

Blue Skies From Now On

Weather Motifs in Popular Song

Jody Berland

*It began in mystery, and it will end in mystery, but
what a savage and beautiful country lies in between.*¹

— Dianne Ackerman

*Eros that has found its object drives the negative,
nonbeing, into the background, like a shadow.*²

— Francesco Alberoni

*Blue days, all of them gone:
nothing but blue skies, from now on.*³

— Irving Berlin

My love is like a heat wave, and I see a new sun, up in a new sky. I'm spreading sunshine all over the place; I'm walking on sunshine, ooh ooh, you are my sunshine, it'll be blue skies from now on, the sun shines bright and I'm alright, cos I'm in love, life can be so sweet on the sunny side of the street. I'm painting the clouds with sunshine, that's the way its gonna be, no shadows, no time, and there's nary a cloud to spoil my perfect happiness.

But oh! my love has left me, and my heart is blue; it's raining in my heart, the clouds block the sun, it's stormy weather, the sun ain't going to shine any more, when I'm without you, and the rain patters interminably on the window pane. It must be teardrops: drip drop, drip drop, drip. . . . I'm stuck lonely here, thinking about somewhere over the rainbow, guess I'll hang my tears out to dry, and time lasts forever.

What could be more natural, more sublime? What better way to evoke the pains and pleasures of romantic love, then to recreate love in the image of a magic, sentient natural

world? And who could, or would want to, rise above these most natural, time-honoured, possibly sacred metaphors of emotion?



Throughout the twentieth century, weather metaphors have proliferated in the repertoire of popular songs. The popular songwriter/singer – for the recorded song performance represents an amalgamation of these two figures, even when they are separate people – strikes a chord by articulating the state of being in love in tune with the musical and cultural conventions of the time. If we are to judge from the repertoire of 20th century pop, he/she more often than not achieves this resonance by describing his or her condition in terms of metaphors supplied by observable nature. The experience of the ecstatic or tragic states of romantic extremity could thus be depicted in terms of a poetic uniting of inner and outer “climates”: sun, rain, fog, storm, and wind have been commonly associated with joy, sadness, gloom, passion, change, and loss. Significant inversions of such associations have been created: *I don't care if the sun don't shine, I get my lovin' in the evening time – when I'm with my baby*. That's Patti Page in 1950. The tune, the words, the sentiment – what a bad girl! But defiant gestures like this one depend equally on the conventional meaning – making capacities of nature, so they do little to displace the hegemony of the weather trope in the romantic imagination. This is particularly so in the “classic” era of the love song, between 1927, say, with the first recording of Irving Berlin's “Blue Skies,” and the end of the 1950s.

To understand the prominence of this lyrical and musical tradition, we have to take into consideration the conservative influences on lyric writing of Tin Pan Alley, radio programmers, and generally the culture industries of the time. Popular culture of the late 1920s was characterized by the rise of radio and a new mass audience for music (American radio programming was about 75% music); this led to a series of “moral panics” about the (sexual and racial) content of the music now carried into everyone's living rooms. The result was a reactive flurry of censorship and self-censorship strategies in radio, as in film and other domains of popular culture. Producers and performers were pressed to clean up and contain the “get-down” qualities of jazz and black popular culture in general.

By the end of the 1920s, most popular song texts dealt exclusively with personal emotions, and more specifically, with romantic love. As lyric writing changed, the expressive range of popular song narrowed. This narrowing has been attributed to two factors: the evolution of the craft of lyric writing, and the changing demands of the medium, as

popular songs began to be written for Broadway shows and motion pictures.⁴ This led to an explosion of “moon in June” lyrics for popular performers whose music had previously featured frank references to sex, money, and other realities of urban everyday life.⁵

These are powerful historical trends whose effects are incontestable. But I’m not sure they altogether explain the pervasiveness, the poetic range, and the deep emotional effectiveness of weather metaphors in so many popular songs of the era. Nothing seems more natural than nature, except maybe love; at least this is what lovers and others evidently felt in experiencing this culture, these feelings, these songs. Yet this same nature seems to have been a fickle one, for the era came and left us, and notwithstanding the current Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennett revivals, which permit us to listen to these songs once again, we are now living in another time. We hear the old songs differently.

