

Women, Nature and Appearance: Themes in Popular Song Texts from the Turn of the Century

One of the most important cultural figures in the period 1890-1910 was the New Woman, a woman who was perceived as breaking older social conventions. The frontispiece of Loveland and Lincoln's "A Woman Without a Heart" (1914, Fig. 1) depicts this woman in a few broad strokes: she is attractive, young, fit, impervious to Dan Cupid's armory, and suspiciously overeducated (this New Woman is reading a book of essays). An article in *Goodhousekeeping* in 1917 fills in this portrait of the New Woman by highlighting her differences from the old:

In the lifetime of girls even 20 years old, the tradition of what girls should be and do in the world has changed as much as heretofore in a century. It used to be that girls looked forward with confidence to domestic life as their destiny. That is still the destiny of most of them, but it is a destiny that in this generation seems to be modified for all, and avoided by very many (Rosenzweig, 100).¹

Stephen Mintz and Susan Kellogg point out that the New Woman's disregard for traditional roles in domestic arrangements extended to other aspects of life:

More women were pursuing higher education, joining organizations, and working outside the home, and fewer young women seemed content to accept their traditional roles—caring for their homes, and tending their children. Many books, newspapers, and magazines bristled with alarm over this so-called revolution in morals and manners. Young women danced the fox-trot, smoked cigarettes openly and defiantly, read sex and confession magazines, watched lurid motion pictures, and, to an unprecedented extent, engaged in premarital sex (Mintz and Kellogg, 108).

In this article I propose to examine how popular song texts at the turn of the century treated this New Woman, as well as how these texts used her to comment on social conflicts in the culture at large. In her book *Imaging American Women* Susan Banta argues that the print media of this period presented a number of visual images to women, offering them models for behavior and for self-definition (from the Gibson girl to caricatures). While I agree with Banta, I would also argue that women in popular song served as a nexus around which other social issues could be discussed, both directly and meta-

A Woman Without A Heart

By
CARL LOVELAND

MUSIC BY
HARRY J. LINCOLN

Composers of

"WHEN I FIRST MET YOU"
"IT CANNOT BE"
"IF TIME WOULD TELL"
"THE STORY OF THE ROSE"
"ONLY A DREAM OF YOU"
"PONY MAID" Etc. Etc. Etc.



Vandersloot
Music Publishing Co.
Williamsport, Pa.

.50

Figure 1. Frontispiece for "A Woman Without a Heart"

phorically. In short, popular song not only presented women with ways to reimagine themselves in a new century but also used women symbolically as a way to either reassert traditional or to celebrate new values.

While an analysis of the uses of women in popular song could go in any number of directions, I will focus chiefly on Woman as a metaphor within the contemporaneous discussion about rural and urban values. This discussion entails more than simple questions of city woman vs. country girl; it also extends to larger cultural conflicts between technology and tradition, sophistication and simplicity, and, ultimately, truth and appearance.

Conflict between the older rural traditions and emerging urban values resulted from a number of changes in middle-class culture at the turn of the century, chiefly as a result of industrialization and the concomitant urbanization of the United States. Railroads, corporate industry and the mechanization of American life were proving to be a mixed blessing. While new technology allowed American industry to distribute food more cheaply than ever, it also required an expanding labor base to produce the means of distribution—a labor base chiefly housed in the cities. At the same time that food was being distributed more cheaply and people were paying less for it, the farmer's profit margin was being steadily eroded. Small-scale farming increasingly became a losing proposition, and the family farm, once the central economic and cultural force in the United States, started to disappear.

This move from agriculture to industry had a profound effect on the American family. In an agrarian culture, men *and* women were responsible for both the family's economic prosperity and emotional support. When the United States switched to a primarily industrial economy, these two functions were split along gender lines. Women were responsible for the emotional well-being of the family, while men earned the wages. Women thus became solely responsible for the emotional and cultural education of American children, while men's role in the family was reduced to that of bread-winner.²

But precisely because women were relegated to the household, they suddenly had more leisure time than they had ever enjoyed before. While many women filled this time with civic and community activities that would easily win the approval of society, other women started to feel an emptiness in their lives. Finding a suitable mate and raising children were just not enough. Many women thus started to attend college, to put off marriage (or even to refuse to marry), to become active in political activities such as suffrage and the settlement movement.

