought Hynes barked and whispered, that he (MF) could not play music he didn’t like, so there. The letter betrayed complete incomprehension on Ferguson’s part.

¹¹⁹*Die Hochzeit des Figaro* (Leipzig: Brietkopf & Härtel, 1899/1925), 87; *Messiah*, ed., Watkins Shaw (London: Novello, n.d.), 7.

¹²⁰It is not altogether fanciful to treat *cryer’s paradise* not as a random collection of songs but as a song-cycle, not one with the tight plot of *Die schöne Müllerin*, but one voicing a number of recurrent themes. (And in songs of differing merit.) We have already observed that the idea of “release” occurs in the first (the title-) song, which like “Atlantic Blue,” is about the death of a man loved. In “Roy Orbison Came On,” one passage stands in ironic contrast to what is to follow in “Atlantic Blue”:

We took a transistor out to an ocean
Of heartbroken songs
And Roy Orbison came on
And my whole world just faded to blue
To a place where all dreams would come true ...

¹²¹In the *Divina Commedia*, Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) has bequeathed to us as succinct and as lovely an epitome of the medieval world-view (or maybe *one* of the medieval world-views) as we are going to find anywhere. In the first section, the *Inferno*, we are escorted into the depths of Hell (the word "inferno" and its English offshoot "infernal" derive from a Latin word meaning "situated below"; the word "Hell" from Germanic roots, conveys the idea of concealment or cover) where, it may come as a surprise, we meet not fire but ice. Hell is frigid and dark, like the North Atlantic. At the centre, in the ninth circle, subject to eternal torment and pain, are those who, like every villain in the country-and-western universe, have *betrayed*. Judas, Brutus and Cassius must spend forever gnawed in the jaws of the three-faced unnamed dark being. Treachery to a benefactor is the direst sin.

¹²²Cf. Lyall Watson, *Dark Nature: A Natural History of Evil* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), xvi: "Evil exists and ... [has] sufficient substance to give it credence as a force in nature and as a factor in our lives ..." It also, according to Watson, casts a shadow.

¹²³Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Random House, 1995), 179-84.

¹²⁴C.B. Macpherson, in his persuasive study *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972 [1962]) states the case categorically. Under capitalism, which has ruled the west since the seventeenth century, "the individual [in principle] is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, for which he owes nothing to society," and "human society consists of a series of market relations." (262, 263) Country-and-western denies these claims.

¹²⁵As quoted by David Runciman in *The London Review of Books*, 23 May 1996, 16.

¹²⁶*Nashville*, 1975, directed by Altman from a script (which of course he and his cast played with fast and loose) by Joan Tewkesbury.