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King of Jazz
by Lyn Murray

POPS: Paul Whiteman, King of Jazz, by Thomas A. DeLong. New Century, $17.95.

Mr. DeLong has done total research on the life and times of the man he calls the single most important force in American music in the 1920s and 1930s — the discoverer of more major musicians, singers, orchestrators and arrangers than any other impresario of his time; the boisterous ringmaster of a musical circus without whom the jazz-oriented works of Carpenter, Milhaud, and particularly Gershwin, might never have been written.

This is a big book, 360 pages including 102 photographs and indexes listing people, ballrooms, night clubs, theaters and concert halls the Whiteman band played, songs and compositions commissioned and recorded.

All the well-known anecdotes — well known, that is, to those of us who grew up in the era — are here. Jack Teagarden's explanation of the presence of a lady in his lower berth on the train, strictly a no-no when the band was touring: "I was waving goodbye and when I brought my hand home, she just jumped aboard." And dozens of others less hoary. I didn't know, for example, that Bing missed a pre-recording for the *King of Jazz*, a picture Whiteman and the band were making at Universal in 1930, because he was in a Hollywood jail on a drunk-driving rap. And who remembers that John Boles filled in for him?

Whiteman, in the beginning a viola player in the Denver and San Francisco symphony orchestras, along the way became a showman, an impresario with an eye and ear for talent, and the guts to innovate. He harbored no illusions about his show-biz billing as "The King of Jazz". "I know as much about real jazz" he said, "as F. Scott Fitzgerald did about the Jazz Age." Nevertheless he put together a band that enjoyed a spectacular success in very commercial mediums — dance halls, legit and picture theatres, night clubs, on records, in radio. And he discovered and introduced an impressive number of jazz artists both instrumental and vocal. Beiderbecke, Bailey, the Dorseys, Venuti, Rollini, Crosby, etc. But who remembers he gave Johnny Mercer his first break as a performer and writer?

The book is full of detail. The changes in personnel of the band over the years, who arranged what, where and when the great hits were recorded (*Whispering* — 2,500,000 copies sold), what the men were paid, the hoopla, hype and ballyhoo of the grand tours at home and abroad, the drinking, the carousing, the hard work. Whiteman to job seekers: "You must be ready to go anywhere the orchestra goes. You must be ready to toil in the recording studio up to show time, then rehearse between shows and practice by yourself the rest of the night."

The book opens with a gripping account of the seminal Aeolian Hall concert of 1924, a big roll of the dice that paid off largely because of the instant success of the *Rhapsody in Blue*. Gershwin and the *Rhapsody*, in fact, run through the narrative like a golden thread. For the rest of his life Whiteman searched in vain for another *Rhapsody*.

In his declining years he appeared on television, conducted occasional Gershwin concerts, did a stretch as a disc jockey, played Vegas, judged a Miss America contest. Nothing like the glory days. The wheel turns. People forget.

Peter Dean, Paul's manager, on the telephone to a restaurant in the St. Regis hotel: "Could you make a reservation at one o'clock for Paul Whiteman? No... not Whitman, Paul Whiteman. W-H-I-T-E-M-A-N." Paul, from across the room: "Tell that rock and roll son of a bitch to drop dead."

An entertaining and valuable book. Highly recommended.

How to Talk Dirty and Write Lyrics

In the autumn of 911, the Frankish king Charles III, known as Charles the Simple, unable to halt the bloody Viking incursions on his northwestern coast, made the best of a bad situation by coming to an agreement with the marauders. This was the so-called treaty of St. Clair-sur-Epte. Charles allowed them to settle permanently in an area to which in due course they lent their name. They were *nortmanni*, in their own language — northmen. Their new domain became known as Normandy, and nearly a thousand years later some of their far-distant descendants would come from places not yet dreamed of such as Montreal and Winnipeg and Chicago and Wichita and give their lives trying to land once more on its shore.

In return for his undoubtedly reluctant generosity, Charles got an agreement from these men, whose leaders became the dukes of Normandy. They were to keep the other Vikings off his neck, support his monarchy, and speak the language of the country, which was already recognizable as French, a dialect of the soldier Latin left behind by long-vanished Roman garrisons. He thereby initiated a chain of historical events that determined how people who speak English as their primary language actually think, not to mention how they tell jokes, express anger, make love, and write songs. Charles the Simple is, distantly and indirectly, one of the reasons a young man named Mario Savio felt impelled in 1964 to write four letters on a placard and show it around the campus of the University of California of Berkeley. The apparition of these four paltry markings incensed the university's authorities, and chances are that few if any of them knew enough about language to understand why. Other authorities hounded the brilliant philosopher-comic Lenny Bruce to his death for public use of the same word.

