

Witty Songs

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Several years ago through eBay I bought colored-vinyl versions of *The Beatles 1962-1966* (The Red Album) and *The Beatles 1967-1970* (The Blue Album) from a major fan named Ed.

After I paid, he asked if I would be interested in some bootlegs he had that featured sessions recorded while The Beatles were working on their amazing albums—he was willing to transfer them to CD free of charge.

I mentioned in my thank you e-mail that I was old enough to have seen the Beatles when they first appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show in 1964. He replied it was "an honor" to meet someone who saw the Beatles live (Ed was born in 1966). This made me think that although those who watched The Beatles that night were part of a huge television audience—almost 74 million¹—it's a set whose numbers have decreased tremendously in the 45 years that have passed.

That realization, Ed's comment and generous offer to send the CDs, and the about-the-same-time coincidence of having dinner with a man named Bill who saw the Beatles perform in Milwaukee in the fall of 1964 started a chain of events that led me to write two articles. The first, "A Day in the Center of Beatlemania," is about the band's September 4, 1964, appearance at the Arena in Milwaukee. The seed for the second—this one—was planted after Ed's CDs arrived. These were interesting for their roughness and for the insights they provided into the experimentation that produced musical passages such as the unusual Paul McCartney organ part that opens and becomes the backbone of "Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds."

On one I was hearing works in progress ranging from the acoustic beginning of "All Together Now" to John Lennon performing an early version of "Good Morning, Good Morning" when out of the blue comes Pete Drake, his talking guitar, and the sliding-steel-words: "I'm just a guitar, everybody picks on me." The track is from the bootleg *Through Many Years* that focuses on George Harrison and Ringo Starr.² Ed had combined various bootlegs on each of the CDs he sent.

I had not heard this clever tune until that moment even though I've played guitar myself for decades and remember Drake's prominence in Nashville—my oldest brother Forry was a country music fan and liked the steel guitarist. I also recalled Drake had played on Bob Dylan albums and was featured on Harrison's first effort after the breakup of The Beatles.

¹ <http://www.beatlesbible.com/1964/02/09/the-beatles-first-ed-sullivan-show/>

² http://avaxhome.ws/music/bootlegs/george_harrison_through_many_years.html

Hearing Drake's "I'm Just A Guitar, Everybody Picks On Me" made me think of other witty titles such as "Love Is Just A Four-Letter Word," "Dropkick Me Jesus Through The Goalposts Of Life," and "If I Said You Have A Beautiful Body Would You Hold It Against Me?" It struck me that an article about such songs would be fun to write and possibly of interest to others—including editors—so I did some research, asked friends and relatives, and eventually identified the 21 that will be covered in chronological order here, at least one from every decade beginning with the 30s.

I've found other lists of witty songs on the Web but they either reference titles alone or songs that haven't truly entered the music mainstream, two criteria I applied.

In considering them, some took me to places suggested by the lyrics for one reason or another as you'll see, and I enjoyed these unexpected byroads and back alleys. I hope you'll take the time to read the lyrics and listen to the songs. (Links to versions on YouTube are included for all but one, and it's available on a CD.)

Levels of creativity, fun, and cleverness are high, and the pair of songs by the Spice Girls and Big & Rich that conclude the list reassure that the good guys are winning the culture wars.

1. "My Sweet Tooth Says I Wanna, But My Wisdom Tooth Says No."

First up is a song from 1931 written by Sam H. Stept, Joe Young, and Sidney Clare and made popular by the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra.³

Frederick Hodges,⁴ who is based in San Francisco, performs the song on YouTube (Hodges). He also kindly supplied sheet music so I could present the lyrics accurately. They are quaint and charming ("I've got a hunch, my honey bunch"). The strangest line is "I'm no eenie meenie you know," which probably is meant to indicate the song's suitor isn't indecisive.

Be prepared for an unusually long lead-in before the vocal starts.

Lyrics

Fondle me cute
 My cutie cute
 I'm not the "oh, stop" kind
 One with a one-track mind, oh, no
 Cuddle me nice
 Take my advice
 Baby I care a lot

³ <http://www.redhotjazz.com/fho.html>

⁴ <http://www.frederickhodges.com/>

Though you won't believe me
Believe it or not

Every kiss you give me is thrilling
In a way I'd go for you so
Oh, my sweet tooth says I wanna, but my wisdom tooth says no

In my heart I feel like I'm willing
I'm no eenie meenie you know
Oh, my sweet tooth says I wanna, but my wisdom tooth says no

Oh, oh, there's really two sides to me
Oh, oh, you've only made one agree
Get together waiting is killing
Can't you see I'm rarin' to go
Oh, my sweet tooth says I wanna, but my wisdom tooth says no

I've got a hunch, my honey bunch
I'm going to fall and how
But I don't mean right now, oh, no
Just take your time
You're doing fine
My love is guaranteed
If you keep trying
You're bound to succeed

Every kiss you give me is thrilling
In a way I'd go for you so
Oh, my sweet tooth says I wanna, but my wisdom tooth says no

2. "I Can Make Anything, But I Can't Make a Man."

Dewey Gill, long-time host of The Big Band Show on Milwaukee's WMSE-FM 91.7, played the second song one Sunday morning on his program. It was written by Reuben Bloom and recorded by the Dorsey Brothers in 1933; vocals are by Mildred Bailey.

Exactly who or what the Yokohamas of the second line are is an open question, but most likely they represent a play on the name of the Japanese port, Yokohama—the nation's second-largest city—and are meant to be a Japanese-sounding family name. Certainly, along with Alabama's and Bahamas, Yokohamas is a good rhyme with pajamas.

(Visit YouTube [Bailey] for the song). Like "My Sweet Tooth...", it has an unusually long lead-in before Bailey starts singing.

Lyrics

I can make pajamas
 Like the Yokohamas
 Make 'em out of silk in Japan
 I can make most anything
 But I can't make a man

I can make a dinner
 Not like a beginner
 I won't have to open a can
 I can make most anything
 But I can't make a man

I can take an old hat
 Make it look like new
 Just add a ribbon or two
 That's what I do to cut expenses

I can make a dollar
 Jump right up and holler
 Talk about your lemon meringue
 I can make most anything
 But I just can't seem to make a man

3. "Who Put the Benzedrine in Mrs. Murphy's Ovaltine?"

Number 3 was written and recorded in 1947 by Harry "The Hipster" Gibson, a wild pianist-vocalist who probably blazed the trail for Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis.

It came out about the time Jack Kerouac and other Beat Generation artists began using the drug⁵—then an over-the-counter amphetamine—to fuel their creative engines. Ovaltine isn't as well known now, but in mid-century America it was a heavily advertised breakfast drink, aimed mainly at children.

The second verse includes, "She says that everything is solid all reet," and you might be wondering as I did if "reet" is just a mispronunciation of "right" that rhymes with sleep or a real word. It actually is a jazz slang term, according to dictionary.com, that means "good, proper, excellent."⁶

Another word used in a way not encountered much today is "clout," also in the second verse. Most of us relate it to organizational power or influence. Its primary meaning, however, is a blow,⁷ as in striking something.

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benzedrine>

⁶ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/+reet>

⁷ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/clout>

The Benzedrine makes Mrs. Murphy want "to swing, the Highland Fling," which is a Scottish dance⁸ if, like me, you didn't know. Not content to rest on his laurels with one, multiple-syllable drug rhyme, Gibson conjures an impressive second with "Who put the Nembutals in Mr. Murphy's overalls?" Nembutal was a trade name for a powerful barbiturate also known by the generic name phenobarbital.⁹ (Click YouTube [Gibson] for the song.)

Lyrics

Mrs. Murphy couldn't sleep
Her nerves were slightly off the beat
Until she solved her problem
With a can of Ovaltine
She drank a cupful most every night
And OOOO how she would dream
Until something rough got in the stuff
And made her neighbors scream. OW!

Who put the Benzedrine, in Mrs. Murphy's Ovaltine?
Sure was a shame, don't know who's to blame
Cause the old lady didn't even get his name
Where did she get that stuff?
Now she just can't get enough
It might have been the man who wasn't there
Now Jack, that guy's a square
She never ever wants to go to sleep
She says that everything is solid all reet
Now Mr. Murphy don't know what it's all about
Cause she went and threw the old man out. Clout!
Who put the Benzedrine, in Mrs. Murphy's Ovaltine?
Now she wants to swing, the Highland Fling
She says that Benzedrine's the thing that makes her spring.

