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“Like a second needs an hour”: Time and the work of Paul McCartney

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While much has been written about Paul McCartney, his actual work as an individual, within and without the Beatles, has seldom been explored in significant depth and context. This essay seeks to demonstrate how McCartney's songs withstand and reward academic attention by tracing one of their defining features: a persistent fascination with the concept of time. Throughout his career, we hear McCartney responding to social, artistic and personal change. In order to highlight various nuances of the songs that have thus far received little commentary, this introductory essay adopts predominantly a liberal humanist perspective, but also briefly illustrates how Marxist, psychoanalytic, postcolonial, and new historicist approaches may be applied to McCartney's work. His contributions to the genre of pop music are considered within Theodor Adorno's terms of “standardization” and compared with and distinguished from those of his two key contemporaries: his former partner John Lennon, and another major songwriter, against whom McCartney is seldom considered, Bob Dylan.

McCartney was born in 1942 and was twenty when the Beatles released their first single. Although its titles, “Love Me Do” and “PS I Love You,” exemplify the narrow thematic range standard in early 60s pop, the Beatles' first album, *Please Please Me* (1963), demonstrates how Lennon and McCartney's characterizing traits were manifest from the start. These are audible in their choices and treatments of cover versions, as well as their own compositions. Lennon's vocal on “Twist and Shout” predates his later “primal screaming” style, while “There's a Place” anticipates his reverence of the imagination in his later songs. Early hallmarks of McCartney's style are also apparent. His crooning of Scott and Marlow's “A Taste of Honey” showcases his ability to handle ballads and illustrates his fondness for older pop styles. More striking, however, is “I Saw Her Standing There”: one of many McCartney compositions to carry nostalgic content within progressive form. Here, the Beatles stretch safe pop standards as if anticipating a new era of more liberated expression in the genre. This is audible in the innuendo implicit in both word (“You know what I mean”) and voice (“*Woooh!* When I saw her standing there!”). The song also inaugurates a key motif in McCartney's writing by isolating a specific moment, thus conveying both a youthful intensity of experience and a reticent sense of how it may impact upon the future.

In “Things We Said Today” (*A Hard Day's Night*, 1964), McCartney expands his perspective to recognize the past, present and future simultaneously.

The song is the vow of two lovers to remember today's promises "someday" in the future, when passion has cooled and there is "not a lot to say." This implication that the future can offer no more than the banality of an ageing relationship is a mark of post-Victorian norms of monogamy, but again, the more daring expressions of later 60s pop are prefigured in the insistence that "Love is here to stay / And that's enough."

Although the sophistication of "Things We Said Today" indicates Dylan's impact on lyric-writing by 1964, his influence on McCartney was both limited and indirect. McCartney's lyrics were becoming more complex, but this was predominantly a response to competition set by Lennon, whose style was always more informed by Dylan's. This distinction has been disadvantageous to McCartney's reputation, encouraging a perception of Lennon as the more serious lyricist, but it also marks the distance between Dylan and McCartney as artists.¹ Dylan, equally, took little from McCartney. Though his admiration of the Beatles' "outrageous" chords² suggested his musical presence ahead of Lennon's, Dylan's electric sound of 1965-66 owed more to Lennon's harsher style in "I Feel Fine" and "Ticket to Ride."³ The divergence between Dylan and McCartney is tellingly audible on *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Help!*, both released in August 1965. While Dylan, inspired by the Beatles, explored group arrangements, "Yesterday" saw McCartney venturing beyond pop, towards more classical styles. George Martin, now beginning to rival Lennon in his influence on McCartney, suggested lavish strings to embellish the latter's solo recording. McCartney countered that this was already a pop cliché. His eventual compromise, however, was an unprecedented arrangement that perfectly fitted the longing for the past in "Yesterday": his guitar and vocal were backed by a string quartet, thus synchronizing pop with baroque.⁴

"Yesterday" carries an intriguing reticence alongside McCartney's other lyrics of this period. While "I've Just Seen a Face," "Another Girl," and "The Night Before"⁵ refer to the female other as a lover, her identity in "Yesterday" is elusive. Biographer Ray Coleman's theory that the song is McCartney's unconscious elegy for his mother may seem tenuous, but only because Coleman considers "Yesterday" almost autonomously in McCartney's writing. Considering the song in the fuller context of his work, Coleman's theory grows more convincing. Mourning was implicit in McCartney's very first composition, "I Lost My Little Girl," written shortly after his mother's death in 1956. In this, as in "Yesterday," the singer awakes to the sudden realization of his loss. (Further implying the role of the unconscious in "Yesterday," it was in a dream that McCartney first conceived its melody).

As if relieving McCartney of an emotional block, "Yesterday" preceded his most prolific, outward-looking phase as a songwriter. In "Eleanor Rigby" (*Revolver*, 1966), he is no longer introspective, but "looking" at the society around him. Furthermore, while "Yesterday" marked an advance by refusing to identify

the other as a lover, "Eleanor Rigby" shows McCartney breaking clean away from the "from-me-to-you" technique standard in pop, dispensing completely of "you" and "I": a detachment that coincides with Lennon's Buddhist-derived contemplation of ego-loss, "Tomorrow Never Knows." This is significant, for while Lennon's song (like Harrison's "Love You To") reflects a growing interest in Eastern religion in the West, "Eleanor Rigby" is a critique of the dwindling role of the Church in British culture, and its conception in early 1966 was simultaneous with Lennon's observation that the Beatles were "more popular than Jesus."⁶