Charles the Simple might be called the grandfather or possibly the midwife of the English language. But whatever we call him, had he not allowed the Vikings to settle in Normandy, the Franco-Germanic hybrid we call English would not exist.

The Normans were a ruthless, energetic, bellicose people with a taste and a talent for power. One of their dukes had a son by his mistress, a boy who was called William the Bastard. This is not a flattering name, and so after he defeated the army of King Harold near Hastings in September of 1066 and had himself crowned king of England, he saw to it that he was henceforth known as William the Conqueror. This is called public relations.

Conquerors are notably disinclined to learn the language of their subjects. We may surmise that this is because they are so busy with more important things, such as appropriating land, giving themselves titles, selecting the best of the local girls, and dispensing justice to those who object. In time the conqueror's language is perceived as that of the successful, the rich and the powerful who evolve into an emplaced aristocracy. To this day

names like Beaumont and Clairmont and those with the prefix "de" seem in England to have more "class" than those of Anglo-Saxon origin. Traces of the social strata extant under the Normans are preserved in surnames. Those of craftsmen are English, Baker, Fisher, Hedger, Shepherd, Shoemaker, Wainwright, Weaver, Webber, but those of skilled artisans are French — Carpenter, Draper, Mason, Plumber, Tailor. And of course Irish names beginning with Fitz, corrupted from *fils de*, son of, are all Norman French.

Legal proceedings were conducted in French. This continued until the Plague killed so many people that there were not enough French-speaking judges to go around, and English at last became the language of the courts. But by then the vocabulary of law was almost entirely French, excepting Latin technical terms, and so it remains: *tort, appeal, justice, jurisprudence, arraignment, verdict, illegal.* For nearly three hundred years, until 1362, Parliament (itself a French term) spoke French.

But though the common people learned French, they did not forget their own language, which in our time is refered to inaccurately as Anglo-Saxon. The Angles and Saxons were only two of the Germanic peoples who had brought their languages to England. Old Norse also made up a part of the language, which was already known as English.

Once the flow of French into English was begun, it never ceased. And whereas the first influence was Norman French, Central French variants came in later. Thus we find in English a whole series of separate but related words imported from those two forms of old French — *catch* from Norman French, *chase* from Central French, along with *warden* and *guardian, warrant* and *guarantee, wage* and *gage, reward* and *regard.* Indeed, English preserves many traces of the evolution of the French language that French itself does not. These include any number of words imported twice, both before and after French dropped an s and replaced it with a circumflex accent — *hostel* and *hotel*, for example.

Because the French were the aristocracy, to this day things in French seem so, well, *chic*, that we continue to import French terminology insatiably, adding to the English vocabulary such words as *couturier, coiffeur, chemise, culotte, chef, maitre d'hotel* (now assimilated to the point of the truncated "mater dee"), *hors d'oeuvres, cuisine, a la mode, a la carte, au gratin, au jus*, and *table d'hote*, reflecting a profound admiration for French food and fashions. So great was French pioneering in the field of flight that our vocabulary for it is still extensively French — *aviation, aviator, aileron, fusillage, nacelle, dirigible.*

Latin of course remained the language of scholars. For three centuries, England's literature was not just bilingual but trilingual. There is a "pop" song of the period that contains these lines:

Ma tres duce et tres ame, which in modern French would be *ma tres douce et tres aimee*, or more likely *bien aimee*, meaning "my very sweet and well-loved,"

night and day for love of thee, which of course is English,

supiro, Latin meaning "I sigh".

English continued to borrow from Latin words that had already entered it in their French forms, giving us such pairs as *blame* and *blaspheme, chance* and *cadence, count* and *compute, dainty* and *dignity, fealty* and *fidelity, frail* and *fragile, poor* and *pauper, ray* and *radius, spice* and *species, strait* and *strict, sure* and *secure.*

With their pride of language broken, the English became wanton in their importations from other languages, eventually taking in *shampoo, bungalow* and *pajama* from Hindi, *typhoon* from Chinese and *tycoon* from Japanese, and *alligator* from Arabic through Spanish. An enormous amount of Spanish has come into English through the American southwest, and now the process is accelerating.