Ah, spring it now Gibson.
This is the second chorus you know
The name of this chorus is called, "Who put the Nembutals in Mr. Murphy's overalls?
I don't know

She bought a can of Ovaltine, most every week or so
And she always kept an extra can on hand
Just in case that she'd run low
She never, never been so happy, since she left old Ireland
'Till someone prowled her pantry, and tampered with her can. Wham!

⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emClxAJCe2g>

⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pentobarbital>

Who put the Benzedrine, in Mrs. Murphy's Ovaltine?
 Sure was a shame, don't know who's to blame
 Cause the old lady didn't even get his name

Where did she get that stuff
 Now she just can't get enough
 It might have been the man who wasn't there
 Now Jack, that guy's a square

She stays up nights making all the rounds
 They say she lost about 69 pounds
 Now Mr. Murphy claims she's getting awful thin
 And all she says is, "Give me some skin." Mop!

Who put the Benzedrine, in Mrs. Murphy's Ovaltine?
 Now she wants to swing the Highland Fling
 She says that Benzedrine's the thing that makes her spring

Ah, spring it now, Gibby.

4. "How Could You Believe Me When I Said I Love You When You Know I've Been a Liar All My Life?"

At 21 words, the title of this tune is claimed to be the longest for a song used in a Hollywood film. It was performed by Fred Astaire and Jane Powell in the 1951 musical *Royal Wedding*; music is by Burton Lane with lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner.

The nuptials of the title are the ones that united Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip in 1947, when she was 21 and he, 26.¹⁰ Footage of that blessed event is included. Astaire and Powell play a brother-sister act that is loosely based on a similar relationship Astaire and his sister Adele¹¹ had early in their careers.

Like Adele, who met and married an English lord, the Astaire character's (Tom Bowen) sister (Ellen) meets and becomes engaged to an aristocrat played by a young Peter Lawford.

Although it's hard to beat the song and dance Astaire and Powell perform to the witty "How Could You...", later in the movie Tom Bowen is so happy about his love interest he dances *up the walls and across the ceiling* of his hotel room.

"How Could You..." rings true with anyone who has manipulated the facts a little to get what he or she wants. Oddly, in the version below, which was

¹⁰ <http://marriage.about.com/od/royalty/p/queenelizabeth.htm>

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adele_Astaire

on the long play record of the movie soundtrack, spoken parts come toward the end of the song. In the movie, they are at the beginning.

Outstanding lines are Powell's triple negative question, "Didn't your mother never teach you no manners?" and Astaire's double-negative response "I didn't have no mother, we were too poor" and the exchange that begins with her, "I'll give you one more chance: Do you love me or don't you?" His immediate and emphatic "No, I don't" reply is met by her "Quit stalling! I want a direct answer."

Powell, evidently the fourth choice to play Ellen after Ginger Rogers declined, June Allyson took the role but became pregnant and had to withdraw, and Judy Garland was hired but then fired,¹² is great throughout. Her costumes, especially the yellow and red outfit she wears during "How Could You..." are strongly period and cool as a 50s jukebox. (Listen to song at [YouTube \(Astair-Powell\].](#))

Astaire: How could you believe me when I said "I love you" when you know I've been a liar all my life?

Powell: You've had that reputation since you was a youth

Astaire: You must have been insane to think I'd tell you the truth

Powell: How could I believe you when you said we'd marry?

Astaire: When you know I'd rather hang than have a wife. I know I said, "I'd make you mine."

Powell: Now wouldn't you know that I would go for that old line?

Astaire: How could you believe me when I said "I love you," when you know I've been a liar

Powell: You sure have been a liar

Astaire: A double-crossing liar

Powell: A double-crossing liar

Astaire: All my doggone cheatin' life

Powell: You said you would love me long

Astaire: So what?

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Wedding

Powell: And never would do me wrong

Astaire: Stop bending the suit

Powell: Faithful you'd always be

Astaire: Me? Why, baby, you must be loony to trust a lower-than-low, two-timer like me

Powell: You said I'd have everything

Astaire: Get her!

Powell: A beautiful diamond ring

Astaire: Ha, ha, ha!

Powell: A bungalow by the sea

Astaire: A bungalow yet! You're really naive to ever believe a full-of-baloney phony like me

Powell: Boy, I sure must have lost my head

Astaire: You ain't lost nothing you never had

Powell: What about the time you went to Indiana?

Astaire: I was lyin', I was down in Alabama!

Powell: You said you had some business you had to complete

Astaire: What I was doin' I would be a cad to repeat

Powell: What about the evenings you was with your mother?

Astaire: I was rompin' with another honey lamb

Powell: To think you swore our love was real

Astaire: Baby, leave us not forget that I'm a heel

Powell: How could I believe you when you said you loved me?

Astaire: When you know I've been a liar

Powell: A good-for-nothing liar

Astaire: All my good-for-nothing life

Spoken

Powel: This is the last time I'll ever go to a party with you

Astaire: Will you put that in writing?

Powel: Oh, you're always making cracks, making cracks

Astaire: Like what?

Powel: You're always humiliating me, humiliating me; didn't your mother never teach you no manners?

Astaire: I never had no mother, we was too poor

Powel: What's the matter with you lately; you used to tell me you loved me. You used to treat me like a high-classed dame. Well, usedn't you?

Astaire: So I used

Powel: So, now you admit it

Astaire: I ain't admitting nothing

Powel: I'll give you one more chance. Do you love me or don't you?

Astaire: No, I don't

Powel: Quit stalling! I want a direct answer.

Singing

Powel: You know you've been a liar

Astaire: I know I've been a liar

Powel: A double-crossing liar

Astaire: A double-crossing liar

Powel: All your double-crossing life

5. "Rockin' Pneumonia and the Boogie Woogie Flu"

This medically inspired hit was recorded by Huey Piano Smith and the Clowns in 1957; John Vincent, record producer and owner of Ace Record Company,¹³ wrote the lyrics to music composed by Smith.

The song sold more than a million copies¹⁴ although some of the lyrics—"I wanna kiss her but the gal's too tall"—probably were included more for rhyme than meaning. But if master songwriters Lennon and McCartney were able to get away with, "My love don't give me presents, I know she's no peasant," I'm okay with it. Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Rivers, The Flaming Groovies, Sha Na Na, and Aerosmith are a few of the artists who have recorded versions.

Lyricist Vincent produced another teen masterpiece, "Venus In Blue Jeans," a 1962 hit by Jimmy Clanton composed by Brill Building writers Howard Greenfield¹⁵ and Jack Keller.¹⁶ Here's the classic open: "She's Venus in blue jeans; Mona Lisa with a ponytail; She's a walkin', talkin' work of art; She's the girl who stole my heart."¹⁷ (Listen to the song at YouTube [Smith].)

Lyrics

I wanna jump but I'm afraid I'll fall
 I wanna holler but the joint's too small
 Young man rhythm got a hold of me, too
 I got a rockin' pneumonia and a boogie woogie flu

Call some other baby that ain't all
 I wanna kiss her but the gal's too tall
 Young man rhythm got a hold of me, too
 I got a rockin' pneumonia and a boogie woogie flu

Wanna scream I want you all to know
 I would be runnin' but my feet's too slow
 Young man rhythm got a hold of me, too
 I got a rockin' pneumonia and a boogie woogie flu

Wanna scream I want you all to know
 I would be runnin' but my feet's too slow
 Young man rhythm got a hold of me too
 I got a rockin' pneumonia and a boogie woogie flu

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnny_Vincent

¹⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huey_%22Piano%22_Smith

¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Howard_Greenfield

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Keller_%28songwriter%29

¹⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4X0zYBNe-1E>

Baby comin' now I'm hurryin' home
 I know she's leavin' cause I'm takin' too long
 Young man rhythm got a hold of me, too
 I got the rockin' pneumonia and the boogie woogie flu

I wanna squeeze
 I wanna squeeze
 I wanna squeeze
 I wanna squeeze

6. "I'm Just A Guitar, Everybody Picks On Me."

Number 6, the primary inspiration for this article, was written and performed by Pete Drake in 1964 and appears on his *Forever* album. It is the epitome of brevity and wit.