It is difficult to summarize their meanings with any one phrase. For love outlasted the weather (*rain or shine, nothing ever changes my love for you*), reflected the weather (*my love is like a beat wave*), was itself the weather (*it’s raining in my heart*), saved a lover from the weather (*you don’t have to walk in the rain anymore*), or ignored it altogether (*I don’t care if the sun don’t shine, I’m going to love you, come rain or come shine*). Love prayed to the weather (*shine on, sunshine: who knows what will be tomorrow; lucky old sun, with nothing to do but roll around heaven all day*), and even had power to change the weather, as in Berlin’s classic:

Blue days, all of them gone:
nothing but blue skies, from now on.
I was blue, just as blue as I could be, so blue.
Every day was a cloudy day for me, that’s true.
Then your love came knockin’ at my door.
Skies were grey, but they’re not grey any more.
Blue skies, smiling at me;
nothing but blue skies, do I see.

What conclusions can be drawn about the cultural contexts and effects of this metaphoric association? What can be known about its powerful grasp on our parents’ and grandparents’ emotional imagination? How can the persistence of its auratic lure be explained?

Above all, the metaphoric connection between the elements of weather and conditions of romantic love helped to identify love as a state of passive receptiveness to forces stronger than the lover herself. It described and gave form to a heightened emotional

condition in which the limits of the self were momentarily suspended, in which the singer found herself in a liminal space connecting heightened emotional consciousness and a powerful, sentient natural environment, in much the same way that writers have long described the pleasures of natural beauty, “as tending towards an ideal of ‘oneness with nature’ or as leading to a disclosure of ‘unity’ in nature.”⁶

Representations of love in the twentieth century have thus participated in a very old tradition of associations between nature, ecstasy, and the suspension of self. Yet the assumed universal temper of this “structure of feelings” is belied by the transitoriness of the trend. For this nature no longer defines the temperament of Anglo-American popular culture. Popular songs have changed dramatically in their representations of love; and the sun and the rain are no longer reliable metaphors, they no longer necessarily carry the same meanings. The romantic/nature narrative of popular song was more or less shattered by rock and roll, wherein love has figured predominantly as something that could be won or, alternatively, lost, perhaps by theft, like a car.⁷

In the earlier narrative, stretching from the rise of the recording industry (phonograph records were available in the teens, but became a major industry, aided by film, in the 1920s) to the multi-generic 1950s and after, love was something that came knocking at your door. If love smiled, it brought a happy, sunny state. (In those days, the sun could still be unconditionally celebrated.) If the lover turned his or her back and walked away, the narrator was the victim of both grief and rain. Clearly this was a time when the pathetic fallacy held supreme. Nature and the self embraced in a tender rhyme, and nature was usually the stronger part of the equation.

On Sex

*Love is to the human being as rain is to the grass and sunshine to the rose.*⁸
— Anthony Walsh

*The female responds to the stimulation of the male at the right moment
just as the tree responds to the stimulation of the warmest days in spring.*⁹
— Jeffrey Weeks

According to a prominent stream of twentieth-century thought, love is founded on biological instinct and manifested in chemistry. In *The Science of Love*, a recent quasi-academic popularization of neo-Darwinist theory, Anthony Walsh describes love as a series of

chemically induced responses to emotional stimuli whose adaptive, sexual, and reproductive functions are clearly explicable.¹⁰ This theme is reinforced in a recent feature article on love in the *Toronto Star* (May 1, 1994), whose author confirms the genetic, chemical basis of sexual attraction, and explains men's stereotypical preferences with regards to women's faces, bodies, and age as a natural consequence of evolutionary, gender-defined instinctive impulses which seek survival through reproduction. Nature which here visually and narratively takes the place of Cupid is thereby evoked as the most reasonable and beneficial explanation for the experience of love. Because of nature's providence, each gender (as Walsh argues in some detail) has its own needs and forms of loving, which have emerged from the gender-defined natural requirements of instinct and evolution.