But of all the languages to which English is indebted for the richness of its vocabulary, none compares to French. Roughly half the language is French or else derives from Latin words that are also in use in French. The other half derives from so-called Anglo-Saxon or Old Norse. The result is that English seems to have two words, or even more, for almost everything. Those that derive from Anglo-Saxon seem earthier and more immediate than those from French, as in the pairs *freedom-liberty, friendship-amity, hatred-enmity, truth-verity, lying-mendacity, domicile-home.* Consider your own response to those two words, *hostel* and *hotel*, and the Anglo-Saxon synonym, *inn.* An inn seems older, more intimate, cozier, than a hotel, with good plain food and a fire. The words for basic things and concepts tend to derive from Anglo-Saxon, *heaven, earth, hell, love, hate, life, death, beginning, end, morning, night, day, month, year, heat, cold, way, path, meadow, stream.* But we use French or Latin or sometimes Greek words to cope with and express abstractions. When we use a French word instead of the Anglo-Saxon, it has an effect of intellectuality and detachment. English contains the word *crepuscle*, from French *crepuscule*, but it does not have the emotional heat and evocative poetic power of *dusk, twilight, sunset, sundown.*

I have often wondered whether a language shapes the people who speak it or a people develop their language in accord with their own tendencies of temperament. For whenever I become familiar with another language, it seems in exquisite harmony with the general character of the people. The Spanish language, with its elaborate formality, seems like the Spanish people. The German language, with its relentless consistency and inflexible structure, is like the German people in their passion for *ordnung*, or order. And the French language, with its clarity and transparency and wonderful lightness is so like the people who speak it. Only a people who spoke such a tongue could have invented the *souffle.* Or *meringue.*

But in the case of English, I am certain that the nature of the language has shaped the people who speak it. Of course, all of history shapes us. But English has some strange emotional effect.

Let us return to the Anglo-Saxon peasants laboring in the fields for the Normans. Going about their work, they spoke English. But when they surrendered the product of that work to the master, they had to speak French. They raised pigs and cows and sheep and lambs, but when they turned the meat over to the Normans, they called it by its French name — *porc* or *boeuf* or *mouton*, in modern French spelling, or *veal.* (In many French words the l has fallen silent, replaced by u, which is how *veal* became *veau.* English uses the older form of the word.)

The use of French words instead of the available Anglo-Saxon equivalents is one of the ways reality is masked in the thought processes of English-speaking people. I have yet to encounter a psychiatrist or psychoanalyst who had a grasp of this fact.

The horse escaped double-naming. The only thing you can call horse meat is horse meat. And we won't eat it. But the French, the Swiss, and the Italians do. How would you feel about ordering swine flesh in a restaurant? That is what pork is called in German — *das Schweinefleisch.* Would we eat horse if the meat were known as *cheval?* I think we might. Calling it *cheval* would permit us to avoid the pressing awareness of where it came from.

Polite ladies and teachers will still caution the young not to use certain words because they are "not nice" without having any idea of why they are not nice. They are "not nice" for no other reason than that they are, or sound like, or seem like, Anglo-Saxon words, still perceived as the vocabulary of the lowly. For example,

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to avoid the use of the word *belly*, which derives from Anglo-Saxon *belg*, "polite" people say *stomach*, which is grossly inaccurate since the stomach is an internal organ of digestion. But *stomach* derives from the French name for that organ, *estomac*, and therefore seems genteel (from the French *gentil*, meaning kind). A promenade seems to have more "class" than a mere walk. And the verb *promenade* carries a connotation of conspicuous display and self-conscious posturing. Nice people don't sweat, they perspire. An odor is less objectionable than a smell. And it seems to be far more elegant to recline than to lie down, to retire rather than go to bed, to dine than eat.

This psychological bifurcation reaches its extreme in words pertaining to the body. Those Anglo-Saxon words denoting the body and its parts and functions have not only been barred from polite conversation for centuries, they have been literally outlawed until recent times. People could and did go to jail for using them.

The most suppressed word in the English language is a verb for the act essential to the survival of this and every other animal species. There are more than four billion human beings on this planet, not to mention dogs, cats, lions, armadillos, lady bugs and fireflies. And we all got here the same way. The word in question is the only transitive verb for this action. And we are not supposed to use it. Mind you, the French cognate for it is used only in a coy and evasive way in slang expressions such as *fous le camp* and *je m'en fous*. The French use their word for *kiss* to replace it, and then, having thoroughly confused the issue, use their word for *embrace* — demonstrably something done with the arms rather than the lips — to replace *kiss*. But the French cognate of our condemned word has nowhere near the power of shock of the English, which to the day she died my mother would refer to only as "that word". That Word is not, despite a popular theory, an acronym for an old British navy charge For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge. Nor can it be defined as slang. Besides the French cognate, it has another in German, *ficken*, and still others in other languages. In fact it traces back to Sanskrit. When we consider this, we begin to see that there was more to Mario Savio's action than a sophomoric defiance of authority. Whether he was consciously aware of it or not, Savio, in linking that word to the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley, called in effect for the restoration of the English language to unembarrassed and unintimidated use.