Drake was a Music City session virtuoso who added smooth pedal steel to an array of C&W hits, including Tammy Wynette's "Stand by Your Man," Charlie Rich's "Behind Closed Doors," and Kenny Rogers' "Lucille." He also played on Bob Dylan's *John Wesley Harding*, *Nashville Skyline*, and *Self Portrait* albums, all recorded in Nashville.¹⁸ Rock guitarists Peter Frampton and Joe Walsh had hits using Drake's "talking steel" guitar technique and evidently he got the idea himself from performer Alvin Rey who achieved a similar effect in the 30s when it was known as the "singing guitar."¹⁹

The version of the song I heard on Ed's bootleg was recorded when Drake was in England working on George Harrison's first post-Beatles album *All Things Must Pass*.

After I found the studio recording of the song included below online, I listened to it many times but couldn't quite make out the third line. Google research didn't produce the lyrics, so I called a number listed at a website about Drake, reached a voice mailbox, and left a message that included my question about the lyric.

In addition, I contacted Bill Cunningham, who's on the board of the Georgia Steel Guitar Association,²⁰ thinking he or another member would be familiar with Drake, who was born in Augusta, Georgia, in 1932.²¹ Cunningham posted a note to the Steel Guitar Forum²² and within a few hours a member had the answer.

¹⁸ <http://www.petedrakemusic.com/about-pete-drake/bio>

¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk_box

²⁰ <http://www.georgiasteelguitar.com>

²¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pete_Drake

²² www.steelguitarforum.com

About a week later, the phone rang and the caller said with a beautiful Southern accent, "This is Rose Drake from Nashville, Tennessee." Who else could it be? so I immediately said, "Hello, Mrs. Drake!" She replied that she was calling to answer my question. I explained I thought I already had the answer but would appreciate it if she could confirm it was correct which she soon did. In my experience, people who legitimately have a claim to fame are among the kindest folks around. (Visit YouTube [Drake] for the song.)

Lyrics

I'm just a guitar
 Everybody picks on me
 These blues they keep playing
 Have got me full of misery

7. "Love Is Just A Four-Letter Word."

Although Drake didn't play on it, Number 7 is Bob Dylan's from 1965. It's brilliant like most Dylan songs, and while its meaning is subject to interpretation, like most Dylan songs, the words go together beautifully, and it features an unusual, hard accent on the second-to-last syllable before the refrain containing the title line.

Tennessee Williams' play, *Camino Real* (translated from Spanish as "Royal Road" or "King's Highway"²³) reportedly is the source of the title which probably has much greater antiquity.²⁴ It's unlikely Williams was the first to make this connection between the supreme human emotion and vulgarity.

The song opens with, "Seems like only yesterday, I left my mind behind, down in a Gypsy cafe, with a friend of a friend of mine"—a cool combination of simple rhymes and a near homophone. References to Gypsies and their culture aren't unusual in Dylan songs, and Williams' play includes a Gypsy and his daughter Esmeralda (also the name of a character in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*²⁵—whose protagonist pops up in Dylan's "Desolation Row"²⁶). But the line refers specifically to a "Gypsy cafe" which made me wonder if a certain type of cafe is so labeled.

Poking around the Web produced an informative connection with a woman named Melanie who co-owns with husband Jim and a silent partner a restaurant named Gypsy Cafe²⁷ in Pittsburgh. I e-mailed the site's general

²³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Camino_Real_%28California%29

²⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love_Is_Just_a_Four-Letter_Word

²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esm%C3%A9ralda_%28The_Hunchback_of_Notre_Dame%29

²⁶ <http://www.bobdylan.com/songs/desolation-row>

²⁷ <http://www.gypsycafe.net/>

address and asked: Why was the name chosen? did it have any special meaning? Melanie wrote back: "I realized that 'Gypsy Cafe' was a perfect way to express our mission. We say we 'go where the Gypsies go' and follow a seasonal path through Europe with our menu. There have also been several intervening details that have proven the name was the best fit."

And what did she think about the Gypsy cafe in "Love Is Just A Four-Letter Word"?

She hadn't heard the song but knew enough about Dylan to suggest the following: "Regarding what Dylan might have meant, I will say that calling ourselves Gypsy Cafe has essentially set the path for us. We have become a home for a very interesting range of folks, all of whom have approached us because of their self-association with the term 'Gypsy.' We offer Eastern European music led by a Gypsy violinist and belly dance. We have a resident Tarot card reader. We are next door to a new works theater whose clientele associate us with the theatrical vibe. We are the official Pittsburgh home of the National Cartoonists Society via the Pittsburgh ToonSeum. We offer a Geek Brunch that attracts comics and sci-fi geeks. Look for a thread between these seemingly disparate groups, and what ties them together is their 'outsider' identification. I think interesting people are frequently misunderstood, or at least believe they are, but crave acceptance just as anyone might. Every outsider wants to be inside, although not necessarily with those who they feel pushed them outside in the first place. That seems pretty Dylanesque to me."

That's an impressive analysis, and I have a feeling the Gypsy Cafe is a cool place.

The third verse, "I said goodbye unnoticed," reminds me of Dylan's "Don't Think Twice It's Alright" and its "Goodbye's too good a word, babe, so I'll just say fare thee well." That line never made sense to me. How could something as everyday as goodbye be too good a word? About eight years ago, however, in an entirely different context, someone mentioned that goodbye is a Middle English contraction of the phrase "God be with ye."²⁸ My hunch is Dylan understood the word's etymology, a fact that reflects careful and subtle writing and is among the many reasons he is superb and often eloquent.

The hardest-hitting line, however, in my estimation, is one that passes quickly, "Yes, I know now traps are only set by me." That sums up a lot of psychological theorizing. (Visit YouTube [Baez] for the song).

Lyrics

²⁸ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=goodbye&searchmode=none>

Seems like only yesterday
I left my mind behind
Down in a Gypsy cafe
With a friend of a friend of mine
Who sat with a baby heavy on her knee
Yet spoke of life most free from slavery
With eyes that showed no trace of misery
A phrase in connection first with she occurred
That love is just a four-letter word

Outside a rambling front-store window
Cats meowed to the break of day
Me, I kept my mouth shut
To you I had no words to say
My experience was limited and underfed
You were talking while I hid
To the one who was the father of your kid
You probably didn't think I did, but I heard
You say that love is just a four-letter word

I said goodbye unnoticed
Pushed towards things in my own games
Drifting in and out of lifetimes
Unmentionable by name
Searching for my double, looking for
Complete evaporation to the core
Though I tried and failed at finding any door
I must have thought that there was nothing more absurd
Than that love is just a four-letter word

Though I never knew just what you meant
When you were speaking to your man
I can only think in terms of me
And now I understand
After waking enough times to think I see
The holy kiss that's supposed to last eternity
Blow up in smoke, its destiny
Falls on strangers travels free
Yes, I know now traps are only set by me
And I do not really need to be assured
That love is just a four-letter word

Strange it is to be beside you, many years and tables turned
You'd probably not believe me if told you all I've learned
And it is very, very weird indeed
To hear words like "forever" plead
So ships run through my mind, I cannot cheat
it's like looking in a teacher's face complete

I can say nothing to you but repeat
 No, I can say nothing to you but repeat what I heard
 That love is just a four-letter word.

8. "Free Your Mind...and Your Ass Will Follow."

George Clinton, Ray Davis, and Eddie Hazel of Funkadelic created Number 8 which was recorded by the group in 1970 and released on an album of the same name. A Wikipedia entry about the song states: "The inspiration for this album was, according to George Clinton, an attempt to 'see if we can cut a whole album while we're all tripping on acid.'"²⁹

The result is a psychedelic experience with distorted guitar riffs and lyrics full of pronouncements. It's easy to imagine writers higher than the Himalayas coming up with the clever title line and then repeating it dozens of times. Possibly as an explanation of what it means or as an expansion, it typically is followed by the refrain "The kingdom of heaven is within," which sounds like an ancient biblical phrase but isn't—at least not exactly.

Closest to it I discovered through an online search is Luke 17:21 which I subsequently found in my King James version of the bible: "Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."³⁰ However, the phrase is "kingdom of God" not "kingdom of heaven."