In the hand of an older writer, the lives of Eleanor Rigby, the ageing spinster, and Father McKenzie, the village vicar, might have been sentimentalized into vacuous nostalgia for a more genteel England. However, McCartney's focus is upon a society in transition, and in its recognition of this, "Eleanor Rigby" is worthy of comparison with contemporaneous observations of secularization in Phillip Larkin's poetry and David Lodge's novels. The church-going spinster and solitary clergyman face an era in which their social roles are meaningless: "All the lonely people / Where do they all belong?" As Ian MacDonald notes, the lyric shows the Church to be a superficial answer to this: "no one was saved."⁷

With "Eleanor Rigby," McCartney's writing advanced to a point where his lyrics were praised not only in themselves, but in their independence from Dylan's massive influence. Frank Kermode and Stephen Spender began a 1972 essay on Dylan's lyrics: "In his own kind it goes without saying that [Dylan] has no close rival; the Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby" is a more accomplished lyric, probably, than any of Dylan's, but it isn't of the same kind."⁸

Central to McCartney's independence was his musical versatility, enhanced by a willingness to experiment that Lennon, at this point, still lacked. Equally, it was not until late 1966 that McCartney's lyrics began to consistently rival Lennon's for depth and dexterity. The single "Strawberry Fields Forever" "Penny Lane" marked a double eclipse: the former being among Lennon's most ambitious and accomplished musical conceptions, and the latter among McCartney's most vividly evocative lyrics. The single represents the point when the two composers ceased to depend on each other, becoming more influential as rivals than partners. Beatles singles were once written as face-to-face collaborations. By 1967, the partnership had fragmented to the extent that Lennon and McCartney's songs warranted double A-sides, back-to-back as heads and tails.

While "Strawberry Fields Forever" shows Lennon yearning for introspective freedom in the imagination, in the equally autobiographical "Penny Lane," McCartney finds comparable solace in remembering the community in which he came to consciousness. Somewhat humbly, he contrasts his privileged lifestyle as an artist sitting "beneath the blue suburban skies" with those of the ascetic working-class characters—each identified by their profession, including a nurse

and a fireman, alluding to his own parents—"back in Penny Lane," from where he draws his inspiration. Yet while McCartney's reference to his new suburban life is an admission that his social position has changed, the use of the first person enables him to implicitly include himself in this celebration of community roles, and furthermore, to rejoice that his earthy roots continue to dominate his perception: "Penny Lane is in my ears and in my eyes."⁹

Despite its celebration of life "meanwhile" back in Penny Lane, images of motorcars and hourglasses, together with the Bach-derived piccolo trumpet, invoke nostalgia; indeed, Fred Davis reproduced the complete lyric as a preface to his book *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (1979). Yet while "Penny Lane" is wistfully reluctant to consign this era of community to the past, elsewhere, McCartney recognized cultural transition with great excitement. He commented in March 1967: "[There are] all these rules for everything, rules of how to live, how to paint, how to make music, and it's just not *true* anymore. . . . They don't really work, all these rules. There could be another answer."¹⁰

For composer and cultural theorist Theodor Adorno, what distinguished pop from "serious" music was its "standardization": reliance on rules of hit-making formulas.¹¹ Adorno, a Marxist, heard the recycling of themes, techniques and structures in pop as preventing the advance of both the individual song and the genre itself, and furthermore, as exploiting the consumer's money and critical energy through vacuous, time-wasting products. In *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), however, the Beatles—led by McCartney, chief or sole writer of eight of the thirteen songs and a substantial contributor to a ninth, as well as being the impetus behind much of the album's packaging—determined to give their audience as much value as possible for their one pound, seventeen shillings and sixpence. Furthermore, the lyrics, both in themselves and in their groundbreaking presence on the sleeve, prompted the consumer—respectfully recognized not simply as a fan, but a listener—to rethink their very "rules of how to live."

Summarizing the relaxation of several key laws of personal conduct in 1967, historian Arthur Marwick writes: "Matters which the Victorians had buried under shame and evasion by the barrow-load were now entering fully into the public domain."¹² In a trilogy of progressively phrased titles on *Sgt. Pepper*, "Getting Better," "Fixing a Hole" and "She's Leaving Home," McCartney reappraises the very notion of rules of how to live. Each sets the singer or central character in opposition to older figures of authority: teachers in "Getting better," the "silly people" in "Fixing a Hole," and parents in "She's Leaving Home." Rather than offering direct commentary, as Dylan had in "The Times They Are a-Changin'" or "Subterranean Homesick Blues," McCartney implies social change via representations of newly liberated individuals. "Getting Better" is ostensibly a love song, but is also a celebration of growth, and in Lennon's section, redemption, contrasting the singer's past as an oppressed schoolboy, then

an angry young man with his present as an independent, optimistic adult. Like all three songs in the sequence, this is left open to further hope through its emphatically gradual tone: "It's getting better all the time." In the moody "Fixing a Hole," however, progress is synonymous with struggle. The singer is unashamedly antisocial, chastising the "silly people" who "disagree and never win / And wonder why they don't get in my door," as he insulates himself in the space of his home, fixing holes and filling cracks through which the rigidly unquestioning attitudes of mainstream society may seep and stop his mind "from wandering / Where it will go." However, his defiance yields self-discovery: while "painting the room in a colorful way," he is "taking the time for a number of things / That weren't important yesterday." As in Lennon's "Strawberry Fields Forever" ("No one, I think, is in my tree / I mean, it must be high or low"), there is a Laingian emphasis on the validity of personal perspective: it "doesn't matter" if he is right or wrong—only that he is where he belongs.