Although French too has its delicate evasions, they are nowhere near as extensive as those of English, and those who speak French do not have the same fear of words that the English do, or the same need to conjure euphemisms from the vocabularies of other languages. The result is that many words that are quite "strong" in English from suppression have become weak from casual use in French. A classic example is the word *con*. It is surely not necessary to explain the cognate in English. Add the word *pauvre*. When the French call someone a *pauvre con*, the expression not only does not have the force of its English equivalent, it does not even have the same meaning. It means merely poor guy, poor jerk, and there is even a certain compassion in it. A film that has been advertised and exhibited all over Paris is a comedy called *P'tit Con*. Even today, long after the death of Lenny Bruce, it is unimaginable that a title utilizing the English cognate would be seen on billboards and movie marquees in Canada, Australia, the United States or England.

This word, incidentally, is not Anglo-Saxon; its root is Latin. But it is one of those words that sounds as if it might be Anglo-Saxon. And in any case, the disdain for Anglo-Saxon words lasted for so long that eventually any direct mention of the body became difficult if not impossible for many people. During the reign of Queen Victoria, the polite English person would avoid using the word *leg*, from the Old Norse *leggr*, substituting *limb*, which is in fact Anglo-Saxon but looks as if it might be French, perhaps because of the resemblance to *jambe*. This idiocy went so far that gentlefolk would even speak of the "limbs" of a table, and in time came to find even the sight of them so suggestive that they took to hiding them under long table cloths. Let us pause for a moment to wonder at the neurasthenia of a people who were afraid of being turned on by a table.

It is but a short step from finding the word for something dirty to finding the things itself dirty. The Protestant Reformation did not originate in England, but I suspect — indeed it is my deep conviction — that the structure of the language made its people uniquely susceptible to the Manichaean austerities of the sects we refer to collectively as Protestantism.

Finally, with the rise of Puritanism, at first in England and later in America, certain Anglo-Saxon words were driven completely underground, and it became illegal to print them. This remained so until only about fifteen years ago. And during the centuries of absolute banishment, That Word, as if in retaliation, took on a quality of anger that eventually made it extremely useful in expressing insult or contempt. All the Anglo-Saxon terms for the genitalia and the functions thereof can be used to express anger or insult. In French, the equivalent terms can be used for such purposes, but they have nowhere near the intensity, because the tabu is so much lighter.

In any culture, there is a strong relationship between tabu and humor. What one should not talk about is what is funny to talk about, since it surprises, and surprise is a critical factor in causing laughter. Religious jokes seem to be fairly common in many Spanish-speaking countries, sexual jokes less so. But the latter are probably the predominant form of private joking in English, partly because of the capacity of both the subject and the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary for it to cause shock.

This brings us to the edge of our central subject — the most effective vocabulary to use in writing poetry or lyrics in English.

It is common for teachers and editors to tell students and writers to use small words, as if there were some special virtue in smallness. The reason the small words are so effective is not that they are small but that they are Anglo-Saxon. And lo these 918 years after William the Conqueror crossed the Channel, the old language still has an extraordinary hold over us.

It has been said that we whose primary language is English speak Anglo-Saxon until the age of three or so and then start learning French. And ever afterwards we will by some deep intuition use the old language for matters of the heart and things of the earth and things close to home, and French to soar into imaginative abstraction. A child first learns words like ***hand, foot, arm, leg, mouth, smoke, burn, feel, touch, rain, sun, moon, sleep, wake, love, fish, kiss, sky, stars.***

Cole Porter uses French in the light and sardonic phrase, "Use your mentality, wake up to reality." But when he wants strong images and emotions, he turns to Anglo-Saxon:

> In the still of the night,
> as I gaze from my window,
> at the moon in its flight,
> my thoughts all stray to you.

Johnny Mercer does the same in *I Thought about You:*

> moon shining down
> on some little town
> and with each beam,
> same old dream.

I did pretty much the same thing in this lyric:

> Yesterday I heard the rain
> whispering your name,
> asking where you'd gone.
> It fell softly from the clouds
> on the silent crowds
> as I wandered on.