I asked college buddy now Pastor Don Stein (Shepherd of the Hills Church, Lacrosse, Wisconsin) about this and he replied in an e-mail: "As for the phrase 'Kingdom of God,' that is primarily found in the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of Matthew prefers to use 'Kingdom of Heaven.' I checked my resources, more than a dozen English and one Greek New Testament. The only reference that I found is the one you cite. Matthew does not record those words of Jesus. The Greek text shows no variants or glosses substituting heaven ('ouranos') for God ('Theos') so I doubt that any translation would substitute one for the other here."

Some online commentators think the two expressions mean the same thing. Former The Way³¹ member Mark Clarke, for example: "There is no indication in any of the words of Jesus that there is a distinction between 'kingdom of God' and 'kingdom of heaven.' The two terms are synonymous. 'Kingdom of God' is the literal term for what Jesus preached, while 'kingdom of heaven' is a figurative way of saying the same thing. It is figurative because 'heaven' is put for 'God' who dwells there."³²

²⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_Your_Mind..._and_Your_Ass_Will_Follow

³⁰ <http://kingjibible.com/luke/17.htm>

³¹ <http://www.theway.org/index.php?page=home&lang=en>

³² <http://godskingdomfirst.org/heaven.htm>

Others think there are differences. The following is from the Learn the Bible website which is sponsored by Antioch Baptist Church of Knoxville, Tennessee: "In Scofield's notes on Matthew...he states that the kingdom of God can be distinguished from the kingdom of heaven in five respects. The characteristics of the kingdom of God are summarized as follows: The kingdom of God is universal and includes angels and saints of all ages, the kingdom of God is entered only by the new birth, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven 'have almost all things in common,' the kingdom of God is chiefly inward and spiritual, and the kingdom of God merges into the kingdom of heaven when Christ puts all things under His feet."³³

That's not exactly clear.

Literary colossus Leo Tolstoy, writer of *War and Peace* and other monumental works, published a book titled *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*.³⁴ I found an online version and scrolled through. Subtitled *Christianity Not As A Mystic Religion But As A New Theory Of Life*, it was published in 1894 and translated by Constance Garnett.

From Part 3: "Christianity recognizes love of self, of family, of nation, and of humanity, and not only of humanity, but of everything living, everything existing; it recognizes the necessity of an infinite extension of the sphere of love. But the object of this love is not found outside self in societies of individuals, nor in the external world, but within self, in the divine self whose essence is that very love, which the animal self is brought to feel the need of through its consciousness of its own perishable nature."

From Part 4: "The position of our Christian humanity, if you look at it from the outside with all its cruelty and degradation of men, is terrible indeed. But if one looks at it within, in its inner consciousness, the spectacle it presents is absolutely different. All the evil of our life seems to exist only because it has been so for so long; those who do the evil have not had time yet to learn how to act otherwise, though they do not want to act as they do."

From Part 7: "That is why that Power cannot require of us what is irrational and impossible: the organization of our temporary external life, the life of society or of the state. That Power demands of us only what is reasonable, certain, and possible: to serve the kingdom of God, that is, to contribute to the establishment of the greatest possible union between all living beings—a union possible only in the truth; and to recognize and to profess the revealed truth, which is always in our power."

None of the above strikes me as clear, either.

³³ <http://www.learnthebible.org/kingdom-of-god-and-kingdom-of-heaven.html>

³⁴ <http://www.fullbooks.com/The-Kingdom-of-God-is-within-you1.html>

While exploring Tolstoy, I came upon a Wikipedia entry that led to a surprising essay he published in 1906 titled "Tolstoy On Shakespeare."

From Part I: "I remember the astonishment I felt when I first read Shakespeare. I expected to receive a powerful esthetic pleasure, but having read, one after the other, works regarded as his best: 'King Lear,' 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'Hamlet' and 'Macbeth,' not only did I feel no delight, but I felt an irresistible repulsion and tedium...Several times I read the dramas and the comedies and historical plays, and I invariably underwent the same feelings: repulsion, weariness, and bewilderment. At the present time, before writing this preface, being desirous once more to test myself, I have, as an old man of seventy-five, again read the whole of Shakespeare, including the historical plays, the 'Henrys,' 'Troilus and Cressida,' 'The Tempest,' 'Cymbeline,' and I have felt, with even greater force, the same feelings—this time, however, not of bewilderment, but of firm, indubitable conviction that the unquestionable glory of a great genius which Shakespeare enjoys, and which compels writers of our time to imitate him and readers and spectators to discover in him non-existent merits—thereby distorting their esthetic and ethical understanding—is a great evil, as is every untruth."³⁵

His reaction to Shakespeare is "repulsion," "tedium," "weariness and bewilderment," "great evil," and "untruth"? A writer would fail to see the brilliance of Shakespeare only if he or she was blinded by an ego even more dazzling. Frank Lloyd Wright had a similar flaw in that only rarely was he able to discern excellence in a structure of his era that he didn't help shape.

Greatness, oddly, is sometimes accompanied by smallness.

Before moving on, I feel compelled to present the following which I stumbled upon while looking into Funkadelic's "the kingdom of heaven is within" proclamation.

It's the source of the "camel through a needle" comparison that sometimes pops up when doubters discuss the improbability of well-heeled televangelists, prosperity preachers, and rich fundamentalists making it into the kingdom of God (or heaven): "One of the more intriguing scriptures in the 'our wealth' area concerns what we often refer to as 'Jesus and the rich young man,' a biblical passage which goes like this: As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.' He said to him, 'Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.' Jesus, looking at him,

³⁵ *Tolstoy On Shakespeare*, 1906, Funk & Wagnalls, New York and London. Page 4. Online at:http://books.google.com/books?id=yJYfDNPQ7vEC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, 'How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!' And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, 'Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.' They were greatly astounded and said to one another, 'Then who can be saved? Jesus looked at them and said, 'For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.'" (Mark 10:17-27, NRSV.)³⁶

Although at first this seems like a clear description of a condition—wealth—that will by itself prevent an individual from being favored by God or Jesus, probably the slippery-as-petroleum-jelly types who are rich Christians will find some way to avoid giving away their Earthly possessions.

In fact, what saves them and any believing Christian—even Adolph Hitler, who supposedly never renounced Catholicism—is plain old faith. As Jesus says in the above, "...for God all things are possible." So even Jim Jones, David Koresh, Jim Baker, and other rogues of religion—and it's a long, long list—will be up there flitting about forever, in the unlikely-to-the-point-of-impossible event Christians have it right.

But, I digress. Meanwhile, the song is on YouTube.

Lyrics

Free your mind and your ass will follow
 The kingdom of heaven is within
 Free your mind and your ass will follow
 The kingdom of heaven is within
 Free your mind and your ass will follow
 The kingdom of heaven is within
 Open up your funky mind and you can fly
 Free your mind, your ass will follow
 The kingdom of heaven is within

Freedom is free of the need to be free
 Free your mind and your ass will follow
 The kingdom of heaven is within
 Free your mind and your ass will follow
 The kingdom of heaven is within
 Free your mind, your ass will follow
 The kingdom of heaven is within

³⁶ <http://www.rc.net/wcc/readings/mark1017.htm>

Free your mind and your ass will follow
 The kingdom of heaven is within
 Yeah

Free your mind and your ass will follow
 The kingdom of heaven is within

Whoaaaaa!

Free your mind
 Will you free your mind?
 And your ass will follow
 I have never, never, never
 Never in my life
 Have this given to me
 Free your mind and your ass will follow
 Free your mind, man, like a newborn
 Not like you
 You are as free as you want to be
 Your ass will follow

Well, I discovered that this life that was given' to me
 Is not really mine
 Free your mind
 If it were mine, I would have fun all of the time
 I'm very discontent now
 Now, I want a way out, now
 I have to find a way
 I have to find some way out
 Free your mind and your ass will follow
 Give it up, give it up
 Free your mind
 Give it up and give it to me, baby
 I'm calling you love
 Love
 From my heart
 Free your mind and your ass will follow
 Wowww!
 Free your mind and your ass will follow
 The kingdom of heaven is within
 Free your mind and your ass will follow
 Get it on!
 Free your mind and your ass will follow
 The kingdom of heaven is within
 Free your mind and your ass will follow
 The kingdom of heaven is within
 The kingdom of heaven is within
 Free your mind!

The kingdom of heaven is within
 Are you satisfied?
 I'm so confused about the whole thing
 I don't understand it
 I can't free my mind
 I'm so mixed up
 Gonna get it on, etc.