Notable throughout this literature is the influence of Darwin, which by the end of the nineteenth-century had come to shape the parameters of thinking in the West about human, and other, nature. Darwin's research suggested that the behaviour of humans, like animals, was formed by historical interaction between evolution and instinct. By emphasizing the natural basis of human needs, his theories offered scientific justification for new perspectives on human sexuality. As Havelock Ellis wrote in the early part of this century, each sex must follow "the laws of its own nature." While challenging scientific thought, these beliefs were also widely disseminated across a newly urbanized, mediatised popular culture. For the early twentieth-century spawned an explosion of popular media, including radio and sound recordings, film, and the periodical press. The contexts for such transmissions ranged from popular science to (more relevant for our purposes) popular psychology and personal advice literature, and, albeit more indirectly, movies and popular music.

In the wake of these processes, people living in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed a cataclysmic cultural change. The official discourses on sexuality, previously preoccupied with determining moral attributes predicated on the concept of *sin*, declined in favour of a new interest in and legitimation of human biological attributes predicated on the concept of an instinct-driven human *nature*. The focus on nature and natural instinct helped to legitimate sexual desire, although it also worked to marginalize less-approved sexual practices, for with the notion of natural instinct came a new conceptualization of disease as antithesis to the "normal" in the domain of sexuality.¹¹

The new scientific focus on the instinctual aspects of human desire was introduced to medical science by Darwin and Freud. Both helped to relocate sexual desire as a necessary part of human nature – at least, initially, for men. Women were still problematic, but their dubious status shifted from a biblical to a medical paradigm. In deference to the

legitimizing power and prestige of medical science, sex was consequently (if gradually) redefined in the culture; it was now recognized as both natural and necessary, indeed, as a central feature of the human psyche. This transformation was initiated during the Victorian era, whose populace was thereby able to approve of sex so long as it was spiritual in purpose, moderate in practice, and legally sanctioned by marriage. In fact, “the Victorians,” claims Steven Seidman, actually “exalted [sex] as a benevolent power,” believing that “the very progress of humanity was anchored in the sex instinct.”¹² This is agreeably consistent with the concept of evolution, which for the first time bonds together instinct and progress. But “The obverse side to assuming the power of sex is its potential danger. The Victorians imagined a drama of an omnipresent powerful sex drive propelled toward pleasure but susceptible to the dangers of excess and ruin. Self-control and the spiritualization of desire would make possible an autonomous self and civilized society.”¹³

Naturally the ascendancy of the biological paradigm did not altogether displace the dominant mores and strictures regarding acceptable sexuality and sexual behaviour, particularly (needless to say) with regards to women. The notion of human instinct came to be widely accepted, but it coexisted in a state of unresolved conflict with the continuing demand for *dispassionate* self-restraint and adherence to those moral and sexual codes already sanctioned by religious and other beliefs. People found themselves driven to resolve the sometimes considerable tension between their sexual desires, now legitimated as a function of natural instinct, and the still dominant values of sexual restraint and monogamous heterosexual love, which were being reshaped and restored as marriage came to be re-situated within the shrinking confines of the nuclear family. Romantic marriage was proffered as the acceptable solution to such conflicts.

Marriage was in this way redefined in the early part of the century as the essential affective core of the nuclear family. As a result of extended debates and negotiations between progressive reformers and feminists on one hand, and public officials, moralists, and experts on the other, marriage emerged as a new companionship of equals, a partnership, and a positive and healthy context for the satisfaction of otherwise dangerous natural instincts. Moderate sexual activity and an equitable sexual harmony between partners – a new concept for the culture, and equally for the professions – came to be advocated as the foundation of a good marriage. Seidman claims that the “sexualization of intimacy” created out of this negotiation was one of the most important legacies of Victorian culture.¹⁴

Of course this resolution was not always an uncontroversial or painless process. The sexual and affective culture, like the lives of its practitioners, was driven by a tension between naturalistic and scientific paradigms – the belief that nature demanded a strong



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RECORDS

STEREO

JOY is like the Rain



- JOY IS LIKE THE RAIN
- ZACCHEUS
- SPEAK TO ME, WIND
- COME DOWN, LORD
- SPIRIT OF GOD
- IT'S A LONG ROAD TO FREEDOM
- HOWL, MY SOUL
- PILGRIM SONG
- HOW I HAVE LONGED
- TEN LEPERS
- GOD GIVES HIS PEOPLE STRENGTH
- WEDDING BANQUET