The Brazilian composer Antonio Carlos Jobim, my sometime

collaborator, became fascinated by the effect of Anglo-Saxon imagery in English. He wrote a song called, in Portuguese, *Aguas de Marco*, in which of course most of the words are derived from Latin. But when he translated it into English — and it should be noted that he wrote the English lyrics himself — he used, he boasted, only Anglo-Saxon words. He is wrong about that. There are a few words from French, such as *joy* and *promise*, in the song. But *The Waters of March* is indeed made up almost entirely of Anglo-Saxon words. And it illustrates a principle stated by T.S. Eliot — that poetry can communicate before it is understood. The lyric hardly even makes sense, but such is the evocative power of the language and the resultant sudden imagery that it is haunting.

Yet for all this vividness of imagery, English has some drawbacks as a language in which to write lyrics, drawbacks that one does not confront in French. For one thing, it is poor in rhyme. There are only four words in English that rhyme with *love* — *above, dove, glove*, and *shove*, with *of* forming, at least in North American usage, a fifth. (In proper British English, *of* rhymes with *suave*.) Since the overwhelming majority of our songs are love songs, this presents a problem — and leads to such endlessly recurring cliches as "that I am dreaming of" and "the stars above". In French, however, there are fifty-one rhymes for *amour*, including the words for *suburb, deaf, short, day, work, drum, tower*, and *around*. Obviously this opens up broad possibilities for rhymed writing on this one subject alone.

The rhythmic character of the French language further enriches its rhymes. There are scores of words that rhyme with *nuage*, meaning *cloud*, including *verbiage, mariage, visage, voyage, pillage, cage, bandage, village, plumage*, and *image*. All these words rhyme in French but not in English. Why? The stress in French is extremely even, balanced, which tends to determine the character of French music. Consider the music of Debussy, so like the French language in its elegant equanimity. Because of this balance, all of the aforementioned words can function as one-syllable or masculine rhymes: mar*iage*, pi*llage*, ban*dage*. But English is a strongly stressed language, and most of those words have what is called a feminine stress, with emphasis on the penultimate syllable. Thus in English only two words on that list rhyme with each other, *pillage* and *village*.

Rhyming in French has been further expanded by the gradual dropping of the sound of terminal consonants. Going back to the words that rhyme with *amour*, we find that it is quite correct to use *faubourg*, meaning *suburb*, because the final g is silent, or *sourd*, meaning deaf, because the d is silent. Furthermore, you can rhyme plural with singular words in French, because the s is mute except before a vowel, in which case you would not be at a rhyme point anyway.

Finally, the option of putting an adjective before or after a noun further opens up the rhyming of French. To be sure, whether you put it before or after the noun subtly alters the meaning. But this alternative has almost disappeared from English. At one time it was quite acceptable to put the adjective after the noun, particularly in poetry, and the practice was unobjectionable as recently as the 1930s. Oscar Hammerstein could without qualms write:

> Someday, we'll build a home
> on a hilltop high...

But I would hesitate to write that today. For better or worse, lyrics have tended toward the natural sequence of normal speech, and in English the rule is now almost infrangible: the adjective preceeds the noun.

Some years ago in Paris, I was translating some of the songs of Charles Aznavour into English. I told him that I envied him and other French lyricists the richness of the language's rhyming. "Yes, it's true," Charles said, "but in practice we end up using the same rhymes over and over again, just as you do in English. It is what comes before them that gives a lyric freshness." That is a sound insight. It takes dogged patience to find a new approach to an old rhyme.

Another advantage of French over English is the device of liaison, the technique of linking syllables in a fluid manner. You pronounce *tres* as *treh*, the s being silent. But if the word preceeds another that begins with a vowel, you sound the s. Thus you would pronounce *tres tard* (very late) as *treh tahr*, but *tres agreable* as *treh zagrayabl*. In either instance, the flow of sound is elegant and smooth. This and other rules of pronunciation render almost non-existent the kind of collisions of consonants that the lyricist in English must seek constantly to avoid. And that avoidance further restricts the writer's choice of words.

Putting it simply, French flows better, and it is my impression that the devices of the language's pronunciation make it possible to sing it faster than English. The magnificent songs of Charles Trenet have, sad to say, fallen from fashion, although Trenet is alive and recently gave a concert in Paris. Back in the 1930s, when Jerome Kern, Harold Arlen, Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz, Irving Berlin and Cole Porter were at the peak of the productivity in America, Trenet in France turned out a body of songs (both lyrics and music) that are among the best of this century, including *La mer*, which has a magnificent lyric, a hymn to the sea that was turned in an American incarnation into the pedestrian love song *Beyond the Sea*. Another of his songs *Que reste-t'il de nos amours?* (what remains of our loves?) fared rather better with the title *I Wish You Love*, although the English lyric has little to do with the original. In any case, I don't think certain of Trenet's songs could have been sung as fast as he was wont to do them had their lyrics been in English, songs such as *Je chante, Pigeon vole*, and *Fleur bleue*.