The ambitions of these New Women lay on a collision course with the values of the American family, fostering debate about what the proper role of women should be. The newspapers and magazines of the day were filled with discussions of and diatribes against her. Moreover, as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg says, the debate extended to questions about "the naturalness" of gender and the legitimacy of the bourgeois social order" (245). Feminists of the period, for instance, were often depicted as mannish in appearance, overly

assertive, and possibly lesbian. But even women like Loveland and Lincoln's "woman without a heart," who apparently conform to modern-day conceptions of femininity in appearance, still troubled turn-of-the-century Americans. If she is missing Woman's central emotional core, her heart, this woman is also unnatural. If even attractively feminine women could violate social and sexual expectations—comfortably violate them, if the picture can be trusted—weren't those very expectations, and the fundamental ideologies of American culture in which they were grounded, questionable?

This debate about the American family, and women's role within it, acquired greater urgency due to the rapidly changing demographics of the United States. The influx of immigrants at the turn of the century led to a growing sense that the white, northern European races were committing, in Teddy Roosevelt's words, "race suicide." White Americans felt that they were only precariously in a position of power; more and more they felt threatened by immigration and the immigrant races' horrifying fecundity. And the New Woman was often blamed for not breeding more Anglos in the face of this demographic crisis. Since she *unnaturally* married late, refused to stay at home, and wanted an education, *she* was threatening American civilization.³

The popular song industry eagerly entered this debate. In true business fashion, however, it avoided partisanship and shrewdly arrayed itself on both sides of the issue. The more conservative song texts of the era attempted to restore a world perceived to be disappearing, and thus portrayed "traditional" women, women who embodied values that were being lost. In these texts women and sexual desire for women are metaphorically tied to the "natural" social order, to what the conservative elements of culture perceived to be unquestionably true. As we shall see, this metaphorical rendering of this truth not only affirmed and naturalized the values of rural, white, traditional America, but raised these values to a sacred plane.

Often, this naturalizing process began with the textual alignment of women and the beauties of the outdoor world. This alignment was established in a number of ways, but most obviously by the use of "nature" imagery to depict the setting in which men wooed these "traditional" women.⁴ For instance, "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree" (1905) the lyrics set the lovers in a pastoral idyll:

The oriole with joy was sweetly singing,
The little brook was bab'ling it's tune,
The village bells at noon were gaily ringing,
The world seem'd brighter than a harvest moon

The same pastoral imagery is evoked in "Dear Old Girl" (1903):

'Twas a sunny day in June,
when the birds were all in tune,
and the songs they sang all seemed to be of you

And in “Hearts and Flowers” (1899):

Out among the flowers sweet
Lingers pretty Marguerite,
Sowing with her hands so white,
Future blossoms, fair and bright.

And in “She Was Bred in Old Kentucky” (1898):

When a lad, I stood one day by a cottage far away,
And to me that day, all nature seem'd more grand;
For my Sue, with blushes red,
Had just promised we should wed,

In all of these song texts the sexual desires that draw people together are metonymically associated with nature. If it happens outdoors in nature then it must be natural.

But the nature depicted is such that it upholds a very specific kind of culture, that of small-town agricultural America. “In the Shade of The Old Apple Tree” refers to a “village” and ties this village in with farming by referring to a “harvest moon.” Pretty Marguerite of “Hearts and Flowers” is depicted as sowing flowers, and Sue, of “She Was Bred in Old Kentucky,” is the result of animal husbandry—she was “bred.” Nature is thus not Tennyson’s “Nature red in tooth and claw,” but a harmonious helpmate to man’s efforts (as we would expect the woman to be as well).

The covers of the sheet music are also very much of a piece with this picture of rural domestic bliss. Figure 2, the cover of Harry Von Tilzer’s “When Kate and I Were Coming Thro’ the Rye,” shows a fashionably dressed young man and his more archaically dressed fiancée out for a walk. Nearby, a quaintly dilapidated old house provides the melding of romance with tradition.