ORIGINALS BY THE MEDICAL MISSION SISTERS

sexual instinct – and traditional moral codes which emphasized appropriate gender behaviour and the renewed centrality of marriage. This tension reached its peak in the early decades of the twentieth-century, when both sets of beliefs were at their strongest. This is also when weather metaphors blossomed in the repertoire of popular song. The attempt to express, contain, and legitimate desire in accordance with conflicting paradigms helped to generate some of the poignant, humorous, and melancholic aspects of romantic songs in this period. Singers appealed to the evident coherence of familiar signs of nature – to the rain, the sun, rainbows and clouds, blue skies and storms – as an imaginative and affective anchor for their passionate but potentially incoherent or unmanageable selves.

The “scientific” sanctioning of (marital) sex that occurred during this period gained much symbolic and emotional power from the particular shaping of experience accomplished by romantic songs and films. The reshaping of sexuality was in fact so successful that ironically, over time, sex itself began to win relative autonomy from the marriage it had initially been sanctioned to sustain. This offers one explanation for why nature motifs function rather differently in songs recorded later, in the post-Tin Pan Alley, rock and roll period beginning roughly in the mid 1950s.

On Metaphor

According to a contemporary pragmatic philosopher studying concepts of emotion, there are two dominant “folk metaphors” for love in our culture. The first: As love increases, its physiological effects increase. The second: There is a limit beyond which the physiological effects of love impair normal functioning.¹⁵ This “folk model” tells us that

if we are really in love we are unable to function normally. Inability to function normally in love involves a lack of control over love. Since the maximal degree associated with “real” love involves a lack of control over love and since we have the responsibility to control our emotions, we have to make a choice. We have to decide whether we want love (together with a lack of control) or whether we want control over love (in which case, however, there is no room for ‘real’ love *as it is defined by our culture*). [emphasis added]¹⁶

The metaphor of love as an overwhelming natural force (usually associated with the early days of a love affair, with all its wild projection and confusion) plays an important role in the mediation of this paradigmatic conflict. Falling is something that happens to us and not something that we do: love may feel like the sun, but it is as much beyond our control as a thunderstorm. As Kovecses observes, this is the dominant love metaphor of

our culture. From this metaphor, others flow: for instance, in

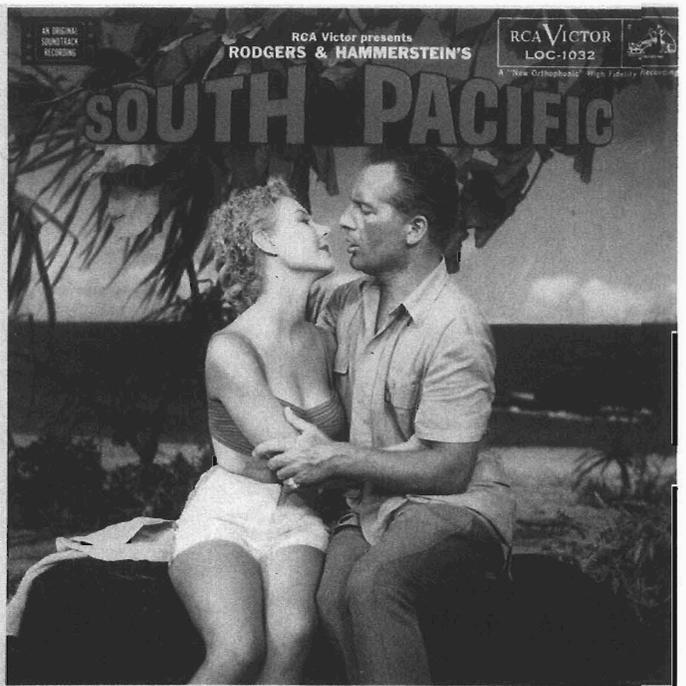
one of the most widely used metaphors for love: LOVE IS A PHYSICAL FORCE. According to this metaphor a person in love is like a physical object that obeys a larger physical force. . . . The object of the force cannot do anything but obey the physical force. This way of conceptualizing love has the consequence that love is viewed as something for which we are not responsible and in which we have no choice.¹⁷

There is of course another, more diffuse narrative attached to this metaphor, the narrative of the natural feminine, variously attached to “Mother Nature” (in the positive sense) or to “terrifying maternal swamps, mountains, seas, inhabited by sphinxes and gorgons.”¹⁸ Here women, nature, pleasure, and danger are identified as parts of a single symbolic order, from which the (male) ego either separates himself, in an act of autonomous assertion (*I’m singing in the rain. . .*), or to which he submits (*It must be raindrops, cos a man ain’t supposed to cry*) with the potential consequence of voluptuous pleasure and/or the dangerous loss of self.