Much of the better brand of American popular music that was created before the rise of rock is being seen as an art music, and perhaps rightly so. During the period between 1900 and about 1955, these two languages, French and English, produced an astonishing body of exquisite songs. No other language, not Italian, not German, not Portuguese, not Spanish, raised the popular song to such heights. Support for this observation comes from colleagues from other countries in explaining their fascination with American songs. The brilliant Portuguese lyrics that came out of the *bossa nova* movement and the work of such *paroliers* (oh how I wish we had that word in English; it is so much better than *lyricist*) as Newton Mendonca and Vinicius de Moraes were something new to Brazil, and in part inspired by the work of such Americans as Cole Porter. In the case of Vinicius, I am sure French was an influence as well, since he spoke the language and had lived in France. Italian musicians complain to me even now that the tendency of their songs is toward a sticky sentimentality.

What American songs and French songs of the golden age had in common was excellence. In style, subject matter, and content, however, they were quite different. Most of the best American songs came out of musical theater and, to a lesser extent, movies. The songs were at first little interpolations into negligible stories, but later, as musical comedy became more sophisticated, each song was expected to advance the drama or illuminate the characters and situations. The composers usually tried to design several of the songs in a play so that they could stand on their own, be recorded and played on the radio. This ambivalent function was never more brilliantly fulfilled than by Lerner and Lowe in *My Fair Lady* and Frank Loesser in *Guys and Dolls*.

The great French songs came from a different tradition, one growing out of the old music halls and for which there has never really been an American equivalent. This is the individual song written usually for an individual singer — Mistinguette, Maurice Chevalier, Edith Piaf, Jean Sablon, Juliette Greco, Charles Trenet, Gilbert Bécaud, Charles Aznavour, Yves Montand, and the Belgian Jacques Brel. Sometimes the performers were, as in

the cases of Becaud, Brel, Trenet, and Aznavour, themselves the composers of their material. But sometimes, as in the cases of Chevalier and Piaf, the singer was dependent on the output of certain favored composers, with whom they would often work in close collaboration. Piaf's songs were *designed* for her.

Because these songs were meant to be heard in recitals, referred to as *tours de chant* (one-man or one-woman shows that far predated the *Evening with So-and-So* format that emerged later in the United States), they had to have a powerful and unique dramatic character, each of them a free-standing entity, a sort of short story in a setting of rhyme and music. Thus while the average American song was a fragment of dramatic monologue, often written in the second person and addressed to some unseen "you", the French song would often be a first-person narrative, or, not infrequently, an observation of the third person. This use of the third person, which one encounters in Hoagie Carmichael's *The Lamplighter's Serenade*, is comparatively rare in American popular music. Usually the "narrator" of the song, if you will, is himself or herself a participant in the tale. The strong tradition of the objective external observer, which you find in some of the wonderful French lyrics of the late Boris Vian, hardly exists in American popular music, with an exception that I'll come to in a moment.

The American song tended to be thirty-two bars long, with an AABA or ABAB melodic structure. The French song was much more likely to be long-form, to accomodate the subject material. The chanson evolved into a complex tale-unto-itself, like Brel's *Zangra*, often exploring complex and difficult subjects, as opposed to the almost incessant love songs of the United States. Not that France doesn't love love songs. But their character is very different, and the view of the subject has always inclined to be more realistic.

The exception to this pattern in American songs, oddly and interestingly, occurs in country-and-western music, most of which is terrible trash but the best of which is very good and often as interesting as what the Nashville people call uptown music. Good country-and-western songs explore subject matter very much like you encounter in French *chansons*. In the 1940s, Edith Piaf recorded *Jean et Martine*, which is about the worried wife of a truck driver waiting for him to come home. Currently there is a country-and-western song about exactly the same situation. The difference is that in the latter God intercedes and brings the husband safely home through the storm, whereas in the Piaf song the wife learns that he has been killed. The American song of course caters to the religious primitives who form so large a part of the country-and-western audience, but it also reflects a major difference between C&W and French story-telling songs. The former are much more sentimental than French songs.

If Trenet's songs were exuberant celebrations of life, alternated with occasional wistful and gentle explorations of sadder subjects, Piaf's songs are almost universally tragic, and unblinkingly realistic. She was singing her tough narratives about prostitutes when Cole Porter's comparatively pallid *Love for Sale* was barred from American and Canadian radio stations.