As if in response to Roosevelt’s fears of “race suicide,” these song texts often emphasize the whiteness of their female characters. This whiteness serves as the screen on which women can display their innocence by blushing. We have already seen that Marguerite has “hands so white,” but she also evidences her whiteness with blushes that “deepen in her cheek.” Sue of Old Kentucky is also capable of a becoming inflammation: “My Sue, with blushes red.” The Dear Old Girl reddens as well: “The words I came to speak/brought the blushes to your cheek.” And when the speaker of “Under the Old Apple Tree” “gently presses” his sweetheart within his arms her cheeks are “blushing red.”⁵

While these women are natural, rustic, and innocent, they are also wooed in a world situated in some indefinite, idyllic past time, when all the confusions of the turn of the century were either unheard of or nonexistent. This

temporal placement of courtship thus further naturalizes the relationship of men and women. In this indefinite time, the inevitable cycle of youth, courtship, and marriage receives its impetus, and leads inevitably to the conclusion of a happy life together. In the chorus of “Dear Old Girl,” for instance, the speaker looks back on his courtship after his wife, the “dear old girl” of the title, has died:

Dear old girl, the robin sings above you,
 Dear old girl, it speaks of how I love you,
 The blinding tears are falling as I think of my lost pearl,
 And my broken heart is calling, calling for you, Dear old girl.

“She was Bred in Old Kentucky” also summarizes a relationship:

Many years have pass'd away since that well remember'd day,
 When to that dear old Kentucky home I came;
 And my happiness thro' life, was my sweetheart, friend and wife,
 For the sunshine in her heart remained the same;
 I am sitting all alone, in a place we've called home,
 For yesterday my darling passed away.

This parting, while often bitter, is softened by the sense of transcendence, by an implied belief that the grief of parting is only temporary. The traditional women, such as the “dear old girl,” does not merely die but is called away by “the Master.” She is not mere matter but a spiritual essence.

“Because” (1902) depicts this spiritual side of the traditional women while still emphasizing her natural side. The speaker of the song can thus avow that when his lover speaks to him he finds “the roses waking round my feet.” And, at the same time, he can swear fidelity to his beloved in the name of God:

Because God made thee mine, I'll cherish thee
 Through light and darkness, through all time to be,
 And pray His love may make our love divine,⁶

This alignment of nature and the sacred is an important component in the message of the more conservative popular song texts, and gives these songs a moral weight we might not expect from a mere commodity. The right kind of woman, these texts say, should embody nature, tradition and virtue. Further, since these women are also imbued with sacred qualities, the values they embody are not merely mores, subject to changes by time and condition, but eternal verities. The texts thus both depict the traditional values of the dominant white culture and, at the same time, give them a numinous validation.

The traditional woman showed her emotions plainly on her face, by blushing. There was no gap between what she was spiritually and how she appeared



Figure 2. Frontispiece for "When Kate and I Were Coming Thro' the Rye"

physically. The popular music industry, accordingly, portrayed the New Woman, by contrast, as a mere facade. Hence, an attack on the New Woman would often refer to her concern with superficialities, with fashion. In “Mary is a Grand Old Name” (1905) George M. Cohan sets up, for example, a dichotomy between the plain (and true) Mary and the pretty (but false) Marie:

Now, when her name is Mary,
there is no falseness there;
When to Marie she'll vary,
she'll surely bleach her hair.⁷

“The Bird on Nelly’s Hat” (1906) moralizes in similar fashion, although using a more bizarre device to convey disapproval. The song refers to a popular fashion of the day in which women wore large hats, often decorated with dried flowers or fruit and “more gruesomely, dead birds.” Richard Maltby argues that these fashions often hinted at “sexual proclivities.”⁸ The first verse of this song depicts two young lovers, Willie and Nelly, involved in what appears to be an unproblematical relationship. But we learn, from the stuffed bird on Nelly’s hat, that Nelly is not what she appears to be. When Nelly says “I’ll be your little honey,” the bird says “It’s a shame to take his money.” The song leaves little doubt about Nelly’s sexual proclivities—she’s a prostitute who preys on honest working-class chaps like Willie.

The popular song industry was also capable of responding to the changing roles of women in a more complex fashion. Rather than simply espousing traditional values, texts could acknowledge the anxieties attendant on the New Woman and the ambiguous feelings she might evoke. One of the most popular songs of the era, Charles K. Harris’s “After the Ball” (1892), shares a number of metaphorical motifs with the general repertory of the conservative love songs, but uses these motifs in a way that suggests, either consciously or unconsciously, some of these ambiguities.