9. "Thank God And Greyhound."

Many of the songs covered in this article are humorous, and this one, recorded by Roy Clark in 1970 and written by Larry Kingston and Ed Nix, fits the category perfectly, though perhaps not intentionally.

The lyrics are fairly straightforward in their description of a woman's poor treatment of the protagonist. It only gets funny when his thanks are directed toward God and Greyhound. The ethereal and mundane working together to close a bad relationship.

It was recorded when TV's *Hee Haw*,³⁷ an amazingly corny Laugh-In³⁸ imitator that looked like a *Li'l Abner*³⁹ cartoon, co-hosted by Clark and Buck Owens, was only a year old. The pair were both major C&W stars when the television show launched in 1969.

Compared to the slackstick humor of *Hee Haw*, "Thank God and Greyhound..." is downright subtle. It was written after The Beatles' "You've Got To Hide Your Love Away" which uses an outlandish self-assessment—"Feelin' two-foot small"—that is similar to the concluding and even more outlandish observation of the second line "...till I feel about one-inch tall." (Visit YouTube [Clark] for the song).

Lyrics

I've made a small fortune and you've squandered it all
 You shamed me till I feel about one inch tall
 But I thought I loved you, and I hoped you would change
 So I gritted my teeth and didn't complain
 Now you come to me; with a simple good-bye
 You tell me you're leavin' but you don't tell me why
 Now we're here at the station and you're getting on
 And all I can think of...is...
 Thank God and Greyhound, you're gone

Thank God and Greyhound, you're gone
 I didn't know how much longer I could go on

³⁷ <http://www.heehaw.com/>

³⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rowan_%26_Martin%27s_Laugh-In

³⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li%27l_Abner

Watchin' you take the respect out of me
 Watchin' you make a total wreck out of me
 That big diesel motor is a-playin' my song
 Thank God and Greyhound, you're gone.

Thank God and Greyhound, you're gone
 That load on my mind got lighter when you got on
 That shiny old bus is a beautiful sight
 With the black smoke a-rollin' up around the tail lights
 It may sound kinda cruel but I've been silent too long
 Thank God and Greyhound, you're gone
 Thank God and Greyhound, you're gone

10. "If You Don't Leave Me Alone (I'm Gonna Find Somebody That Will)."

Written by Delbert McClinton and Sonny Fortner in 1973, recorded by McLinton and Glen Clark, and included on the album *Subject To Change*, Number 10 is a straightforward—albeit clever—plea for a little space, early 70s style. The song appears not to be available on the Web; however, the *Subject To Change* CD may be purchased at various music sites.

Lyrics

You're scarin' me to death baby with your, your jealous heart
 This ain't no way for our romance to start
 You keep on telling me to explain myself
 'Bout something one of your friends said
 About me and somebody else

Your loose-mouth friends, honey
 Ain't doin' you no good
 And some of them gals you run with
 Wouldn't help you if they could

What you do is your business
 'Til it starts givin' me chills,
 If you don't leave me alone
 I'm gonna find somebody that will
 I'm gonna find me somebody that will

Well, yeah

You're scarin' me to death baby with your, your jealous heart
 This ain't no way for our romance to start
 Take it easy baby, don't be so hard on yourself
 You know, you're making me nervous causin' danger to my health

What you do is your business

'Til it starts givin' me chills,
 If you don't leave me alone, baby
 I'm gonna find somebody that will

Gonna find somebody that will
 Wha'd you say?
 Gonna find somebody that will
 Yes, I will
 Yes, I will
 Gonna find somebody that will
 Yes, I will

11. "Broad Minded Man."

This bawdy tune from 1973 was written by Jim Owen and recorded by Jim Ed Brown and the Browns. As it did me, the title might cause you to wonder about the origin of the slang expression "broad" as applied to woman. It's not heard as much today.

I visited the always helpful *Online Etymology Dictionary* and discovered it doesn't go further back in time, evidently, than the beginning of the 20th century. The entry at the site reports it might have been suggested by the broad hips of women or the term "abroadwife," which refers to a woman away from her husband. It includes the interesting fact that the "rise of women's athletics" led to changing the name of the track and field event broad jump to long jump in 1967.⁴⁰

Emerging rights and equality for females in 1973 didn't seem to reach Owen and Brown who celebrate an ancient pursuit. The protagonist's wife "throws up a howl" every time he's "on the prowl" and he's sure his mother did the same.

The last verse is an attempt to lighten the impact the protagonist's shenanigans might have had on the objects of his lust. He wants any woman "who's been hurt by something I've done" to know he's "sorry for it all" and that it "was all done in fun." Life is never as simple as pop. (Visit YouTube [Browns] for the song).

Lyrics

I've been a rascal from the day I was born
 And oh what a good life I've had
 I've got more memories than leaves on the trees
 And I owe it all to my dad

My daddy was a broad-minded man

⁴⁰ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=broad>

He had `em on his mind all the time
 I wanna be like dad in every way I can
 I try to be a broad-minded man

I've lived in haste attempting to taste
 Every drop of life's sweet wine
 So if there's anything you can name I ain't done
 It's because I haven't had the time
 I've got a woman who don't understand
 She calls my life a shame
 And throws up a howl every time I'm on the prowl
 And I'm sure my momma did the same

My daddy was a broad-minded man
 He had `em on his mind all the time
 I wanna be like dad in every way I can
 I try to be a broad-minded man

I hope there ain't a girl anywhere in this world
 Who's been hurt by something that I've done
 If I've caused a tear to fall then I'm sorry for it all
 Cause I swear it was all done in fun

My daddy was a broad-minded man
 He had `em on his mind all the time
 I'm wanna be like dad in every way I can
 I try to be a broad-minded man
 I try to be a broad-minded man

12. "Dropkick Me Jesus Through the Goalposts of Life."

This classic in the clever title genre was recorded by Bobby Bare and written by Paul Craft in 1976. I remember hearing "Dropkick Me Jesus..." when it first came out and thinking it was strictly for laughs. But now that I'm older, and a total Nontheist, I'm not so sure. 'Course if Jesus exists and truly is a football fan, one thing is certain: He roots for the Green Bay Packers. (Visit YouTube [Bare] for the song).

Lyrics

Drop-kick me, Jesus, through the goalposts of life
 End over end, neither left nor the right
 Straight through the heart of them righteous uprights
 Drop-kick me, Jesus, through the goalposts of life

Make me, oh, make me, Lord, more than I am
 Make me a piece in your master game plan
 Free from the earthly temptations below

I've got the will, Lord, if you got the toe.

Drop-kick me, Jesus, through the goalposts of life
 End over end, neither left nor the right
 Straight through the heart of them righteous uprights
 Drop-kick me, Jesus, through the goalposts of life

Bring on the brothers who've gone on before
 And all of the sisters who've knocked on your door
 All the departed dear loved ones of mine
 Stick 'em up front in the offensive line

Drop-kick me, Jesus, through the goalposts of life
 End over end, neither left nor the right
 Straight through the heart of them righteous uprights
 Drop-kick me, Jesus, through the goalposts of life

A lowly bench warmer I'm contented to be
 Until the time when you have need of me
 The flash on the big scoreboard signs from on high
 The big Super Bowl way up in the sky

Drop-kick me, Jesus, through the goalposts of life
 End over end, neither left nor the right
 Straight through the heart of them righteous uprights
 Drop-kick me, Jesus, through the goalposts of life

Yeah, drop-kick me, Jesus, through the goalposts of life
 End over end, neither left nor the right
 Straight through the heart of them righteous uprights
 Drop-kick me, Jesus, through the goalposts of life

13. "I'm the Only Hell Mama Ever Raised."

Number 13, with its great play-on-words title and refrain, was written by Wayne Kemp, Mack Vickery, and Bobby Borchers and recorded by Johnny Paycheck in 1977—smack dab in the center of a period when he and others were labeled "outlaws." Although Merle Haggard—who served time at San Quentin prison—was probably the most deserving of the title, his "Okie from Muskogee" seemed to put him completely behind even stupid laws such those against marijuana and LSD.

In "I'm the Only Hell..." the protagonist's mother tells him "not to smoke it" which might refer to pot, freebase cocaine (now called crack), or worst of all, tobacco.