An amazing thing happens in older American movies: ladies manage the miracle of becoming mothers without any abdominal enlargment. It seems unlikely that this bowdlerization did anything to protect the morals of children, most of whom were bright enough to notice for themselves the changes that overtook women who were, in one of the euphemisms used to avoid statement of the reality, in a family way. What is more, farm children even knew how they got that way.

It is this lack of suppression, either of language or fact, in French movies, novels, plays, and songs that doubtless inspired the strange British and American belief that the French are a "sexy" people, casual and carefree about dalliance. Of course this belief is a remnant of Victorianism. A people who had to cover the legs of tables and even put frilly ruffles on the legs of pianos were bound to think *any* other people they encountered were sexy. The French just happened to be the closest. While the French may be more casual about discussing what Hamlet calls "country matters", they are not notably more casual about exploring them. They are rather less so than the English, in my opinion. The English, by contrast, have been inclined to do it and never name it, which proclivity is another part of England's psychological legacy to America. The bars and roadhouses of the American South are liberally populated by boozy tarts who would take quick umbrage if you used the Anglo-Saxon words for what it is they are only too anxious to do.

That strange vision of love that never seems to have a physical fulfillment, which is found in hundreds upon hundreds of American songs, goes far back in history to the Manichaean heresy that is also the root of Protestantism.

Manichaeus was born in Persia either in 215 or 216, the son of a father who belonged to a sect that believed in sexual abstinence. After the dreams and visitations from angels that so often and conventionally attend religious conversions, Manichaeus formed his own sect and set forth a cosmogony whose complexity is exceeded only by its lack of accord with reality. In its essentials, it was a dualism, good versus evil, light at war with darkness.

The Manichaean religion died out in China around the Fourteenth Century, but its influence is with us yet. The reason is that it influenced Aurelius Augustinus, who was born in Roman Africa in 354 and is known to us now as St. Augustine of Hippo. Augustine is considered the greatest thinker of Christian antiquity. Significantly, he was a Manichaean for nine years before his conversion to Christianity. Augustine's views were so uncompromisingly severe that they made even other churchmen uncomfortable, and one of them accused him of lapsing back into Manichaeism. Augustine believed that mankind is involved in Adam's guilt and punishment through dependency on the sexual passion for reproduction. He had retained the Manichaean hostility to sex. Spirit is good, matter is bad. Therefore physical life is bad. And the act that makes life is particularly evil. Augustine's views were strongly influential on Calvin, on Janssen, and on the New England Puritans. In downtown Geneva, Switzerland, which was Calvin's birthplace, there is a row of statues of heroic proportions in a park, celebrating Calvin and his disciples. And there stands, larger than life, Roger Williams.

But there was another way that the Manichaean heresy came to shape our lives. By a direct lineage, it gave rise to another heresy, that of the Cathars in northern Italy and southern France, which flourished in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries. The Cathars continued the belief that life was evil. They had a passionate belief in celibacy, did not favor reproduction, and pushed the whole thing to its logical extreme by looking favorably on suicide. Marriage was considered particularly hideous, a sort of institutionalized vice. The highest state was that of being "perfect", which one attained through a ceremony called the *consolamentum*. Such were the rigors of this condition, including abstinence, that most believers put it off until they neared the ends of their lives. This hypocrisy has a familiar ring to us.

The hotbed of this religion was Provence, that haunted and haunting part of southern France whose vision is burned into our minds by Cezanne. And it continued there until it was ruthlessly and bloodily stamped out by the church in actions that developed into the Inquisition.

Now, it was in Provence that our love songs were born.

The vision of romantic love to which the majority of us are addicted was more or less unknown to the Greeks and Romans. Love was not unknown, as witness the story of Ruth and Naomi,

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Eighty percent of everything is crap.
— Theodore Sturgeon

the devotions of Damon and Pythias. Nor was uncontrolled passion, as witness David's deadly love for Bathsheba, and any number of amorous follies in Greek mythology. But a helpless and monogamous lifelong devotion was considered an aberration, even perhaps a form of insanity.

The troubadours of Provence changed that.

Scholars argue about the meaning of the poetry that these songwriters produced. One author claims that they were "eager to clothe the caprice of their senses with mystical grace". Others have held the opposite, contending that the troubadours were Cathars whose love poems were coded celebrations of their own religious experience.

It is a poetry that talks of conspiracy and secrecy and guarded nocturnal meetings and fear of discovery and a yearning for some sort of initiation. Into what? Into the perfect state of the Cathar religion?

Whatever the true meaning of the songs of the troubadours of Provence, it is wise to remember that they came into being where that intensely anti-sexual religion had flowered. The songs are full of longings for kisses that never come. The passions are never consummated, and this very fruitlessness is idealized. Jauffre Rudel wrote these lines:

Car nulhs autres joys tan nom play
com jauzimens d'amor de lonh.