While "Fixing a Hole" uses the home to illustrate that liberation can begin here, now, the subsequent piece evokes a very different household. In "She's Leaving Home," freedom can begin now, but not here. Of the three songs, this is the most affecting, since it humanizes the individual's oppressors. The focus on the past and the parents, left behind, is as intense as that on the present and the young girl's need to leave. McCartney's language is minimal, but the imagery used and reactions attributed to the characters convey their emotions and relationships most effectively. The dominance and diligence of the matriarch, an important figure in McCartney's lyrics, is shown through the contrasting actions of the parents. "Father," who has no discernible voice of his own in the song, "snores as his wife gets into her dressing gown." Yet though the early-rising mother's devotion to her family is evident, her reaction upon finding her daughter's farewell note captures perfectly the claustrophobia of this home, as she "cries to her husband / Daddy, our baby's gone." The daughter's feelings, too, are sympathetically conveyed, albeit with a quietness that corresponds with her careful departure; as she prepares to leave, she is clutching her handkerchief. However, as Adrian Henri wrote in the same year, "Love is a prison and love is free,"¹³ and the song ends on a note of mutual acceptance of the passing of time as the child becomes an adult and breaks away to find her own identity: "She's leaving home / Bye-bye." Despite its resonant sadness, this song represents a fundamentally positive alternative to the bitter resignation to the pains of family life, as encapsulated by Larkin, thirty years older than McCartney, in "This Be the Verse" (1974).¹⁴

McCartney's predominant address to the young on *Sgt. Pepper* was masterful in tactic, as well as content, for a reappraisal of the rules via amplification of the counter-cultural impulses of the time was imperative if the studio-bound Beatles were to remain relevant. They were now in their mid-twenties, an advanced age in pop, and with the Mersey beat era having passed and Dylan, like

them, in exile for the second half of 1966 (again, a considerable measurement of time in 60s culture) there was a threatened return to the middle-of-the-road standards of pre-1963 pop, as singers such as Engelbert Humperdink and Lulu began to dominate the charts. Away from public life, however, the Beatles were challenging the rules of how to make music more adventurously than ever, utilizing techniques learned from the avant-garde scene, finding and distorting random sounds and arcane instruments while fusing post-classical arrangements with melodic pop-rock. In this, the very distinctions between pop and serious music as identified by Adorno were disregarded.

A major point of contention in Adorno's critique of the pop song was its standardized harmonic structure: "[R]egardless of what aberrations occur, the hit will lead back to the same familiar experience, and nothing fundamentally novel will be introduced."¹⁵ However, *Sgt. Pepper* challenged this, too: first, in a reprise, which took the title track literally outside itself, bringing musical and conceptual unity to the album, but still more boldly in "A Day in the Life." McCartney's contribution to Lennon's composition intervenes not as a middle-eight, but another song altogether, as defined by the change of tempo, vocalist and lyrical setting. Linearity is, however, maintained through the implication (marking a key difference between the two writers) that Lennon's verses represent the imagination, and McCartney's, everyday life. The latter's segment begins "Woke up" and ends "I went into a dream," at which point, Lennon returns.

Considering how to accommodate his section, McCartney blatantly dismissed what were previously seen as the limits of pop, and introduced something that was indeed fundamentally novel: a forty-one piece symphony orchestra, treated "as one instrument," moving from its lowest collective E-major note to its highest, but with each musician playing at his own speed.¹⁶ Reinforcing his conviction that music could cross into previously unthinkable areas, McCartney's conception for this sequence, influenced by avant-garde composers such as Cage and Stockhausen, was a significant contribution to serious music as well as pop.

Sgt. Pepper did not signify the end of standardized pop, but it expanded the genre's parameters considerably, as testified by its status as one of the first pop releases to form a blueprint for the standardization of the album, as distinct from the single.¹⁷ It scaled the boundaries of 60s pop, and also those of earlier styles that formed Adorno's initial subject matter. The title track juxtaposes guitar rock with a plump brass arrangement, while the vocal on "When I'm Sixty-Four" is lightly speeded and flattered by a jazzy array of clarinets to recreate an early gramophone sound, thus appealing to the nostalgia of an older generation approaching a newly liberated "60s" of its own in retirement. For indeed, "When I'm Sixty-Four" also looks ahead, and the radiance with which it does so is another mark of how optimistic the future may have seemed to the young of the 60s. Through its complex perspective of time, "When I'm Sixty-Four" has en-

dured as pertinently as any of McCartney's compositions. Its language is archaic, satirizing the rigid formality of post-Victorian courtship ("Indicate precisely what you mean to say"), but on an album which closes with the lines "I'd love to turn you on," its flamboyantly nostalgic arrangement implicitly celebrates the passing of this repressive era.

Sgt. Pepper bore McCartney's most outward looking batch of songs, but no other phase in his career is so clearly defined by his own childhood. He grew up in a family-orientated, working-class community, in a postwar era when local entertainment played a significant social role. Although the height of music-hall had passed decades earlier, as the son of a local jazz musician who had also worked as a light operator at the Liverpool Hippodrome, McCartney acknowledges that he grew up "steeped in that music-hall tradition."¹⁸ Beyond *Sgt. Pepper*, he further evokes earlier styles in songs such as "All Together Now" and "Honey Pie," and, more seriously, in one of his most accomplished solo recordings, the grand, Broadway-styled ballad "Warm and Beautiful."¹⁹ He has also frequently recreated the music-hall stage in solo videos, sometimes anachronistically so in relation to the music, as in the disco-influenced "Goodnight Tonight" and the synth-ballad "So Bad."²⁰ Departures such as these, and indeed, McCartney's often bewilderingly lightweight solo work, suggest that despite his transforming influence on pop, the blueprint for his concept of the entertainer's role was set by the genial song and dance men of the postwar era. (His apparent ambition to stand alongside these as well as more serious artists, just as the Beatles did on the *Sgt. Pepper* sleeve, was taken still further when, immediately after Al-Qaeda's terror attacks on America in 2001, he wrote "Freedom," an anthem designed to stir patriotism and community spirit much as the music of Glenn Miller and Vera Lynn had in Britain during the Second World War²¹).

