

The Verses Replicated (Over and over and over again)

In the happier future, when we have recovered from the insanity of copyright law, the economists will look back at these centuries and ponder why we spent so much effort creating scarcity in the one market where nothing needs to be scarce. The artists and scientists will scratch their heads at the idea that their forebears were motivated primarily by market forces. But I think it is the social historians who will really have a field day. Intellectual property rights have had such a bizarre, unpredictable influence on the culture.

For instance...when trademark laws were first being drafted in the 1800s, I am sure no one envisioned that they were setting in motion a cascade of events that would lead, inexorably, to twenty-odd different spellings of the word "biscuit." But *Cheez* and *Fharmacy* and *Sox* were already there, like prophecies of doom, from the moment legislators turned spelling into a finite economic terrain.

The IPR oddity that I am fascinated with at the moment is on Wikipedia. Copyright violations are a *bête noire* of Wikipedia, and are especially convoluted where song lyrics are concerned. Lyrics to most popular songs are widely available on the internet, and short quotes from songs are clearly not actionable, but Wikipedia understandably does not want the lyrics of entire songs to be included on its pages. This has given rise to a certain class of editor who attempt to *paraphrase* a song's lyrics, sometimes in great detail. Such efforts are obviously a worse option than actually providing the lyrics, so the pages often link to off-site pages that do contain the lyrics. But more than that, the results are unintentionally ludicrous. In fact, let's start with Ludacris' *Roll Out*:

The song's lyrics address the irritation felt by Ludacris as a result of nosy onlookers. The verses replicate the questions these parties ask about choices he's made ("Who's your house-keeper and what you keep in your house/What about diamonds and gold, is that what you keep your mouth"), the dollar amounts of his lavish purchases and the people with which he spends his time ("Who's that bucked-naked cook fixing three course meals"). In the final lines of the song, Ludacris warns these people to stay out of his personal affairs.

Bob Dylan, who seems to be an especially good target; *As I Went Out One Morning*:

...about a man who offers a hand to a woman in chains, but realizes that she wants more than he is offering, and that "she meant to do [him] harm." A character identified as Tom Paine then appears and, "command[s] her to yield" and apologizing[sic] to the narrator for the woman's actions.

Joni Mitchell; *Coyote*:

...describes an encounter (which turns into a one night stand) between the narrator (possibly meant to be Joni herself as there is a reference in the lyrics to her coming home from the studio) and "Coyote", a ranch worker. Coyote represents nature contrasted with the narrator's big city (presumably LA) life where "pills and powders" are necessary to "get them through this passion play".

Kansas Joe McCoy, and everyone after; *Why Don't You Do Right?:*

...tells the narrative of a woman who is complaining about her partner's apparent financial insolvency. She states that he was financially well off in 1922, but now has nothing. She claims it is because he wasted it on other women, and that these lovers will no longer show any interest in him now that he's poor. She claims that he tricked her into a relationship where all he has to offer her is 'a drink of gin'. She ends each verse asking why the man doesn't 'do right' by her, and then throws him out, insisting that he go earn a living in order to support her.

The unbelievable beginning of Dylan's *Desolation Row*:

The place described is having abnormal morality, where they sell "postcards of the hanging", and the social status quo is not followed: "beauty parlor (is) filled with sailors" and the "blind commissioner", who has "one hand tied to the tight-rope walker" while he masturbates with "the other (hand) in his pants". All these strange characters "need somewhere to go" and the place turns out to be Desolation Row.

The second verse concerns Cinderella and Romeo, who has apparently come to woo Cinderella; she "seems so easy". He is rebuffed, however, as someone says "you're in the wrong place, my friend/You better leave." After this disagreement between "someone" and "Romeo," Cinderella is left "sweeping up/on Desolation Row" after the ambulances leave. Most reviewers agree that Romeo and Cinderella are in Desolation Row because they do not fit into their assigned roles. Cinderella is supposed to fall in love with a prince, and Romeo is meant to love Juliet--their refusal to heed these roles and rules sends them in exile to Desolation Row.

Right Said Fred (the world's buffest band)'s only hit:

"I'm Too Sexy" is sung from the point of view of a self-satisfied fashion model. The song's lyrics express confidence that his personal level of sexiness makes him too sexy for numerous things, most notably his shirt....The following is a list, in lyrical order, of the things for which the model considers himself to be too sexy:

- My love ("love's going to leave me"; used in the opening and after "...my cat")
- My shirt ("so sexy it hurts")
- Milan
- New York
- Japan
- Your party("no way I'm disco dancing")
- My car ("too sexy by far")
- My hat ("what d'you think about that?")
- My cat ("poor pussy...poor pussycat")
- The song itself ("and I'm too sexy for this song", at which point the song abruptly ends)

I am in pain with how much this amuses me. Even the wiki-links, which you can't see here...*shirt* is wikified, in case scholars approaching Western civilization through the lens of Right Said Fred aren't familiar with the concept (which would be understandable, I guess.) And something about "the things for which" just sends me....oh god....

The song opens with three upbeats as André 3000 counts "one, two, three" and then leads into the first verse. The lyrics begin to describe the persona's concerns and doubts about a romantic relationship. He wonders if they are staying together just "for tradition," as in the lines "But does she really wanna

[mess around] / But can't stand to see me / Walk out the door?" André 3000 commented, "I think it's more important to be happy than to meet up to...the world's expectations of what a relationship should be. So this is a celebration of how men and women relate to each other in the 2000s." The song then leads into the chorus, which consists of the line "Hey ya!" repeated eight times, accompanied by a synthesizer performing the bassline.

During the second verse, the persona gets cold feet and wonders what the purpose of continuing the relationship is, pondering the question, "If they say nothing is forever...then what makes love the exception?" After repeating the chorus, the song leads into a call and response section. André 3000 jokes, "What's cooler than being cool?", and the "fellas" response, an overdubbed version of his vocals, is "Ice cold", a reference to one of André Benjamin's stage names. He then calls to the "ladies", whose response is overdubbed from vocals by Rabeka Tuinei, who was an assistant to the audio engineer.

The song's breakdown coined the phrase "shake it like a Polaroid picture," a reference to an erroneous technique used by some photographers to expedite instant film. Early versions of the film needed to be dried, and shaking the picture helped it to dry faster. The breakdown also namechecks singer Beyoncé and actress Lucy Liu. The song closes by repeating the chorus ad libitum and gradually fading out.