The weather metaphor functions then as a kind of counter-anthropomorphic displacement of pleasure/danger in the romantic topography. Rather than working through the gendered anxieties of love through clearly coded moral figures, we find instead the apparently stable figures of sun and rain, which suddenly themselves begin to shift. For rain doesn’t only mean sadness or loss; it also stands in for fate, submission, and/or submersion, which can be viewed positively (*Thunder only happens when it’s raining*, Stevie Nicks; *Here comes the rain again*, Annie Lennox) as well as dismally or oppositionally. Rain easily represents an unsolicited or unmanageable event, but the singer/narrator can position herself in any number of ways in relation to its effects.

The cultural construction of nature/physical force as a power overwhelming the individual will was certainly reinforced by, and to some extent was culturally constituted through, the conventional narratives of popular songs. For “popular song lyrics through the early 1950s placed love mainly in the hands of fate. The singer played an essentially passive role, waiting for a permanent love relationship to ‘happen.’”¹⁹ Of course it was not only the directives of nature (meteorological or otherwise) which caused people to feel passive, overwhelmed, to identify with singers who seemed subject to predetermined forces – many aspects of life in the twentieth century have conspired to produce such feelings. Similarly, these are not the only felt components of romantic love. But romantic lyrics succeeded in conflating these so that they become part of a fused, poetic experience that was understood to be a central and natural feature of (submitting to) romantic love.

Precisely because of the successful fusing of love and fate – and also because what



could be more successful at “naturalizing” feeling than nature? – it is easily assumed that the Western association of love with the vicissitudes of weather is universal. After all, this association can be found as early as 1709, in Alexander Pope’s “Pastorals,” wherein the beloved’s responses to the narrator-lover orchestrate the very weather:

All nature mourns, the Skies relent in showers,
Hushed are the birds, and closed the drooping flowers;
If Delia smile, the flowers begin to spring,
The skies to brighten, and the birds to sing.²⁰

Indeed throughout the tradition of Western culture, and many other cultures as well – in the literatures of India, of China, and so many others – the beloved is invoked in a setting of cheerful sunlight, singing birds, meadows, and the flowers of spring or summer, while present sorrow is invoked by an autumnal or wintry setting.

But nature metaphors do not always structure the narratives of love; when they do, they do not necessarily represent an overwhelming physical force. They rarely do, for instance, in popular songs of the nineteenth century. In the lyrics discussed by music historian Charles Hamm, for instance, nature often makes an appearance, but it is a picturesque nature: seasonal, formal, clearly metaphorical – by which I mean that it is phenomenologically separate from the experience of the body – and so kept at a decorous distance.²¹ Precisely by being picturesque, it is not a sublime or powerful nature. It does not overcome the ego boundaries of the singer and, though it may help figure the emotions of grief or joy, it is not transformed by them.

The reshaping of natural metaphors that emerges in the 1920s and remains dominant through the 1950s is part of the larger cultural process of redefining love in the early twentieth century. This process of redefinition has been observed by social historians who trace such change in the realm of sexual activities, mores and values. These changes don’t occur on their own, however, but in complex relation to cultural forms, practices, and technologies, including urbanization, changing family structures, and the growing idealization present in the commodities of popular culture; and to metaphor and belief, all of which contribute to shaping experiences of emotion, love, and desire.