Although McCartney's period pieces are often dismissed as whimsical indulgence, their prominence in his work of 1967, also the year of his most socially pertinent songs, highlights how, despite the lightness of the genre's content, his appreciation of the intimacy of the music-hall environment informed his awareness of the unifying potency of the song. In his pre-TV childhood, the family would gather round the piano to sing: a tradition remembered in "Your Mother Should Know."²² Yet, so sparse is this composition that McCartney's invitations to "Lift up your hearts and sing me a song / That was a hit before your mother was born" and to "sing it again" are not ad-libs, but the very substance of the song. The ritual of singing around the piano was also echoed in two of the Beatles' most celebrated TV appearances: the *Our World* performance of "All You Need Is Love" and the *Frost on Sunday* rendition of "Hey Jude."²³ In both, the music-hall tradition of audience participation was echoed as the crowd surrounded the group onstage and sang along, and in each, it was chiefly McCartney who played the showman (although the former was predominantly Lennon's song, McCartney enjoyed this role through his asides "All together

now!” and “Everyone!”). Decades later, these highpoints of his career were themselves nostalgically recreated by McCartney in a TV performance of a 1993 single. By this time, however, the friendly cry “All together now!” had transformed into “C’mon People,” and the song was a rally-cry to “form a party” to challenge the ecological indifference of world leaders.²⁴

The contrast in the mediated memory between the optimism of 1967 (as heard in the popular song) and the radicalism of 1968 (as witnessed on the streets) marks an advance from innocence into experience, and perhaps, to some degree, theory into practice. Although the social content of the Beatles’ 1968 songs grew somewhat hesitant, as audible in Lennon’s “Revolution” (“count me out-in”) and McCartney’s turn towards a more whimsical style in songs such as “Rocky Raccoon” and “Martha My Dear” (*The Beatles*), “The White Album” carried what was implicitly the latter’s most politically loaded song as a Beatle. Though the interpretation would seem tenuous had it not been confirmed by McCartney in the Nineties, “Blackbird” alluded to the civil-rights struggle: “I had in mind a black woman, rather than a bird. Those were the days of the civil-rights movement, which all of us cared passionately about, so this was really a song from me to a black woman, experiencing these problems in the States: ‘Let me encourage you to keep trying, to keep your faith, there is hope.’”²⁵

Following a sequence of blows, including, most devastatingly, the death of Martin Luther King, 1968 seemed indeed “the dead of night” for the civil rights movement. Yet, as McCartney’s songs frequently remind us, the despair of night yields the revelation of morning, and “Blackbird” is fundamentally a song of hope: the bird, although injured, is *singing* in the dead of night. Adopting what is effectively a Marxist understanding of social progress, the song, recorded at the height of the 60s student uprisings, sees previous setbacks as advancing the necessity of revolution to the point of inevitability: “You were only waiting for this moment to arise.”

McCartney’s symbolism in the lyric corresponds interestingly with Jung’s identification of the bird as a “symbol of transcendence,” and again, there is an implication of the social potential of the song.²⁶ The blackbird’s “singing” is heard throughout Asia, Europe and North America. Thus, writing shortly after his return from Rishikesh, where he had studied Transcendental Meditation with the Maharishi, at precisely the time when Lennon was beginning his relationship with Yoko Ono, McCartney found a perfect symbol for the hope of transcultural harmony.

McCartney occasionally returns to political themes in his writing (often, as in “Kreen Akrore,” “Give Ireland Back to the Irish” and “Ebony and Ivory,” to address issues of racial or postcolonial tension) but “Blackbird” closed the most socially resonant phase in his work. From here on, his songs become more personal. Like “Yesterday,” the last song of comparable introspection, McCartney’s 1969 compositions are haunted by a sense of abandonment. Now, however, the

singer is not mourning loss, but fearing its imminence. "Let It Be" correlates with "Yesterday" in both its genesis from a dream, and its relation—this time, conscious—to McCartney's own "Mother Mary." He recollects:

This was a very difficult period. John was with Yoko full time, and our relationship was beginning to crumble: John and I were going through a very tense period. The breakup of the Beatles was looming and I was very nervy. Personally it was a very difficult time for me. . . . One night during this tense time I had a dream I saw my mum, who'd been dead ten years or so. And it was so great to see her because that's a wonderful thing about dreams: you actually are reunited with that person for a second; there they are and you appear to both be physically together again. . . . In the dream she said "It'll be alright." I'm not sure if she used the words "Let it be," but that was the gist of her advice.²⁷

Although McCartney leaves his own troubles veiled and unspecified in "Let It Be," thus enabling it to reach all "broken hearted people," its correspondence with his despair as the Beatles fell apart remains striking. He is on the point of acceptance, but unable to completely surrender hope of reconciliation:

For though they may be parted
There is still a chance that they will see
There will be an answer, let it be.

With dual significance that captures the confusion of the "hour of darkness," the refrain "let it be" is repeated as if a prayer for an answer, yet simultaneously, it *is* the answer. With Zen-like deconstruction, hope and providence are inverted. In the conflict between past (the lost unity of the "parted") and future ("a chance that they will see"), the hour of darkness represents a tension between the wants of the conscious ego and the wisdom of the unconscious Self, which sees—or, in Zen-Buddhist terms, *Sees*—only the present.