Let us note in passing that the words "joy" and "play" came into English unchanged from that period, while their spellings evolved into *joie* and *plait* in modern French.

The lines translate:

For no other joys so much please me
as the pleasure of love from afar.

Anyone with a good knowledge of American songs will immediately think of these lines:

I reach for you as I reach for a star,
worshipping you from afar...

One of the troubadours wrote of a man who all his life loves a princess whom he has never even met. He meets her in the end only to die in her arms. Was the poet describing the final Cathar initiation at the end of a life?

The tradition finds an echo in this lyric to a lovely song by Richard Whiting:

Will I ever find
the girl in my mind,
the one who is my ideal?
Maybe she's a dream
and yet she might be
just around the corner
waiting for me.
Will I recognize
the light in her eyes
that no other eyes reveal?
Or will I pass her by
and never even know
that she was my ideal?

This is an idealized and essentially asexual vision of love. Since the only possible excuse for doing "it" was that you were *in love with* the object of your ardor, and the only thing you could do about that was to marry her or him, that song actually hints at an entire life lived in celibacy. It was, I believe, Anatole France who said that of all the aberrations of sexual behavior, the strangest was abstinence.

This idealized and asexual vision of love took its deepest hold not in Catholic France but in largely Protestant America. Protestantism, echoing the anti-sexuality of Manichaeus, took root in England, partly, I suggest, because the suppression of the Anglo-Saxon language created an array of unconscious assumptions that made her people particularly susceptible to its guilt-infliction and denial of the physical self. And the extreme Puritans emigrated to America. Little wonder, then, that the vision of love first put forth by troubadours of Provence should spring up again west of the Atlantic.

It is impossible to estimate how much the songs of the 1930s and '40s and '50s, saturating the North American society through radio and records to an extent never before possible, influenced the life outlook of people now over fifty. But song after song told them love would solve everything, once you found Mr. or Miss Right.

The girl that I marry
will have to be
as soft and as pink as a nursery...

Love doesn't solve everything of course. It isn't even a very good cure for loneliness. But generations of Americans grew up with expectations inculcated by an all-pervasive popular music and by movies that ended with a comparatively chaste kiss whose duration was strictly limited by the film industry's censorship system. Because the songs and movies celebrated the heady emotion of *falling in love*, millions of people thought that this temporary exhilaration was love itself, and so, when it ended, moved on to the next marriage. And possibly the next, in a process that became so universal that a sociologist named it "sequential polygamy".

That era of song is ended. Many factors were involved in its fading. Rock-and-roll was a major one. While women's liberation asserted a woman's right to sexual freedom, rock-and-roll reduced women to being mere objects for male gratification, finally leading to a song called *You Don't Have to Tell Me that You Love Me*. Rock-and-roll not only defeminized women. It dehumanized them. Rock-and-roll made "groupie" a new word in the English language, although the phenomenon itself was not exactly new.

American songs of the first half of the Twentieth Century gave us an image of sexless love; rock-and-roll gave us an image of loveless sex. Meanwhile, the pornographers, including Hugh Heffner and Bob Guccione, were destroying the mystery of women even among children browsing at magazine racks. There seems to have been a turn of the wheel in the last few years, signs of a yearning for the older kind of song that idealized love. Willie Nelson recorded an album of old standards, including the timeless and exquisite *Stardust*, and it became a best-seller. Linda Ronstadt did an album of older songs, and its sales too went into the millions.

It was once accurate to say that the French made comedies about sex while the Americans made tragedies about it. But boudoir farce is now common in America. This is in part a result of the changed emotional climate of which the freer use of certain Anglo-Saxon words is both a consequence and a cause.

As for English, that hybrid tongue once confined to a small island country, it has become the first true world language. It is second only to Mandarin Chinese in the number of people who speak it, and to none at all in area of diffusion. About 300,000,000 people speak English as their primary language, and another 120,000,000 as their secondary language. No one knows how many people speak it as a foreign language.

And it is growing, not only in the number of persons who speak it but in the size of its vocabulary, partly due to its capacity to create new words from within — *contrail*, for example, from *condensation trail* — and partly to its unimpeded importations from other languages, including *discotheque* from French and *macho* from Spanish. An unabridged general dictionary of English now contains about 500,000 entries. Language experts say that dictionaries of 750,000 entries will soon be in general use.

And all this, the songs and the profanity and the neuroses and this expanding language, because of Charles the Simple. And his treaty of St. Clair-sur-Epte.