The realm of love is particularly saturated with metaphor and could not readily be apprehended without it. As Alberoni reminds us about the “state” of falling in love, “the nascent state is a proliferation of signs.”²² We read these in nature, too, as though we could find here what is meant or missing in love’s body. Of course signs are organized

according to codes, to structures of meaning, to metaphors. Most of our understanding of basic emotions like anger, pride, and love comes via a number of what Kovecses calls “basic-level metaphors.” Basic-level metaphors are explanations of anger, pride or love in terms of known aspects of the physical world, like heat, struggle, fire, physical unity, physical force, or economic value. Such concepts “are information-rich and rich in conventional mental imagery. . . ; historically,” he adds, “the basic-level concepts can . . . be said to have partially created the concepts of ANGER, PRIDE AND LOVE.”²³ In other words our concepts of love, as well as of nature, have been partially formed by metaphoric constructions brought to us by decades of popular songs. These concepts may be housed in our minds, but they are lived and felt more tangibly in our bodies, which seem thereby to articulate the very essence of nature.

Do these familiar metaphors and omnipresent images, these evergreen songs, actually help us to understand love? There can be no doubt about it – they not only accompany us through the experience, they help to define its shape. We do not necessarily think of this experience being shaped thus, because of the intensity with which it is lived through the body. If anything on earth feels “natural” to us, it is the physical-emotional state of being in love, which informs us that we have attained a pure state of nature. Whether or not we apprehend this state as being chemically induced, we are acutely aware of the physiological changes that accompany it. Our bodies turn hot and cold, the world seems sharp and clear, the entire universe manifests itself in heightened ways, and we suddenly live in our bodies, and therefore in the world, in a new way. Fortunately, in the midst of potential chaos, familiar concepts come readily to hand: the beloved’s smile glows like the sun, loneliness is like the cold, dreary, interminable rain, our eyes cry like the downpouring sky, the wind bodes change, the lover’s name is whispered by the trees, the skies have turned a bright happy blue. Seasons come, forever recurring, seasons go. These image-concepts are crucial to the ways we mediate between the physiological experiences we have come to know as love, and our cultural beliefs, social needs, and personal strategies, all of which help construct our relationships as social institutions. For they mediate between two potentially incompatible constructs of love: the “falling” state, and the permanent state.

But do these metaphoric structures help us to understand nature? When I began this investigation, I was sure that they did not. I assumed that nature was again being appropriated for diverse human needs while we humans remained characteristically oblivious to the otherness of the rest of nature. After all, “nature” doesn’t ordinarily consider rain an unhappy event! And rain itself isn’t precipitated by heartbreak, it’s made from water condensation! All this is true, and it is still central to my argument. But I have to admit that

it also seems more complicated. For nature is not just "out there." In love, as in utopia, we lose the solid boundary between here and there, past and future, you and me, nature and the human soul. That is why, in the end, we arrive at the limit of metaphor as a route to understanding these songs.

On Nature

Many of these songs ("Stormy Weather," etc.) imply a strong interrelatedness between human actions and weather. In many of the lyrics, weather is assumed to be sensitive to human moods, needs, and dispositions. We could argue that weather is usually invoked in a purely metaphorical way, as something separate from but similar to the emotional state of the singer, but nevertheless, in the writing/performance of the song, the boundaries between inner and outer space are poetically blurred, in something like the way that the boundaries between inner and outer space are blurred through the very act of singing, the very fact of music itself. Our poets so often express this blurring through references to weather because nature's cycles, and the natural landscape generally, have already been endowed with meanings that convey something intelligible about this experience.

Sex was not the only important product of nineteenth century American culture. Another was the unique symbolic fusion of civilizing aspirations and primal nature that characterized the landscape of the New World. The landscape was there to be conquered, possessed, loved, by its thereby legitimated conquerors: in coming to terms with this landscape, Americans and Canadians founded a new pastoral ideal which invested in nature the emotions formerly reserved for God.²⁴ Nature retained its sublime aspects long after the romantic aura of pastoral illusions had receded before the combined deterrents of work, actuality and the new technological sublime; as Neil Smith has observed, "The end of romanticism did not however mean the end of universal nature."²⁵

As I have noted, this is not the landscape one tends to discover in the tidy stanzas of nineteenth century popular song. Nature remained distant, a visual object or territory rather than an internal space. In the popular love song of the modern era, the landscape rediscovers some of its sublime powers, but its horizons are narrowed to the personal horizons of the desiring lover. In these songs there is no surrounding, except possibly a window; no other person, except perhaps a rival; no extended family, no job, no city aside from the laneway beneath the feet. In a sense, there is no "nature" as we currently understand the term, either. The desire to be immersed in outer nature, which will become characteristic of the urban dweller of the late twentieth century is anticipated by this romantic desire

to be immersed, to be lost, in the intimate sensual landscape of love, where time and space can for a moment disappear.