Despite such glimpses of enlightenment, vulnerability continues to dominate subsequent songs. "The Long and Winding Road" hints again at resignation to inevitability in its eponymous line, but its melancholy, soft-focus lyric remains fearful, the singer admitting inability to revive a dying relationship ("You'll never know the many ways I've tried"), and begging the other to give him another chance ("Don't leave me waiting here"). Still more despairing is "Oh! Darling," in which, between spoken ad-libs of "believe me, darling," McCartney screams "If you leave me / I'll never make it alone." Whether this is, as MacDonald summarizes, a "spoof doo-wop,"²⁸ or whether it is indeed the closest McCartney came, consciously or otherwise, to begging Lennon to re-think his long-apparent intention to leave the Beatles, "Oh! Darling" has a noticeable correspondence with McCartney's later expressed feelings of this period.²⁹

In later 1969 compositions, McCartney finally embraces the answer glimpsed in "Let It Be." *Abbey Road* climaxes with him finally able to accept

the present as merely a part of the fullness of time: "And in the end, the love you take / Is equal to the love you make."³⁰ Aware that Shakespeare used rhyming couplets to signify the end of an act, McCartney "wanted to end with a little meaningful couplet, [and] followed the bard."³¹ Yet it was indeed the end of only one act. McCartney summarizes "You Never Give Me Your Money" as a lambaste at the later Beatles' manager Allen Klein,³² but MacDonald hears more in the song, identifying in the weary descent of the opening bars "the idealistic, innocent 60s [being] bravely bidden farewell."³³ However, he also identifies the song as "the psychological opening of [McCartney's] solo career," highlighting the freedom inherent in the refrain "Oh that magic feeling / Nowhere to go," after which, the mood lifts dramatically and a new clarity of direction emerges. With the lines "Soon we'll be away from here / Step on the gas and wipe that tear away," Linda McCartney effectively replaces Lennon as the other in McCartney's lyrics.

While the image of the Beatles crossing the street on the *Abbey Road* cover proved symbolic of their state of transition, the rear sleeve of McCartney's 1970 solo debut boldly celebrated the changes in his life. Above Linda's portrait of her bearded husband, holding daughter Mary in his weather jacket before the rugged Scottish highlands where they now lived, the title *McCartney* emphasized both his independence from the Beatles and his new life as a family man.

McCartney is triply marked by Linda's presence: as well as providing photography and harmonies, she is the clear inspiration of several tracks, including the classic "Maybe I'm Amazed." In this most Lennonesque of all his recordings, McCartney screams of being "a lonely man who's in the middle of something / That he doesn't really understand," praising his lover while confessing to being afraid of how he needs her. Yet while upheaval remains a specter, the sense of personal axis progresses from McCartney's late Beatles tracks. The present is still shown to be trying, but the sense of the future is clear and optimistic. Images of staying in bed and wasting time in "Every Night" suggest what McCartney has referred to as his "nervous breakdown" after the Beatles split, but the key line is the conclusion: "But tonight I just wanna stay in / And be with you." Emphasizing the simplicity of his contentment, this quietly challenges the uneasy relationship between rock and domesticity: McCartney was beginning to receive considerable flak in the music press for his new lifestyle (much of this was initiated by Lennon, who moved to New York City in September 1971).

McCartney was not the only 60s icon to face scorn for shifting priorities from rock stardom to personal contentment. "Every Night" is one of his few lyrics to overtly suggest Dylan's work; "Tonight I'll Be Staying Here with You" concluded *Nashville Skyline* (1969) with an almost identical resolution. Meanwhile, Lennon and Harrison further liberated themselves from the Beatles' myth through post-Dadaist publicity stunts and Hare Krishna respectively. All such

changes found expression in the music. The Beatles' aptly titled *Let It Be* preceded Lennon's declaration that "the dream is over"³⁴ and Harrison's that *All Things Must Pass* (both 1970). Dylan, too, continued to reflect personal axis at start of the new decade in *New Morning* (1970), while Van Morrison sang of "Starting a New Life" in "Old Old Woodstock" (*Tupelo Honey*, 1971). It was not just these individuals who were growing up, however: it was rock itself, which, as Neil Young memorably recognized, was now "ready for the country."³⁵

As was also true for Dylan and Morrison in America, McCartney's salvation from the drug-addled, contract-bound 60s corresponded with a move from the city to the country. Although, unlike his contemporaries across the Atlantic, McCartney never fully embraced country-rock, the lyrical content of his 1970-74 work is strongly characterized by celebration of his rural home life. "Man We Was Lonely" (*McCartney*) contrasts the "fast city-life" with family intimacy, as the McCartneys harmonize: "Now let me lie with my love for the time I am home (home) . . . home." This theme is pursued more boldly on the second solo album, *Ram* (1971), in which McCartney sings of personal healing with robust, occasionally arrogant, conviction. "Dear Boy" begins with him admonishing another who, not realizing what he "had found," wounded the singer with his rejection. It is, however, a song of recovery, rising beautifully as the focus shifts from past to present and a new love enters his life. When he "stepped in" to this relationship, his "heart was down," and the memory of hurt resounds in the corresponding vocal, moving from C to D and "down" to B. The next line, however, unexpectedly transcends the established frame of the melody, communicating newfound freedom. "A love *came through*," and here, the vocal climbs an entire octave, turning the mood from sorrow to joy. This love "brought [him] round" from the apathy suggested in "Every Night," and got him "up—and about!," at which point, the eager jangling of an electric guitar enters the song, marking a newly revitalized outlook.

