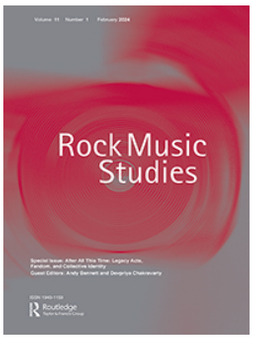

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Rock Music Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rrms20

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To cite this article: Mark Osteen (21 Jun 2024): "I'll Never Make it Alone": The Beatles' "Oh! Darling" in Its Contexts, Rock Music Studies, DOI: 10.1080/19401159.2024.2362058

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/19401159.2024.2362058

ROCK MUSIC STUDIES
https://doi.org/10.1080/19401159.2024.2362058

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"I'll Never Make it Alone": The Beatles' "Oh! Darling" in Its Contexts

Mark Osteen

Department of English, Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, USA

ABSTRACT

This essay uses a the line in the title, quoted from "Oh! Darling," a song on the Beatles' *Abbey Road* album, as a prompt to catalog and analyze the song's sources and inspirations in earlier 12/8 meter rhythm and blues songs. The author then traces its emergence from previous Beatles songs in 12/8, and its differences and similarities to earlier compositions that involve anger and crying. Last, it shows how the song occupies a pivotal position in *Abbey Road*'s journey through the multifarious forms of love.

KEYWORDS

The beatles; *Abbey road*; songs in 12/8 meter; intermusicality; crying; love songs

"You refer back to something you've loved and try and take the spirit of that and write something new." That is how Paul McCartney explained his songwriting method to Barry Miles (277). These words precisely describe what happened with "Oh! Darling," his tribute to the 12/8 rhythm and blues and rock-and-roll tunes of his youth. With his words in mind, I propose that we interpret the song's lyric "I'll never make it alone" as McCartney's recognition that neither he nor any other songwriter creates a song without help. In this essay, I catalog and analyze several of the song's important sources and inspirations as well as its similarities to the Beatles' earlier compositions. Last, I show how it occupies a pivotal position in *Abbey Road*'s journey through the multifarious forms of love.

Hold Me

Several scholars have pinpointed likely sources for "Oh! Darling" in earlier R&B tunes composed in 12/8 meter.[1] Jonathan Gould, for example, describes it as a "carefully crafted replica" of classics such as "The Great Pretender" by the Platters, James Brown's "Please Please Please," and Little Richard's "Send Me Some Lovin'" (579). Written by the Platters' manager, Samuel "Buck" Ram, and released in 1955, "The Great Pretender" begins, like "Oh! Darling," with an "Oh!" pick-up note poised on the dominant seventh. (McCartney adds an augmented fifth; the Platters' song is in G major on the original recording.) Both songs express the singer's powerful desire for his lover, and in both the singer will "grieve all alone," but McCartney's plea is more direct: the Platters' singer's need "is such" that he must pretend "too much," or his emotions will overwhelm him. Hence, he is "lonely, but no one can tell." The narrator of "Please Please Please" (written by Brown and Johnny Terry

CONTACT Mark Osteen mosteen@loyola.edu Department of English, Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, USA

and recorded in 1956) is equally urgent—so urgent that the songwriters didn't have time to compose a bridge. The song's bluntly direct lyrics are pretty much summed up in the title. "Send Me Some Lovin'" (written by John Marascalco and Leo Price, recorded in 1957) is a little faster than "Oh! Darling" and quite a bit less angst ridden. Although the song was composed, like McCartney's, in the key of A major, Richard sings it in D-flat. We might call all three songs great uncles of our darling.

Steve Turner (191) cites as sources some of Jackie Wilson's ballads, particularly "To Be Loved" (1957; co-written by Berry Gordy, Jr.). This song is also in 12/8 (in the key of F major) and the lyrics to the chorus—"To be loved, to be loved / Oh, what a feeling, / To be loved"—bear some resemblance to those in McCartney's composition. But, otherwise, it seems no closer than a second cousin. Tim Riley describes "Oh! Darling" as a "simmering gospel blues torched with Ray Charles vocal melodramatics" and suggests that it recalls Elvis Presley's "One Night" (319). Among Brother Ray's numbers, "I've Got News for You" should indeed be in the mix of influences to consider. Elvis's song (written in B-flat) does anticipate "Oh! Darling" in some respects. For example, its A-section melody is introduced by the V7+5 chord and it rises to a climax on the line "been too lonely too long" at the end of the bridge (over the IV7 chord), similar to the way McCartney's shouted words, "Well, you know, I nearly fell down and died," consummates the bridge—the chord here, however, is V7. These echoes seem fairly distant. Even so, it is clear that McCartney copped some of these songs' harmonic choices: for example, "The Great Pretender," "Send Me Some Lovin,'" "To Be Loved," and "One Night" all anticipate "Oh! Darling's" modulation to the IV chord on the bridge. Walter Everett further observes that Fats Domino's "Can't Believe You Wanna Leave" employs a 4-3-b2-1 ending similar to that of "Oh! Darling" (253; "Can't Believe" was also recorded by Beatles favorite Gene Vincent). But I contend that Little Richard's version of that song is the stronger influence, given McCartney's oft-stated admiration and emulation of this rock-and-roll icon. I have more to say about Little Richard below.