In the ways urban dwellers visit the natural landscape, Neil Smith writes, the “externality” of nature is “replaced by universality, at least for the weekend.” The idea is to become one with it, to lose the too-present sense of oneself in its alternative temporal and spatial universe. For the poetic journey into nature “starts off where the scientific journey ends;” the poetic journey begins from the externality of nature which it strives to universalize, while “the scientific journey accepts the universality of nature – as matter or as space and time – which it strives continually to convert into an external object of labour.”²⁶ If rain begins as an externality of nature, its otherness is partially transcended in the melancholic song to lost love. We go toward it, while it comes toward us. For rain then comes to *mean* melancholy, loss, sadness, as a result of a poetic-anthropomorphic projection quite foreign to most country dwellers. In other words, this is a constructed nature, which thereby comes to life both in the landscape, and in our bodies.

In some of these songs, the singers defy the natural elements in favour of their own more powerful feelings – *I’m singing in the rain, I’m happy again; I don’t care if the sun don’t shine, when I’m with my baby; long as I can be with you, it’s a lovely day*. This subject doesn’t care about the elements, metaphorically or otherwise. Usually, however, external and internal temperatures form a unity of experience suffused with (and defined by) the common qualities of feeling and weather: heat, skin, opening surfaces, enclosed bodies, colour, the poignant eternities of change. In realizing this poetic unity, the singer seeks to escape the boundaries of the self while declaiming on the most intimate of powerful feelings. That is what these songs teach us to understand of and to wish for in romantic love. All the accumulated barriers of the self are supposed to fall down as we fall forward into oneness with the other. The lover is magical and unique because only he or she can initiate that collapse of boundaries. Selves are fused with the universe, while the lover, like the mountains and trees, remains a magical other.

It is because we have bodies that we can no longer call this trope a metaphor.

On Revolution

Durkheim wrote the following of people experiencing a revolutionary upheaval:

A man who experiences such sentiments feels himself dominated by outside forces that lead him and pervade his milieu. He feels himself in a world quite distinct from that of his own private existence. This is a world not only more intense but also qualitatively different... [These

forces] need to overflow for the sake of overflowing, as in play without any specific objective. . . . At such moments, this higher form of life is lived with such intensity and exclusiveness that it monopolizes all minds to the more or less complete exclusion of egoism and the comonplace.²⁷ As Francesco Alberoni observes, this is precisely the same as the condition of falling in love:

At these times, sexuality becomes the means by which life explores the frontiers of the possible, the horizons of the imaginary and of nature: the nascent state. . . . The nascent state is a proliferation of signs. In this process, which encompasses the present and the past, nature too is involved. Rain and sunshine, the shape of a cloud grow rich with values, come to signify something that is connected with the beloved and with our love for her; they have a meaning, indicate a direction. Since there is an obstacle, since the other person is different, since her response is never absolutely certain or at least never perfectly suited to the question, the most casual incidents, things, combinations become signals for interpretation, invitations, denials, omens. Every place where something significant happened becomes sacred. Love produces a sacred geography of the world.²⁸

On Love

*It's right as the rain, that falls from above,
and fills the world with the bloom of our love.*²⁹

— Tony Bennett

The connections between weather and love songs draw our attention to the apparently “natural,” but actually changing, status of both “weather” and “love” as they have been joined together in myth, metaphor, and dominant symbolizations of nature in popular culture. Both have evolved from the “naturalist” innocence of the 1920s, or the 1940s and 1950s, and even through the 1960s, at least insofar as summertime songs go, when spring and summer, youth, sun, and romantic happiness are invariably connected,³⁰ to the more skeptical concerns of the 1990s (when acid rain coexists with a more acidic attitude towards “natural” paradigms and permanence of love).