Unsurprisingly, Lennon believed that the "dear boy" who offended McCartney was himself, and responded angrily in both the press and the vitriolic "How Do You Sleep?" (*Imagine*, 1971). Using Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone" as a model, Lennon capitalized on what many assumed to be an authoritative perception of his former partner to deliver a list of insults that stands as the single most devastating attack that McCartney's public image and artistic reputation have ever received. Although his response in the press was understandably timid, he continued the dialogue in song. A highlight of the *Wings Wild Life* (1971) was "Tomorrow": a nominal riposte to Lennon's sneer "the only thing you done was . . . yesterday" in the form of a grand ballad that also forged a manifesto for his new career with Wings.

Still more direct is *Wild Life's* closing track. Here, Lennon is no longer patronized as "Dear Boy," but, in a humble move from sarcasm to sincerity, sor-

rowfully addressed as “Dear Friend.” The song is marked by a strong sense of concern—Lennon had by now begun an on-off relationship with heroin and painfully relived childhood traumas through primal therapy—and this is manifest in both lyric and vocal: note the tenderness with which McCartney sings “Are you afraid?” In hindsight, it seems that “How Do You Sleep?” may have been what he needed to jolt him from the petulance of *Ram*. His seriousness in “Dear Friend” becomes clear when, uncharacteristically, he lays bare his insecurities about his own identity, responding to Lennon’s criticisms: “Are you a fool / Or is it true?”—a question that returns at the closing edge of each verse to be left hanging unanswered.

In addition to contrasting their different attitudes to the fragmentation of the Beatles—McCartney’s lingering hope for reconciliation, Lennon’s indifference—“Dear Friend” and “How Do You Sleep?” exemplify the divergent ways in which they addressed their situation in song: McCartney dispensing with all but its emotional essence (as in “Let It Be” or “The Long and Winding Road”), Lennon preferring overt self-reference (as in “The Ballad of John and Yoko” or “God”). However, the sheer aggressive might of “How Do You Sleep?” notwithstanding, it is “Dear Friend” that chimes most pertinently with the changing lives of its audience, and remains McCartney’s last song to do so with such immaculate timing. Contrasting with the sometimes detrimental insularity of Lennon’s style (“I just believe in me / Yoko and me,” he sang in “God”), “Dear Friend” shows McCartney placing his own experience in a universally recognizable setting. Reflecting on the bittersweet twilight of a friendship as one or both parties embark on new relationships (in which, its correspondence with “Dear Boy” is more than nominal), “Dear Friend” could have been about any of the “young and newly wed” amongst the Beatles’ first generation of fans and beyond.

Despite its appeal for compromise, “Dear Friend” was ultimately a parting gesture. Symbolically, the last time McCartney saw Lennon (in 1976) was when he called unannounced at the Dakota, guitar in hand, only for Lennon to coldly remind him that they were no longer teenagers in Liverpool and close the door. The next time McCartney addressed him in song, it was in the form of an elegy.

Like “Tomorrow,” “Here Today” (*Tug of War*, 1982) quietly echoes the song that marked the first fracture in the Lennon-McCartney partnership. Since Lennon’s acknowledgement of “Yesterday” as McCartney’s finest moment was clearly double-edged, this gesture may seem odd, but in the overwhelming sense of loss that pervades both songs, McCartney’s subtle linking of the two is deeply pertinent, as implied in his return (for the first time since “Yesterday”) to the use of a string quartet. Most significantly of all, both are defined by regret of past arguments, and the yearning for a chance to make peace: “I said something wrong, now I long for yesterday.” Introducing “Here Today” onstage in 2002, McCartney said: “Sometimes when people pass on you wish you’d said every-

thing you'd meant and everything you felt. . . . I wrote this next song after my dear friend John passed on.³⁶

Centering on the line "if you were here today," McCartney acknowledges the later distance between himself and Lennon ("And if I said I really knew you well / What would your answer be?"), but as in "Things We Said Today," initial closeness is elevated as the essence of the relationship: "But as for me / I still remember how it was before." As ever, McCartney keeps the context clear for anyone to apply the song to their own experience, and though widely documented details of their first meeting in 1957 are conjured in the line "What about the time we met?" (poignantly met by an echo at the point where Lennon's backing vocal might once have sounded), the subsequent "What about the night we cried?" carries a dignified reticence, reminding us that for all public knowledge of the Beatles, their relationship was one of privately lived experience. Even by McCartney's often-effusive standards, "Here Today" is unabashed in its emotion: "Now I am holding back the tears no more." However, this is justified by the song's essential theme of wishing "you'd said everything you meant." "Here Today" closes: "I really loved you and was glad you came along . . . For you were in my song."

McCartney's reflections on the passing of time are indelibly haunted by a sense of loss, and his career has been touched by four major experiences of this. The first was the death of his mother, in the aftermath of which, he first took up the guitar and began writing songs. While a direct connection between these two defining events in his early life is debatable—this was the skiffle boom, when thousands of teenagers were buying guitars—a significant comment on the role of music in McCartney's life comes from his brother Mike, who mused to Hunter Davies: "It was just after mother's death that it started. . . It took over his whole life. You lose a mother—and you find a guitar?"³⁷ Although McCartney has yet to acknowledge that any of his songs *consciously* mourn his mother, her absence remains a specter in the persistent theme of family life in his songs, and his many recreations of the musical styles of his childhood.