The reference to "Rock of Ages"⁴¹ had me contemplating exactly what that song is about for the first time (it wasn't a hymn in the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church of my naive youth). I always liked the melody and the "rock of ages" lyric but hadn't really thought about what it meant and missed entirely the word "cleft" in the song, thinking it was "meant" as in "rock of ages meant for me."

Now that I've read the lyrics it's obvious the rock is Jesus. Dictionary.com defines "cleft" as "to split or divide as if by a cutting blow" which metaphorically works well with the image of Jesus tortured and murdered to absolve the sins of the protagonist and other believers.

What most Christians don't think about is how Jesus is a human sacrifice similar in many ways to those carried out by the Maya and other primitive cultures. The Old Testament has plenty of examples of animal sacrifices and the practice culminates in a way with the sacrifice of the man-God Jesus in the New Testament.

Then I backed up to consider "Precious Memories" in the previous line and have to admit I had never heard of the song although versions of it, according to a website titled "The Forever Notebook," were recorded by a flock of singers, from Bob Dylan to Dolly Parton.⁴²

According to a web page⁴³ that promotes Hamlin, Texas, "Precious Memories" was written by "John Braselton Fillmore Wright (1877-1959), composer of about 500 gospel songs..." Wright was living in Hamlin when he wrote the song in 1923.

Paycheck himself eventually served time in prison and probably warbled this tune now and then to understanding fellow jailbirds. Behind a lot of mischief in the song is that good ole boy the devil, and he plays a role in the next witty song, too. (Visit YouTube [Paycheck] for the song).

Lyrics

I can't sell my momma short on loving me
I guess that's why she let me go so far
Momma tried to stop me short of stealing
I guess that's why I had to steal that car

She told me not to smoke it
But I did and it took me far away

⁴¹ <http://www.gospelsongslyrics.info/Rock-Of-Ages-gospel-song.htm>

⁴² <http://forevernotebook.com/precious-memories-part-2.html>

⁴³ <http://www.hamlintradesdayvillage.com/About-Us.html>

And I turned out to be
The only hell mama ever raised

I rolled into Atlanta, stolen tags and almost out of gas
I had to get some money, and lately I'd learned how to get it fast
Those neon lights was calling me and somehow I just had to get downtown
So, I reached into the glove box, another liquor store went down

And I sing "Precious Memories," take me back to the good old days
I can hear my momma singing "Rock of Ages" cleft for me
She tried to turn me on to Jesus, but I turned on to the devil's ways
And I turned out to be the only hell my momma ever raised

Well they put those handcuffs on me, Lord how I fought to resist
But the agent's clamped 'em tighter, 'til that metal bit into my wrists
They took my belt and my billfold, my fingerprints, and the profile of my face
Then they locked away the only hell my momma ever raised

And I sing "Precious Memories," take me back to the good old days
I can hear my momma singing, "Rock of Ages" cleft for me
She tried to turn me on to Jesus, but I turned on to the devil's ways
And I turned out to be the only hell my momma ever raised

She tried to turn me on to Jesus, but I turned on to the devil's ways
And I turned out to be the only hell my momma ever raised

14. "Heaven's Just a Sin Away."

Written by Jerry Gillespie⁴⁴ and recorded by The Kendalls in 1977, "Heaven's Just a Sin Away" was a Number One hit on the Billboard country singles chart. The Kendalls were a father-daughter act that began performing professionally when Jeannie was just 15.⁴⁵ Father Royce died young at 63 in 1998. Looking at the angelic Jeannie, it's hard to think of her in the grip of Lucifer. The song has all the characteristics of the bouncy middle 70s disco era that spawned it. (It's at YouTube [Kendalls]).

Lyrics

Heaven's just a sin away whoa, whoa, just a sin away
I can't wait another day I think I'm giving in
How I love to hold you tight whoa, whoa, be with you tonight
That still won't make it right cause I belong to him

Whoa, whoa, way down deep inside I know that it's all wrong
Your eyes keep tempting me and I never was that strong

⁴⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerry_Gillespie

⁴⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Kendalls

Devil's got me now whoa, whoa, gone and got me now
 I can't fight him anyhow I'm think he's gonna win
 Heaven's just a sin away whoa, whoa, just a sin away
 Heaven help me when I say I think I'm giving in

Whoa, whoa way down deep inside, I know that it's all wrong
 Your eyes keep tempting me, and I never was that strong
 Devil's got me now whoa, whoa, gone and got me now
 I can't fight him anyhow I think he's gonna win

Heaven's just a sin away whoa, whoa, just a sin away
 Heaven help me when I say I think I'm giving in

Heaven's just a sin away whoa, whoa, just a sin away
 I can't wait another day I think I'm giving in
 How I love to hold you tight whoa, whoa, be with you tonight
 But that still won't make it right cause I belong to him

15. "You're the Reason Our Kids are Ugly."

Written by L.E. White and Lola Jean Dillon who recorded their version in 1977, this finger-pointer was re-recorded by superstars Conway Twitty & Loretta Lynn in 1978.⁴⁶

Lynn has an amazingly authentic country history. She was born and spent her early life in Butcher Holler, Kentucky, which is 126 miles southeast of Lexington. A "holler" is actually a southern dialect take on the word hollow, which in the geographic sense, means valley.⁴⁷ Lynn was born on a hill in the hollow and had seven brothers and sisters, including Crystal Gayle, her youngest sibling and also a star. She married a moonshiner nicknamed Doo and Mooney in 1946 at age 13,⁴⁸ had four children by the time she was 19, was a grandmother at 29,⁴⁹ and became country music's reigning queen by her late 30s.

Born one year after Lynn, Conway Twitty started out as a rock and roller and had a hit with the monumental "Only Make Believe," which was released in 1958 and topped pop charts in the US and England.⁵⁰ He co-wrote the song with multi-instrumentalist Jack Nance who was primarily the drummer in the Rock Housers, Twitty's band at the time. His group was later renamed the

⁴⁶ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90_jUVbg9hk&feature=youtube_gdata_player

⁴⁷ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/hollow>

⁴⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loretta_Lynn

⁴⁹ <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0528750/bio>

⁵⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It%27s_Only_Make_Believe

Twitty Birds,⁵¹ and by the mid-sixties, he switched to country music. He could still rock out and was an excellent guitarist, as his version of "[Johnny B. Goode](#)" from 1969 demonstrates.

Lynn and Twitty began singing duets in 1971 and soon recorded five Number 1 records.⁵² Their "You're the Reason Our Kids are Ugly" includes several lines either not in or different from the Dillion and White original. The first occurs in the second verse and it's great mainly because of Lynn's amazingly deep southern drawl. When she sings "wires" in the added line, it becomes almost "wher-ers."

Another striking difference is the change from a mention of Phyllis Diller in the Dillion and White version to Ruth Buzzi in Lynn and Twitty's. They, their producers, or record company execs might have been aiming for a younger demographic with Buzzi who was born almost 20 years after Diller and was perhaps better known among young people because of her Laugh-In appearances. (Visit YouTube [Lynn-Twitty] for the song).

Twitty: You're the reason I'm a-ridin' around on recapped tires

Lynn: And you're the reason I'm hangin' our clothes outside on wires.

Both: And you're the reason our kids are ugly, little darlin' Ah, but looks ain't ev'rythin' and money ain't ev'rythin' But I love you just the same

Twitty: You're the reason I've changed to beer from soda pop

Lynn: And you're the reason I never get to go to the beauty shop

Both: You're the reason our kids are ugly, little darlin' Ah, but looks ain't ev'rythin', and money ain't ev'rythin' But I love you just the same. I guess that we won't ever have everything we need 'Cause when we get a head it's got another mouth to feed

Lynn: And that's the reason that my good looks and my figure is gone

Twitty: And that's the reason that I ain't got no hair to comb

Both: And you're the reason our kids are ugly, little darlin' Ah, but looks ain't ev'rythin' and money ain't ev'rythin' But I love you just the same

Lynn: Conway, why in the devil don't you go and shave and put on a clean pair of pants?

⁵¹ http://theband.hiof.no/band_pictures/conway_twitty.html

⁵² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loretta_Lynn

Twitty: But Loretta, look at yourself. Now I wish you'd take them curlers out of your hair and go put on a little makeup and get out of that housecoat before supper

Lynn: Ha, well let me tell you something, Conway, considerin' everything what I went through today, I look like a movie star

Twitty: Eh-he-yeah, Ruth Buzzi

Lynn: Thank you

Twitty: Besides that, all our kids took after your part of the family, anyway

Lynn: Oh they did, huh? What about the ones that's bald?