The text of “After the Ball” acknowledges the urbanization of the United States by removing the action from rural America and setting it at a glittering ball. This metaphor, the brightly lit, fashionable party, artfully serves as the stage for the song’s ambivalences. The song seems to say that while society may be dazzlingly attractive, this illumination doesn’t always reveal the whole truth.

This ambiguity in the metaphor of the ball is paralleled by those of the woman character. In contrast to songs such as “She Was Bred in Old Kentucky,” which portray women as natural, open, and blushing honest, “After the Ball” depicts a woman who is mysterious. The speaker of the song has no simple relationship with her. She is no blushing young maiden but she is not brazen either—she is, instead, difficult to comprehend and a source of anxiety.⁹

An old man tells the seemingly straight-forward story of “After the Ball,” after his young niece asks why he never married. We learn that the old man once had a lover but lost her when she was young. While at the ball his lover came to him:

There came my sweetheart, my love, my own
 ‘I wish some water; leave me alone’
 When I returned dear there stood a man,
 Kissing my sweetheart as lovers can.

His sweetheart tries to explain, but he “would not listen/ pleadings were vain.” One day, though, he learns the truth:

.a letter came from that man,
 He was her brother—the letter ran.

His ill-founded jealousy has cost him the possibility of a happy life.

However, this straight-forward story, with its equally resolute moral, leaves some questions unanswered. We learn that the speaker has rejected his erstwhile lover’s pleadings, and she has died sometime before the song takes place. Also, at some time in the past, the brother wrote to explain what really happened. This implies that the brother wrote after the woman died. But, if this is the case, then we have to ask why the brother waited. Wouldn’t it have been more sensible to explain the situation before the woman died and spare everyone a life of heartbreak? Further, why does the speaker believe the brother and not his sweetheart? Wouldn’t the sweetheart have told the same story—that she was merely kissing her brother?

These questions could lead us to read “After the Ball” as a picture of rigid, distant relations between men and women at the turn of the century. Since the speaker rejects his sweetheart’s pleas, while accepting the explanation of the brother, we could conclude that the song argues that men make the rules and decide women’s fate; hence the almost biblical sternness with which the speaker reacts to his sweetheart’s seeming duplicity. But Harris also portrays the speaker as wistfully, maybe even tragically, despondent over the failure of this relationship. While he may once have felt that upholding traditional values was his paramount concern, with age he has come to regret this decision.

The moral ambiguity expressed by “After the Ball” could color even the message of song texts apparently espousing traditional values. In the second verse of “In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree,” for instance, the speaker describes the old apple tree standing over the final resting place of his beloved, where he has returned to pay his last respects. While the apple tree overtly symbolizes the rural values typical of conservative song texts and the connection between the traditional woman and domesticated nature, it also im-

plies that those values and that connection have passed away. This funerary apple tree thus marks our exclusion from a paradisiacal era of small towns and innocent women. The apple tree symbolizes a change in the pattern of American life. At the turn of the century, more people were living in the city than in the country (for the first time in the nation's history) and, along with this change in demographics, came a sense that an older way of life was dying. The speaker of the song acknowledges that he himself has left the traditional world behind; he has "come a long way from the city" to pay his final respects. He is remote, both geographically and spiritually, from what had been good and true.¹⁰

Even while still alive, the innocent rural maiden could be used acknowledge the changes in American culture. "You're the Flower of My Heart, Sweet Adeline" (1903) tells of a typical pastoral courtship:

I can see your smiling face as when we wandered
Down by the brookside just you and I,

The text connects Adeline with nature, but this connection only underlines the speaker's inability to find her:

I wonder where you are my darling,
And if your heart to me is still the same,
For the sighing wind and nightingale a singing
Are breathing only your own sweet name.

In this text, death has not taken the woman away, nor does she await her lover in paradise. She has simply wandered away to no one knows where. This song was used by John "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald as a campaign song in his 1906 bid for the mayor's office in Boston (Ewen 1966, 377-78). It is surely significant that wondering about the whereabouts of a good old-fashioned girl became a political item right when suffragism was active.