The mourning of a second loss, of the Beatles as a group, is similarly apparent in McCartney's use of retrospective musical styles and forms in subsequent work, most obviously in the reprisal of key album tracks and the use of medleys. Like *Abbey Road*, *Red Rose Speedway* (recorded at the same studios in 1973) climaxes with a medley, the structure of which, in its opening piano bars, linking guitar chords, and culmination with a lengthy guitar solo, closely resembles the 1969 sequence. While such moments ostensibly represent a continuation of the styles McCartney had pioneered on the later Beatles albums, an element of self-standardization renders this less a progression than a return. Elsewhere, the similarities are more self-conscious. Like "Tomorrow," "Bluebird" invites comparison with one of McCartney's most famous songs, while the cover of its parent album, the pointedly titled *Band on the Run* (1973), shows Wings at the center

of a gathering of recognizable faces, albeit that, fittingly, the crowd was smaller and consisted of less well known, more contemporary faces. This gesture was significant not only in suggesting *Sgt. Pepper* as a yardstick of McCartney's past achievements, but furthermore, because the 1967 album also acknowledged the problem of narrow media representations, contrasting four mop-top dummies against the mature real-life Beatles.

Still more defining was the disintegration of McCartney's relationship with Lennon. McCartney lost him twice: once as a collaborator, and once again as a friend. His absence in both roles punctuates McCartney's solo work, from the conspicuously sparse *McCartney* tracks, lacking the changes in mood and melody that he might have supplied, through the excessive optimism of "My Love" (*Red Rose Speedway*, 1973) or "With a Little Luck" (*London Town*, 1978), to the strained attempts at nonsensical lyrics in "The World Tonight" (*Flaming Pie* 1997). Furthermore, McCartney continues to allude to Lennon in his writing. The title of *Flaming Pie* (recorded during preparation of the Beatles' *Anthology* series) was lifted from the first history of the group, penned by Lennon in 1961, while "The Song We Were Singing" fondly recalled their writing sessions.

It was through the *Anthology* project in 1995 that McCartney came as close as he ever could to reunion with Lennon in the Beatles' postmodern "collaborations," "Free as a Bird" and "Real Love," built around unfinished Lennon demos.³⁸ The mourning of a relationship in the former once again suggested that McCartney was singing to Lennon. His lines "Whatever happened to the life that we once knew / Can we really live without each other?" are so typical of his nostalgic style and expressed longing for reconciliation that many assumed he wrote them; Lennon's original demo, however, confirms they were already in place. This illustrates a fundamental connection between Lennon and McCartney: the early lives of both were traumatized by losses that would haunt their later work. A third, uncompleted "reunion" track was titled "Now and Then," and revolved around Lennon's line: "I don't want to lose you."³⁹

As darkly anticipated in "Somedays" (*Flaming Pie*), a fourth, massive loss came with Linda's death from cancer in 1998. Following 1999's *Run Devil Run* (a cathartic revisitation of the Rock 'n' Roll classics that brought him solace in his teenage grief), McCartney published *Blackbird Singing* (2001), his first collection of verse and lyrics. This concluded with "Nova," a sequence of unrestrainedly emotional poems of his life with and without Linda, in which, grief is defined by the constancy of feeling amid the brutal adjustments that time demands: "My love is alive / My love is dead."⁴⁰ However, *Driving Rain* (2001), McCartney's first album of original songs after Linda's death, is marked by a definite sense of healing, and its tones of loss are suffused with thanksgiving. Integral to this is an underlying belief in greater, more celestial forces, and the lyrics are rich in metaphysical imagery: "All the world's a tiny bubble," McCartney sings in one track,⁴¹ while "Spinning on an Axis" finds him "Staring

in the face of time and space." However, rather than offering a simplistic belief in passive destiny, McCartney urges us to seize the opportunities offered by personal and political history: "You were only waiting for this moment to arise," as he sang in "Blackbird." "Magic" remembers his first meeting with Linda, and in its intense focus on one moment, resounds as a mature counterpart to "I Saw Her Standing There." Comparing the two songs, we hear a massive advance from innocence to experience in McCartney's work, and, owing much to Lennon's influence, pop itself, as standard themes are replaced with personal reflection. While "I Saw Her Standing There" was a bawdy cry of youth, "Magic" is firmly a song of age: "So this is the hour . . . when they turn out the light / Nothing but memories. . . burning so bright." However, while it is "they" who turn out the light, it was the singer himself who initiated this whole story: "A few minutes later, you'd have been out that door / And I'd have been lonely—for evermore." Further underlining its intimations of mortality, "Magic" closes with the striking of sudden, monotonous guitar chords, imitating the chiming of a clock.

It is this recognition of the uniqueness of *now* that enables McCartney to sing of finding "love again" in the vulnerable but transitory "From a Lover to a Friend." As usual in his writing, however, advance is shown with all its emotional pulls, and the past remains a specter. Images of rain persist throughout the album, suggesting tears ("Rinse the raindrops from your eyes," he repeats on the closing track⁴²), but rain also has more subtle significance on the album, symbolizing the cyclic, almost karmic weathers of emotional experience. The lively title track uses the setting of romantic drives together to symbolize companionship through everyday experience, just as "Two of Us," one of his first songs for Linda, did for another raincoat-wearing couple in 1969.

Fittingly, in terms of its autobiographical nature, *Driving Rain* is the culmination of a long sequence of McCartney compositions using water as a metaphor for time as a sublime force of nature; this includes tracks as diverse as "Penny Lane," "The Long and Winding Road," "Mamunia," and "Wanderlust." "Fluid" on *Rushes* (1998), his ambient collaboration with Youth, features the sound of running water, over which, the question is asked: "What does the concept of time mean to you?" So how does McCartney's work answer this question? Inevitably, time is synonymous with life and experience. However, in their constant recognition of the present, be it defined by mourning for the past and what it represents, or embracing the future and the difference it promises, his songs allow a beautiful and truthful perspective of innocence, as they display ongoing tension between plenitude and lack, love and loss. In "Waterfalls" (*McCartney II*, 1980), the singer needs love "Like a second needs an hour / Like a raindrop needs a shower." It is, however, in such recognitions of the very incompleteness of events that McCartney offers his most emotionally resonant and historically valuable work.