In 1955, nearly 85 percent of all popular songs still concerned “different stages in the ‘drama of courtship.’” By 1959, songs contained more nearly explicit mention of sexual matters than would have been allowed previously. Factors contributing to this change included the influence of black performers and singers appearing in Top 40 stations. By 1966, only 65 percent of popular song hits concerned stages in the courtship process.³¹

By then, as Carey observed, the mood of popular music was “more sensual, direct, sexual and ‘gutsy’.” Romance is no longer a precondition for sex – love does not necessarily mean permanence – and lyrics reject the earlier passive orientation toward boy-girl relationship. . . . The affair was actively sought by the lovers rather than passively longed for, (while) love often seems to have been reduced to physical attraction.³²

In addition to the changes that can be detected over time, there are other important differences in terms of how people situate themselves performatively in relation to nature and sex. It may seem that the subject of rain provides a universal grammar; for instance, sadness, disorder, interminability, the defeat of the lonely individual by a larger force, a world that is cold and impervious. *Into each life some rain must fall; but too much is falling in mine*, as one song puts it. But as we’ve already seen, there are interesting differences. Annie Lennox celebrates rain (*Here comes the rain again*), as does Stevie Nicks (*Thunder only happens when it’s raining*), Jackie Moore (*I wish it would rain down*), and (of course, differently) Madonna. Men seem normally to sing about rain as something that can be overcome (*I’m singing in the rain, it’s a lovely day to be caught in the rain*) or used, whether to corner a woman or to disguise emotions that could not be overcome in a manly way (*it must be raindrops, cos a man’s not supposed to cry*). But how far can we go with this? At least before 1970, men wrote most of the songs.

Melancholic rain interferes with the preferred order. Sun bespeaks the unimpeded pleasures of the narcissistic individual. Weather, however, introduces a different telos. I can air these speculations because I have appropriate concepts available to me: the history of sexuality, the production of nature, the dialectics of the body. Sex, like the weather, has become available as a quantitative abstraction in our culture.³³ Our culture produces sex as an independent concept lifted from the intimacy of the concrete and thereby made available for different types of consideration. It has been redefined as a material, rather than an ideal, entity; it is corporeal, not cosmic; in other words it is part of modern nature. In consequence there are more choices, more removable parts, more possibilities for agency and intervention, more visible and invisible dangers, a different kind of a past, a more uncertain future. There are more meanings in the rain.

In these transitional years, however (and we are still living this transition), nature and culture cohabit in an uneasy, often sentimentalized, often eloquent and powerful disequilibrium. Fidelity, loyalty, and the pledge to eternal love still claim nature as their inspiration. If untoward sexual enthusiasm or other deviance causes the lover to violate the social codes, this too can be blamed on nature – *Lightning striking again, and again, and again. . . .* And as sex gains its ideational autonomy from the older styles of romance, again it is

nature that provides the sensory contours and felt meanings. But this is an altered nature, a newly fragile and differently articulate nature that is beginning to speak through the songs, not to mention our bodies, our hearts. "*I dreamed. I dreamed I was falling through a hole in the ozone layer*" (Deee-Lite). This suggests that we are going to have to invent it all over again.

Notes

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6. R.W. Hepburn, *"Wonder" and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 17.
7. James Carey, cited in Hirsch et al., "The Changing Popular Song: an Historical Overview," in *American Popular Music: Readings from the Popular Press*, ed. Timothy E. Scheuerer, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1989).
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9. Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (London: Longman, 1981), 147.
10. Walsh, 188-91.
11. Weeks, passim.
12. Steven Seidman, *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830-1980* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 18-19.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., 94.
15. Zoltan Kovecses, *Metaphors of Anger, Pride, and Love: A Lexical Approach to the Structure of Concepts* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co, 1986), 87-88.

16. Ibid., 88.
17. Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 106.
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19. Hirsch et al., "The Changing Popular Song," 177.
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22. Alberoni, 37.
23. Kovecses, 117.
24. Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 12.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 14.
27. Durkheim, "Value Judgements and Judgements of Reality," 1953, cited Alberoni, 5.
28. Alberoni, 13, 37-38.
29. "Right as the Rain," Tony Bennett, 1960.
30. See Keir Keightley, "The History and Exegesis of Pop: Reading 'All Summer Long'" (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1991).
31. Hirsch et al., 178.
32. J. Carey 1969, cited Hirsch et al., 178, 176.
33. Jody Berland, "On 'Reading' the Weather," *Cultural Studies* 8, no.1 (Winter 1994).