Conservative song texts aligned women with nature, and, by implication, with rural America. The forward-looking songs of the turn of the century often made this same metaphorical alignment but used it to celebrate change. The New Woman thus became the center for celebrations of the possibilities of the city and for advances in technology. But even more importantly a women's character started to emerge. These texts seem to argue that women (and, by implication, men) were no longer expected to be transparently true and natural in a rural setting, but to enjoy the roles made available to them in the city.

Many of these song texts still set romance in a bucolic scene, but this setting was provided by a park, implying an urban locale. Robert A. King's "The Fountain in the Park" (1884) is one of the earliest and most famous of these songs:

While strolling in the park one day,
 All in the merry month of May;
 A roguish pair of eyes they took me by surprise,
 In a moment my poor heart she stole away.

“By the Light of the Silvery Moon” (1909) also evokes this urban rusticity:

Place park, scene dark,
 Silvery moon is shining thro’ the trees

In addition to staging romance in settings that only recall rural America, the more liberal song texts also portrayed courtship as a leisure activity, as in Sterling and Von Tilzer’s “On a Sunday Afternoon”:

On a Sunday afternoon, in the merry month of June,
 Take a trip up the Hudson or down the bay;
 Take a trolley to Coney or Rockaway,
 On a Sunday afternoon you can see the lovers spoon.

These texts do away with the moral weight we saw attached to women in the more conservative songs. The relationship between men and women no longer implies a spiritualized nature but mundane reality. Parks cannot carry the sacred significance of rural America; they provide an escape from the work-a-day world. Flirtation does not imply eternal bliss; it is indulged in for its own sake. In opposition to the old-fashioned rustic girls who are blushing and reluctant, these women can dispose of their lives, and sometimes take the initiative, as in “The Fountain in the Park.”

Song texts often tied this new freedom for women to technological advances, and implied that both were good things. “In My Merry Oldsmobile” (1905) gleefully depicts the relationship of a couple using the same kind of innuendos that we might expect from later popular songs:

They love to spark in the dark old park,
 As they go flying along,
 She says she knows why the motor goes;
 The sparker’s awfully strong.¹¹

The innuendo is continued when the speaker hints to his lover that “You can go as far as you like with me,/ In my merry Oldsmobile.”

“Come Josephine In My Flying Machine” (1910) also uses transportation metaphors to suggest an ecstatic sensation like sexual transport:

Come Josephine, in my flying machine,
 Going up, she goes! up she goes!
 Balance yourself like a bird on a beam,
 In the air she goes, there she goes!
 Up, up, a little bit higher,
 Oh, my! the moon is on fire.

The speaker is not only proposing an airplane flight (surely an expensive way of wooing someone) but something that will provide the same sense of giddy flight as romance. This giddiness is further reflected in the disjunct syntax of the song's lyrics.

Popular song texts could also parody the conventions of the more conservative repertory. The little country maid, as found in songs like "She Was Bred in Old Kentucky," is set up in James Thornton's "The Streets of Cairo" (1895):

I will sing you a song,
 And it wont be very long,
 'Bout a maiden sweet,
 And she never would do wrong,

Ev'ryone said she was pretty,
 She was not long in the city,
 All alone, oh what a pity,
 Poor little maid.

This little maid's modesty appears to be planted in thin soil, for she quickly becomes a vamp who makes every man "sorry that he met her." The last verse also emphasizes her appeal as based on display, as theater:

She was engaged
 As a picture for to pose,
 To appear each night
 In abbreviated clothes

All the dudes were in a flurry
 For to catch her they did hurry,
 One who caught her now is sorry,
 Poor little maid.

The tune is taken from the melody of a hootchy-kootchy dance popularized by Little Egypt at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 (Ewen 1966, 372).¹² Thornton adds to the exotic quality of the song by setting it in Cairo, thus removing this "poor little maid" both geographically and spiritually from the blushing maids of "She Was Bred in Old Kentucky," or "Dear Old Girl."¹³

“Ta-ra-ra-bom-der-e” (1891, attributed to Henry Sayers¹⁴) also depicts a woman who is something other than she appears to be:

A smart and stylish girl you see,
Belle of good society;
Not too strict, but rather free,
Yet right as right can be!