Twitty: Well, I guess you might say they take after me...

16. "If I Said You Have a Beautiful Body, Would You Hold it Against Me?"

Written by David Bellamy and recorded by the Bellamy Brothers in 1979, this was the second hit for the duo after "Let Your Love Flow."⁵³

When I first heard the song in the 70s or 80s, I thought it was a reaction to the women's movement which endeavored to rack focus from the female form to the female mind. I was wrong. Evidently, the line originated with Groucho Marx on TV's *You Bet Your Life* in the 1950s.⁵⁴ David Bellamy, who was born in September, 1950, never forgot Groucho's question and made it the basis of his song.

Marx had an amazingly quick and comical mind and is well-known for striking witticisms such as: "Please accept my resignation. I don't care to belong to any club that will have me as a member" and "Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana."

The devil, a popular fellow in these witty songs, pops up again in the chorus. (Visit YouTube [Bellamy Brothers] for the song.)

Lyrics

If I said you have a beautiful body
 Would you hold it against me
 If I swore you were an angel
 Would you treat me like the devil tonight

⁵³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bellamy_Brothers

⁵⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/If_I_Said_You_Had_a_Beautiful_Body_Would_You_Hold_It_Against_Me

If I was dying of thirst
 Would your flowing love come quench me
 If I said you have a beautiful body
 Would you hold it against me

Now we could talk all night about the weather
 I could tell you about my friends out on the coast
 I could ask a lot of crazy questions
 Or ask you what I really want to know

If I said you have a beautiful body
 Would you hold it against me
 If I swore you were an angel,
 Would you treat me like the devil tonight
 If I was dying of thirst
 Would your flowing love come quench me
 If I said you have a beautiful body
 Would you hold it against me

Now rain can fall so soft against the window
 The sun can shine so bright up in the sky
 But daddy always told me
 "Don't make small talk"
 He said, "Come on out and say what's on your mind"

If I said you have a beautiful body
 Would you hold it against me
 If I swore you were an angel
 Would you treat me like the devil tonight
 If I was dying of thirst
 Would your flowing love come quench me
 If I said you have a beautiful body
 Would you hold it against me
 If I said you have a beautiful body
 Would you hold it against me

17. "She Got the Gold Mine and I Got the Shaft."

Jerry Reed cut Number 17 in 1982. It was written by Tim J. Dubois, a songwriter with an unusual background: He has a BA and an MA in accounting and was a CPA before he started writing songs.⁵⁵ Many of his compositions are listed at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_DuBois. He must have it all—the math thing and the language thing.

⁵⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_DuBois

Although Reed is best known for his singing and light-hearted attitude, he was also a great guitar player. Here's a [link](#) to a video featuring him doing a duet with Chet Atkins.

Many of Reed's hits were story songs, and he does an excellent job of delivering Dubois' funny lines. The song is sexist and was out-of-date before it was recorded. Even in the early 80s, there weren't many guys who would marry just to have someone cook for them. It's a whale of a tale, though. (Visit YouTube [Reed] for the song).

Lyrics

Listen, guess it was back in '63
 When eatin' my cookin' got the better of me
 So I asked this little girl I was goin' with to be my wife
 Well, she said she would, so I said "I do"
 But I'da said I wouldn't if I'da just knew
 How sayin' "I do" was gonna screw up all of my life!

Well, the first few years weren't all that bad
 I'll never forget the good times we had
 'Course I'm reminded every month when I send her the child support
 And it wasn't very long till the lust all died
 And I'll admit I wasn't too surprised
 The day I come home and seen my suitcase sittin' out on the porch

Well, I tried to get in, and she changed the locks!
 I seen this note on the mailbox that said
 "So long, turkey! My attorney will be in touch!"
 Well, I decided right then and there
 I'm gonna do what's right and give her fair share, right?
 But I didn't know it's going to be THAT much!

Well, she got the gold mine!
 I got the shaft
 They said they were splittin' it all down the middle
 But they give her the biggest half
 Well, it all sounds mighty funny
 But it hurts too much to laugh
 She got the gold mine—I got the sha-a-aft. I'm telling you

Hey, listen—you ain't heard nothin' yet
 Why, they give her the color television set
 Then they give her the house, the kids, and both of the cars!
 Well, next they start talkin' 'bout child support
 Alimony, and the cost of the court
 Didn't take me long to see how far in the toilet I was!

And I'm tellin' ya, they made a mistake
 It adds up to more than I make!
 Everything I got worth havin', they've already took!
 While she's livin' like a queen on alimony,
 I'm workin' two shifts eatin' baloney,
 Askin' myself, "Son, why didn't you just learn how to cook?"

She got the gold mine!
 I got the shaft
 They said they're splittin' it all down the middle
 But they gave her the biggest half
 Well, it all sounds mighty funny
 But it hurts too much to laugh
 She got the gold mine
 I got the sha-a-aft

Well, she got the gold mine!
 I got the shaft.
 They said they'd split it down the middle
 But she got the better half
 Well, it all sounds mighty funny
 But it hurts too much to laugh
 She got the gold mine—I got the sha-a-aft

Easy boys, let me tell 'em about the shaft
 I got the shaft all right
 Appreciate that judge, thank ya
 One good thing about it though folks
 I don't have to worry about carryin' a billfold n'more
 Mama's gonna to have all the money
 Hahahahaha
 All I need's a few food stamps—you understand what I mean!
 A lot sadness in the world
 Boys, if you can figure a way to get me out of this
 I think I would appreciate it

Much later, Reed appeared on Parton's Dolly⁵⁶ show and the two did a duet with a new part from the woman's perspective that's a kick. (It's at YouTube [Parton-Reed]).

18. "The Future's So Bright, I Gotta Wear Shades."

Written by husband and wife duo Barbara K. and Pat MacDonald when they were working in Madison, Wisconsin, and released by their group Timbuk3 in

⁵⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dolly_%28TV_series%29

1986, this New Wave-sounding tune was a Top 20 single and later was featured on numerous CDs and soundtracks.⁵⁷

The song can be taken at face value as a celebration of the value of majoring in "nuclear science" or, in general, of pursuing a college degree or as it was probably intended, a wry commentary on the dangers of life in the age of nuclear weapons.⁵⁸ Sadly, the creators of this very cool tune were later divorced. (Visit YouTube [Timbuk3] for the song).

Lyrics

I study nuclear science, I love my classes
 I got a crazy teacher who wears dark glasses
 Things are going great, and they're only getting better
 I'm doing all right, getting good grades
 The future's so bright, I gotta wear shades, gotta wear shades

I gotta job waiting for my graduation
 Fifty thou a year will buy a lotta beer
 Things are going great, and they're only getting better
 I'm doing all right, getting good grades
 The future's so bright I gotta wear shades, gotta wear shades

I'm heavenly blessed and worldly wise
 I'm a peeping-tom techy with x-ray eyes
 Things are going great, and they're only getting better

I'm doing all right, getting good grades
 The future's so bright, I gotta wear shades, gotta wear shades

Yeah, I'm doing all right, getting good grades
 The future's so bright I gotta wear shades, gotta wear shades

I study nuclear science, I love my classes
 I got a crazy teacher who wears dark glasses
 Things are going great, and they're only getting better

I'm doing all right, getting good grades
 The future's so bright, I gotta wear shades
 I gotta wear shades
 gotta wear shades
 gotta wear shades

19. "Cleopatra: Queen of Denial."

⁵⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timbuk3>

⁵⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Future%27s_So_Bright,_I_Gotta_Wear_Shades

This Egyptian-influenced true romance was recorded in 1993 by Pam Tillis, who received a credit for co-writing the song with Jan Buckingham and Bob Dipieoro.⁵⁹ Dipieoro is a longtime Nashville songwriter⁶⁰ and at one time was married to Tillis;⁶¹ Jan Buckingham also has a lengthy record of achievement in country music.⁶² "Cleopatra:..." is the story of a woman who wants her object of affection to be something he is not, hence her regency in the land of wishful thinking. (Visit YouTube [Tillis] for the song).