A highly salient but previously unrecognized source is hidden in the Beatles' own catalog: Smokey Robinson's "You've Really Got a Hold on Me," which the Fab Four first recorded in 1963 (transposing it from C to A and altering the title's first word from "You've" to "You"). McCartney recalls that this and other Robinson songs "had really been an influence" on the band (Miles 277). In fact, "You've Really Got a Hold on Me" is the Miracles number that he recalled while working with Lennon on "In My Life," and it is the song that prompted the quotation with which I began this essay. So powerful was the song's impact that the Beatles re-recorded it half-seriously during the Get Back sessions in early 1969 (at a more deliberate tempo than on their earlier recording, closer to that of "Oh! Darling"). Robinson's song was thus likely in the front of McCartney's mind as he penned the new number, the early versions of which were recorded during those same sessions. Although "Oh! Darling" is considerably slower than the band's cover of Robinson's song, they recorded both compositions in the key of A, and the chord progressions are remarkably similar: although Smokey's sticks mostly to I, vi and IV, both songwriters employ the ii7 / V7 turnaround (Bmi7 to E7), albeit in different spots—Robinson in bar seven, McCartney in the fifth and sixth measures. (The Beatles' cover of Robinson's tune also features an unorthodox eleven-measure A section.)

Figure 1 The songs' sentiments, however, are opposites: in Robinson's composition, the beloved one has a hold on him that he cannot escape; in McCartney's, the singer says, in

"Oh! Darling" Chord Progression, Verse

A / E / F#mi / D / Bmi7 E7 / Bmi7 E7 / (1st ending: A D / A E /) ; (2nd ending): A D / A A7/.

"You Really Got a Hold on Me" Chord Progression (Beatles' version)

(Intro) A / A / F#mi / F#mi / A / D / Bmi E7 / A / A / F#mi / F#mi

Chorus: A A7 / D / A / A E7 (fermata) / E7 (in 9/8) / A / F#mi E A ("tighter") / A / F#mi E A ("tighter").

Figure 1. Comparing the Harmonies of "Oh! Darling" and "You Really Got a Hold on Me".

effect, "I do *not* have a hold on you." The imploring tones, however, show kinship, although "Oh! Darling" is more intense, bordering on the violent.

In Black

Most of the precursor songs I have mentioned were originally recorded and/or written by Black artists. Is "Oh! Darling," then, an instance of cultural appropriation, another example of a white artist exploiting Black musicians by rewriting (or in some cases, simply stealing) their work and profiting by the theft? Does this appropriation also elide the depredations of slavery and Jim Crow? Journalist Tim Sommer claims that it does, stating that by borrowing the structures and tropes of Tin Pan Alley songwriting, the Beatles hid the roots of rock and roll in Black music: "The Beatles meant no harm, I am quite sure of it, but their music did its best to ensure that you would forget that there is a slave market lying at the foundation of every tom roll and bass line." The Beatles would disagree. In a 1972 interview with *Jet* magazine, Lennon observed that growing up in Liverpool gave the band members a relatively enlightened perspective on race. "The ugly scars of an earlier, racist-colonial period in England still mar the ports. . . . Slave rings are still anchored to the front of the docks there. But it was usually hipper, this port city, than most of the country. We'd been hearing funky black music all our lives, while people across Britain and Europe had never heard of it" (qtd. in Deriso).

Indeed, the Beatles venerated Black artists and paid tribute to them by performing and recording their music. Thus, their early albums feature songs by well-known African American artists such as Chuck Berry, the Marvelettes, the Isley Brothers, and Little Richard, while also including material by more obscure figures such as Larry Williams ("Bad Boy") and Arthur Alexander ("Anna"). In most cases they diligently cited the composers, unlike, for example, Led Zeppelin, who were sued several times for failing to credit the (mostly Black) originators of the songs they recorded.[2] In that same interview with *Jet*, Lennon stated, "Black music is my life. . . . All I talk about is 1958 when I heard 'Long Tall Sally,' when I heard 'Johnny Be Good,' when I heard Bo Diddley. That changed my life completely." At the end of the interview, he declares categorically that "rock 'n' roll is black" (qtd in Deriso). There is no forgetting here. It is also worth noting that the band refused to play segregated venues in the U.S. South and signed Black artists Doris Troy and Billy Preston to Apple. In fact, Preston holds perhaps the most viable claim to

being the fifth Beatle, given that his playing is out front on many tracks on *Let It Be* and that his piano solo is featured on "Get Back."