In the second verse we learn from the maiden herself that she is not above a little duplicitous flirtation:

I'm not extravagantly shy,
And when a nice young man is nigh;
For his heart I have a try,
And faint away with tearful cry!

When the good young man in haste,
Will support me round the waist;
I don't come to while thus embraced,
Till of my lips he steals a taste!

“Ta-ra-ra-bom-der-e” uses the conventions of the older songs—blushing maidens, good young men, and so on—but turns them on their heads. The older ideals of womanly modesty and manly gallantry are now a mere pretext for behavior that would shock a village maid.

Duplicity became an important theme in the more forward-looking songs. Instead of naturalizing love these songs often theatricalized romance. “By the Light of the Silvery Moon” specifically evokes the theater, with the lovers *acting* their roles:

Place park, scene dark,
Silvery moon is shining thro' the trees
Cast two, me, you,
Sound of kisses floating on the breeze,

Act one, begun,
Dialogue, “Where would you like to spoon?”
My cue, with you,
Underneath the silv'ry moon.

The country maid, whose inner state is visible on her blushing cheeks is now replaced by the urban woman who merely acts out her emotion.

Henry Blossom's lyric for “If I Were on the Stage” (from the 1905 operetta *Mademoiselle Modiste* with music by Victor Herbert) concisely delineates this metaphorical connection between love and theater. Fifi, the heroine of the operetta, in a key scene, imagines playing three different roles and

the music she would sing to flesh them out. She imagines singing a “gavotte moderne” to illustrate her role as a country maid, a polonaise to play a “stately queen,” and a waltz to play a romantic lead. The waltz section, widely regarded as some of Herbert’s best music, is very impassioned, with leaps of ninths and tenths at the climactic moment. But, as Herbert’s biographer, Edward Waters, points out, Fifi can pull off this song because of her training as a singer and *actress*. This feigned passion nevertheless wins the heart of the operetta’s hero.

This discussion of the thematic treatment of women in popular song texts starts on the farm and ends in the city, and explores the range of values that could be expressed by the dichotomy between the rural and urban woman. This dichotomy allowed the writers of these texts to express a number of oppositional values (although they would have been surprised, no doubt, to find out that they did so). We have seen nature ranged against technology, simplicity against sophistication and artifice. At the heart of this dichotomy lies a conflict about truth and appearance.

The more old-fashioned depictions of courtship and marriage seem to argue that truth and appearance should be the same thing. The beloved should show forth her inner self, with no gap between that inner self and her outer appearance. These songs thus set out to reinforce the paradigm of the honest woman who is the receptacle of the culture’s truths. In Banta’s words, women who didn’t follow this model were guilty of “posing,” and “posing [and] self-representation . . . are marks of the bad woman, [and] corrupt society” (Banta, 174).

The more forward-looking songs take a different view of “posing” and, consequently, of women who do pose. She is free to help love along, and who are we to deny her? If some gentlemen catches her eye, why should she be extravagantly shy? The newer songs do not demand a bridge between truth and appearance. Rather they accept appearance as it is with little or no moral implication.

How did audiences react to this conflict between the messages of the older and newer songs? “A Bird in a Gilded Cage” can offer some insights. The song describes a posing woman, who may seem to be happy but who cannot be in the old-fashioned sense. While this song may seem to be unqualifiedly critical of the feminine title character, the public would, quite likely, have heard it sung by a woman. The sheet music for “A Bird in a Gilded Cage,” states that it was sung “with great success” by May A. Bell, who is depicted on the cover wearing elaborate finery. In this instance the public would have learned about the evil of posing women from a woman.

One could argue, along with some current thinkers on gender politics, that women in this instance are serving the dominant power in the culture, a patriarchal hegemony.¹⁵ Thus women singers, controlled by male-dominated cultural institutions, are forced to condemn their own sex.