As McCartney enters his 60s, and Popular Music Studies emerges with radical interdisciplinary presence in academia, perhaps now is the time to recognize the mythology of the man as a reflection of the cultures in which he is celebrated, and begin to explore the content, context and achievement of his work.

Notes

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¹McCartney's reputation has been further troubled by Dylan's reported distaste for his style. However, the anecdote invariably used to illustrate this also demonstrates the different directions of the two. Recalling the "very cool reception" Dylan dealt McCartney when the Beatles visited him in London in 1965, Marianne Faithfull recounts in her autobiography how McCartney played the acetate of an experimental track of random distorted noises. Dylan responded by leaving the room. See Marianne Faithfull with David Dalton, *Faithfull* 75-76. A lesser-known acknowledgement of McCartney on Dylan's part is his unreleased version of "Yesterday," recorded in 1970: a country-blues treatment that renders this spontaneous recording as tender and melodic as anything on the resulting *New Morning* album (1970).

²See Steve Lowe, "When We Were Kings."

³Compare these tracks with, for example, "Tell Me Mama" and "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues" on Dylan's *Live at the Royal Albert Hall, 1966* (1998).

⁴See Ray Coleman, *Yesterday and Today* 40-47.

⁵The Beatles, *Help!* (1965).

⁶See Maureen Cleave, "How Does a Beatle Live?: John Lennon Lives Like This" 72.

⁷See Ian MacDonald, *Revolution in the Head* 181.

⁸Frank Kermode and Stephen Spender, "The Metaphor at the End of the Funnel" 155.

⁹An intriguing characteristic of McCartney's more ambitious projects is his grounding of them in references to Northern English culture. His first solo venture beyond pop was his brass score for *The Family Way* (1967), a film set in working class northern England. Previously, the Beatles had avoided brass for fear of sentimentality—see McCartney's comments in *The Beatles Anthology* 234. However, by the time the *Sgt. Pepper* sessions began in late 1966, immediately after McCartney completed his brass score, the Beatles' style had so advanced that they were able to use such arrangements with fresh integrity. Thus, the archaic styles that suffuse *Sgt. Pepper* with a post-hallucinogenic shine act

as both a distancing effect *and* a means of retaining elements of familiarity within their more adventurous sound.

McCartney's insistence on identifying works that threaten to appear elitist with his own more earthy cultural background continues. His first operatic piece was *Paul McCartney's Liverpool Oratorio* (1991), and a compilation mixing "classical" arrangements of his songs with further orchestral compositions was pointedly titled *Paul McCartney's Working Classical* (1999). He collaborated with the Super Furry Animals for the impressionistic *Liverpool Sound Collage* (2000), and the first major exhibition of his paintings opened in Liverpool in 2002.

¹⁰*It Was Twenty Years Ago Today* (1987).

¹¹See Adorno's essay "On Popular Music" 437-69.

¹²In 1967, a new Abortion Act was passed, entitling women of all classes to legal and thus safer abortions, while the National Health Service Family Planning Act meant that contraceptives and birth control counseling became freely available from local health authorities. Later that year, the Sexual Offences Act was amended, making homosexual relationships between adults legal. See Arthur Marwick, *British Society since 1945* 148.

¹³Adrian Henri, "Love Is" 21.

¹⁴See Larkin 182.

¹⁵Adorno 438.

¹⁶See McCartney's comments in Barry Miles, *Many Years From Now* 327.

¹⁷Examples of the structural and stylistic standardization of *Sgt. Pepper* include the Rolling Stone's *Their Satanic Majesties' Request* (1967) and Queen's *A Night At The Opera* (1975).

¹⁸See Miles 23.

¹⁹"All Together Now" (*Yellow Submarine*, 1969); "Honey Pie" (*The Beatles*, 1968); "Warm and Beautiful" (*Wings, At the Speed of Sound*, 1976).

²⁰"Goodnight Tonight" [Version D], directed by Keef (1979); "So Bad," directed by Keef (1984).

²¹McCartney, *Driving Rain*, 2001.

²²*Magical Mystery Tour*, 1967.

²³*Our World*, BBC TV, 25 June 1967; *Frost on Sunday*, London Weekend Television, 25 August 1968.

²⁴"C'mon People" (McCartney, *Off the Ground*, 1993). See *Top of the Pops*, BBC 1, 17 February 1993.

²⁵See Miles 485.

²⁶See Carl Jung, *Man and His Symbols* 146-47.

²⁷Miles 538.

²⁸MacDonald 307.

²⁹See *Wingspan* documentary (2001).

- ³⁰“The End” (*Abbey Road*, 1969).
- ³¹Miles 558.
- ³²Miles 556.
- ³³MacDonald 309.
- ³⁴Lennon, “God,” *Plastic Ono Band* (1970).
- ³⁵Neil Young, “Are You Ready for the Country?” *Harvest* (1972).
- ³⁶Concert at Chicago United Center, 10 April 2002.
- ³⁷Hunter Davies, *The Beatles* 96.
- ³⁸The Beatles, “Free as a Bird,” *Anthology 1* (1995); The Beatles, “Real Love,” *Anthology 2* (1996).
- ³⁹Lennon, circa 1980 (unreleased).
- ⁴⁰McCartney, “To Be Said,” *Blackbird Singing* 156.
- ⁴¹McCartney, “Tiny Bubble,” *Driving Rain*.
- ⁴²McCartney, “Rinse the Raindrops,” *Driving Rain*.

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