Lyrics

Well, I said he had a lot of potential
 He was only misunderstood
 You know he didn't really mean to treat me so bad
 He wanted to be good
 And I swore one day I would tame him
 Even though he loved to run hog wild
 Just call me Cleopatra everybody, 'cause I'm the Queen of Denial

I knew he didn't have any money
 Yeah, that's why he couldn't buy me a ring
 Oh, and just because he bought himself a brand new pickup truck
 Really didn't prove anything
 And he never had to say he loved me
 I could see it every time he smiled
 Just call me Cleopatra everybody, 'cause I'm the Queen of Denial

Oh, Queen of Denial, buyin' all his alibis
 Queen of Denial, floatin' down a river of lies...yeah

Well, I'm not gonna jump to conclusions
 Or, throw away this perfect romance
 Even though I saw him dancin' last night
 With a girl in a leopard skin pants
 Oh, he's probably stuck in traffic
 And he'll be here in a little while
 Just call me Cleopatra everybody, 'cause I'm the Queen of Denial

Oh, Queen of Denial, buyin' all his alibis
 Queen of Denial, just floatin' down a river of lies
 Oh, yeah

20. "2 Become 1."

⁵⁹ <http://www.metrolyrics.com/cleopatra-queen-of-denial-lyrics-pam-tillis.html>

⁶⁰ <http://www.bobdipiero.com/biography.html>

⁶¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_DiPiero

⁶² <http://www.janbuckingham.com/bio.html>

Number 20 was written by Matt Rowe⁶³ and Richard Stannard⁶⁴ with help from The Spice Girls (Victoria Adams, Melanie Brown, Emma Bunton, Melanie Chisholm, and Geri Halliwell) who recorded it in 1996. It's a highly romanticized account of the events leading to an intimate relationship.

What's most notable, for me at least, is the lyrical admonition toward the end of the song, "Be a little bit wiser, baby, put it on, put it on," which seems to allude to the need to wear a condom. Songwriting as not just a mood-setter for sexual activity but as an instruction for responsible intercourse in the Age of AIDS. (Visit YouTube [Spice Girls] for the song).

"2 Become 1" has a breezy pop feel and flow and The Spice Girls bring the lyrics to life beautifully in the video.

Lyrics

Candle light and soul forever
 A dream of you and me together
 Say you believe it, say you believe it
 Free your mind of doubt and danger
 Be for real, don't be a stranger
 We can achieve it, we can achieve it
 Come a little bit closer, baby, get it on, get it on
 'Cause tonight is the night when two become one

I need some love like I never needed love before
 Wanna make love to ya, baby
 I had a little love, now I'm back for more
 Wanna make love to ya, baby
 Set your spirit free, it's the only way to be

Silly games that you were playing
 Empty words we both were saying
 Let's work it out, boy, let's work it out, boy
 Once again if we endeavor
 Love will bring us back together
 Take it or leave it, take it or leave it

Are you as good as I remember, baby, get it on, get it on
 'Cause tonight is the night when two become one

I need some love like I never needed love before
 Wanna make love to ya, baby

⁶³ <http://www.mattrowe-music.com/>

⁶⁴ <http://www.biffco.co.uk/>

I had a little love, now I'm back for more
 Wanna make love to ya, baby
 Set your spirit free, it's the only way to be

Oh, whoa, oh, whoa

Be a little bit wiser, baby, put it on, put it on
 'Cause tonight is the night when two become one

I need some love like I never needed love before
 Wanna make love to ya, baby
 I had a little love, now I'm back for more
 Wanna make love to ya, baby
 I need some love like I never needed love before
 Wanna make love to ya, baby
 I had a little love, now I'm back for more
 Wanna make love to ya, baby

Set your spirit free, it's the only way to be

It's the only way to be
 It's the only way to be

21. "Save a Horse (Ride a Cowboy)."

The final song was written and recorded by Big & Rich in 2004. I heard it performed by a local band at the Wisconsin State Fair several years ago and immediately liked the catchy refrain.

Clearly, Big & Rich are animal lovers, and I'm right there with them.

Acoustic guitars, a banjo, and a fiddle give the tune a country tinge even though the distorted electric guitars and big beat are pure rock. A slow interlude after a Cream-style bridge improbably includes a banjo-picked nod to "Secret Agent Man," first recorded by Johnny Rivers in 1966 and used as title music for the television show of the same name, which was a retitled British show called *Danger Man* starring Patrick McGoohan.

McGoohan was viewed as having made enough money for his sponsors to get free reign for a new program called *The Prisoner* that debuted in the UK in 1967 and the US in 1968. It's the strangest and artiest TV series ever made but lasted just one season.

"Save a Horse..." is all about the boozy life of honky-tonks and men and women on the make—a mainstream celebration of legal highs and spur-of-the-moment romances and a long way from the outlaw country of the 70s.

These guys are happy driving Chevrolets and avoiding the "freak parade," or so they claim, even though the video for the song is staged as a parade featuring a marching band, majorettes, and a drum major; cheerleaders; farmers; bespectacled babes in business suits; a midget; secret service agents; and a variety of other boogieing participants. No freaks though.

It has to be among the more interesting and entertaining videos produced in support of a pop song. (Visit YouTube [Big & Rich] for the song).

Lyrics

Well, I walk into the room passing out hundred dollar bills
 And it kills and it thrills like the horns on my Silverado grill
 And I buy the bar a double round of crown and everybody's getting down
 An' this town hain't never gonna be the same

Cause I saddle up my horse and I ride into the city
 I make a lot of noise cause the girls they are so pretty
 Riding up and down Broadway on my old stud Leroy
 And the girls say, save a horse, ride a cowboy
 Everybody says, save a horse, ride a cowboy

Well, I don't give a dang about nothing, I'm singing and bling-blanging
 While the girls are drinking long necks down
 And I wouldn't trade ol' Leroy or my Chevrolet for your Escalade
 Or your freak parade I'm the only John Wayne left in this town

And I saddle up my horse and I ride into the city
 I make a lot of noise cause the girls they are so pretty
 Riding up and down Broadway on my old stud Leroy
 And the girls say, save a horse, ride a cowboy
 Everybody says, save a horse, ride a cowboy

I'm a thorough-bred, that's what she said in the back of my truck bed
 As I was gettin' buzzed on suds out on some back country road
 We were flying, high fining, wine, having ourselves a big and rich time
 And I was going, just about as far as she'd let me go
 But her evaluation of my cowboy reputation
 Had me begging for salvation all night long
 So I took her out giggin' frogs, introduced her to my old bird dog
 And sang her every Willie Nelson song I could think of and we made love

And I saddle up my horse and I ride into the city
 I make a lot of noise cause the girls, they are so pretty
 Riding up and down Broadway on my old stud Leroy
 And the girls say, save a horse, ride a cowboy
 Everybody says, save a horse, ride a cowboy
 What? What?

Save a horse ride a cowboy
Everybody says
Save a horse ride a cowboy

The songs in this article show naked apes at their imaginative best.

All happen to be American in origin, but I'm certain many, similarly astute, wry, and witty musical observations have been written in other languages and recorded in other nations.

Wit is wonderful because almost without fail it makes us smile, even if its context is tragic as in "I'm The Only Hell Mama Ever Raised."

Also, other than the practically slapstick "You're The Reason Our Kids Are Ugly" and "She Got The Goldmine, I Got The Shaft," these songs don't judge or preach.

They are not mean-spirited, snooty, or sanctimonious and they don't portray existence, events, or decisions as black or white, right or wrong; they are familiar with and understanding of our species condition as aware, our frailties and foibles, our hopes and dreams, our strengths and shortcomings.

My certainty about Jesus' backing The Pack in the astronomically unlikely event he exists—and is a football fan—is exceeded by my conviction that great witty songs that should have been covered never came to my attention, despite my best efforts to find them.

Should you know of one (or more) that is truly a song—not just a title—and that was recorded by a mainstream act or at least one attempting to find an audience and make a buck, please e-mail the title and artist to ted@tswrites.com.

I'd like to expand the list.

* * *

Since finishing the above, seven more witty songs have come to my attention, some suggested by friends, others by readers:

"I Caught A Cold in My Heart," "I've Got A Rose Between My Toes," "Let's Duet," "Two Divided By Love," "Two Story House," "We Too Are One," and "Weed Instead Of Roses."

All are available on YouTube, and someday I might research and write about them.

ted@tswrites.com
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