But the women who were specifically telling about these treacherous women were *actresses*. They were appearing as characters themselves. That is, May Bell was not a specific individual born in such and such a place with parents who did such and such. Rather, when she was singing in the theater, she was “May Bell,” the renowned singer and popular star. Her identity was a facade and when she sang “Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage” she could easily have been regarded as the Bird herself, or the envious young woman, or the narrator of the song. So while in one sense she closed off the meaning of the song by being the true woman who condemns her sex’s impostures, she was also the “posing” woman that the song castigates—a pose which made her famous (and wealthy). In performance, at least, the song is perfectly ambiguous.¹⁶

Popular music’s ambiguity about women and appearances was part of a general trend at the turn of the century and was evident also in cultivated literature. Lily Bart, in Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* (1905), spends the whole novel trying to keep up appearances. Thorsten Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) described women’s function, in the upperclasses at least, as the showing forth of the earning power of their mates. In Brander Matthews’ novel, *The Action and The Word* (1900), an upper-class couple argue, seemingly, about the wife’s desire to be an actress. But the argument is really about appearances:

The theatricalism of her phrases had already affected him painfully, and now in her words he thought he caught an echo of some play. The suggestion of insincerity he was afraid he had detected in her outburst was painful to him. He would rather she had really felt as she was speaking than that he should have doubted the genuineness of her emotion (*Harper’s Weekly*, vol. 44, no. 2258, p. 295).

Thus, whatever ambivalence the culture at large may have felt about women was reflected in popular songs of the era as well and, ultimately, left unresolved.

It may be that all these ambiguities are part of what popular culture is all about. As Simon Reynolds argues

Pop isn’t about a narrow reflection of the “reality” of where an individual is already at, but about where or who you’d *rather* be (251).

These depictions of women then would not resolve disputes. They would articulate them. The contradictions leave the audience the space in which to decide them. As Whoopi Goldberg, another thinker on popular culture says:

Stars don’t get to do anything. Stars only are. They’re a state of mind.

NOTES

1. For more on the New Woman, see Filene, pp. 18-25.
2. For more on development of these gender roles in the family, see Douglas.
3. Lutz discusses Roosevelt's opinions in *American Nervousness 1903*, pp. 82-83. See also Walter Benn Michaels' argument about racism, women, and national identity, in "The Souls of White Folk."
4. Although, this Mythos has a long history—with roots in Greek odes—more recent predecessors are songs such as Stephen Foster's "Gentle Annie" or "I Dream of Jeannie."
5. The ability to blush is still used as a mark of racial purity by the American Nazi Party, as seen in the recent documentary *Blood in the Face*.
6. This lyric is underlaid by a rather more steamy French lyric which makes no mention of God and is in fact blatantly erotic in its imagery. The French version features physical details: "tu viens à moi et je frissone . . ." and "tout mon coeur se donne/ A toi en un baiser brûlant d'émoi." ("You come to me and I tremble. . ." "I give my heart to you in a kiss aflame with feeling. . .") Peter Gay, in his discussion of bourgeois conventions in love, points out that the erotic and the spiritual were often linked (*Education of the Senses*, pp. 141-142).
7. Cohan also aligns falseness with ethnicity (the more foreign "Marie").
8. P. 28. Although Maltby's description of the messages conveyed by fashion may be more provocative than enlightening, I think it is inarguable that fashion tells us both something about the wearer's sexual identity *and* the wearer's relation to the other sex. For more on this see Lurie.
9. This image of the willful, mysterious "Beautiful Charmer" was a common trope at the turn of the century. See Banta, pp. 45-91.
10. The speaker's pilgrimage back to this moral center is typical of people in a spiritual crisis. The archetype thus evoked may be one explanation for the song's success. For more on this archetype see Turner 1974.
11. See, for instance, Robert Johnson's "Terraplane Blues," or Prince's "Little Red Corvette."
12. The tune of *Streets of Cairo* has entered the popular consciousness. Seemingly every child in America learns it at quite a young age with new lyrics that still reflect the somewhat salacious subject matter of the original: "There's a place in France,/ Where the ladies wear no pants."
13. Compare this courtship ritual with that presented in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. In Wharton's novel the heroine practices a similar form of enticement although in a slightly more refined fashion, in a *tableau vivant*.
14. Sayers claimed to have heard the tune in a St. Louis brothel (Tawa, 151).
15. See, for instance, Robertson on ritual music and power.
16. This argument takes off from some ideas presented in Sean Cubitt's "'Maybellene': meaning and the listening subject."

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