Phil Bausch thus argues that the Beatles "not only didn't 'use' black artists, they championed them. When The Beatles came to New York, they were guest DJ's at a radio station and could play anything they wanted. Instead of choosing their own songs, they played songs by their favorite artists, like The Ronettes and Little Richard." Their admiration also boosted many of these artists' careers. Smokey Robinson himself commented in an interview with *Rolling Stone* that the Beatles were the first huge white act to admit they listened to and loved Black music. The Temptations' Otis Williams went further, saying, "I must give credit to The Beatles. . . . It seemed like at that point in time white America said, 'OK if the Beatles are checking them out, let us check them out'" (both qtd. in Bausch). Far from robbing them, the Beatles' endorsements put money in these artists' pockets. Even Bobby Parker, supposedly a victim of the band's cribbing of his song "Watch Your Step," admits that he was "flattered" that they borrowed his tune's opening riff for "I Feel Fine" (though he adds that he should have garnered more recognition for it: *John Lennon's Jukebox*, Part 2, 1-1:10).[3] Lennon confessed, "Especially in the early days, I would often write a melody, a lyric, in my head to some other song because I can't write music. So I would carry it around as somebody else's song and then change it when I got down to putting it down on paper, or putting it down on tape—consciously change it because I knew somebody was going to sue me or everybody's going to say 'what a rip off'" (*John Lennon's Jukebox*, Part 2, 0:50). In other words, they watched their steps, taking care to change whatever material they appropriated.

But at least one forerunner complicates this general truth. Everett points out that around the time that McCartney composed "Oh! Darling," he had been listening to Fleetwood Mac's 1968 cover version of "Need Your Love So Bad," a slow, unorthodox, eight-bar blues written and first recorded by Little Willie John in 1955. This song's bridge harmonies are identical to those of the "Oh! Darling" bridge, even including the same striking move to the F7 chord in the second measure and the intervening F7b5 before the turnaround (Everett 253). Moreover, the lyrics highlight the singer's plea to the beloved in similarly desperate terms. Thus, "Oh! Darling": "Believe me when I tell you," and "when I beg you"; "Need Your Love": "Listen to my plea, baby, bring it to me." "Need Your Love" also anticipates the later song's theme of belief, displayed when, in the second verse, the narrator of "Need Your Love" declares "I need someone to stand up and tell me when I'm lyin.'" Fleetwood Mac's rendition reached the Top 40 in the UK and so it seems likely that McCartney simply borrowed the song's bridge.[4] Unlike the intertextual relationships listed above, this one might strike us as outright cribbing. See Figure 2.

On the other hand, the dual bridges feature a fairly standard chord progression, with just a couple of variations (the VI7b5, for example). More to the point, McCartney's songwriting was always deeply intertextual—and intermusical. Listeners are supposed to recognize that "Oh! Darling" is a self-conscious pastiche that, as we have seen, draws from a number of similar compositions. As such, it adheres to its genre's harmonic and structural conventions, as do his early jazz tributes such as "Honey Pie" and "When I'm 64," and as does "Back in the U.S.S.R.," a pitch-perfect imitation of the Beach Boys. These songs—each composed and recorded within a couple of years of "Oh! Darling"—demonstrate McCartney's restless creativity and willingness to branch out. They also display his

"Oh! Darling" Bridge

D / F7 / A / A / B7 / B7 / E7 F7b5 / E7 E+.

"Need Your Love So Bad" Bridge

D / F7 /A / A / B7 / B7 /E7 F7b5/ E7 E7+.

Figure 2. Comparing the Bridges of "Oh! Darling" and "Need Your Love So Bad"

recognition that reworking the music of earlier eras (in the case of "Honey Pie" and "When I'm 64," music that his musician father would have played) can provide inspiration. In this light, the line "I'll never make it alone," constitutes another way of offering what McCartney does in the quotation that begins this chapter—a self-conscious acknowledgment of its unoriginal origins. I propose, then, that "Oh! Darling," McCartney's homage to the 12/8 rhythm and blues songs that influenced him, resides in a gray area somewhere between pastiche and plagiarism, but lies closer to the former than to the latter.[5]

Little Paulie

The intertextual influences on "Oh! Darling" do not end with the song itself. They also encompass the vocal performance, and in this regard the song's most potent precursor is Little Richard, a frequently acknowledged model for McCartney who, as a teenager, was famous for his stunning Penniman impersonation. He was Little Paulie—or perhaps Littler Richard. The Beatles also backed Richard in Hamburg and performed and recorded several songs associated with him, including "Long Tall Sally," "Hey Hey Hey," "Ooh My Soul," and "Lucille" (Price 219–20). McCartney recalled that he "used to sing [Little Richard's] stuff but there came a point when I wanted one of my own, so I wrote 'I'm Down.'" To sing such a song properly, he explained, "you have to leave your current sensibilities and go about a foot above your head. . . . You actually have to go outside yourself" (Miles 201). He does just that on "I'm Down," bursting forth with screams and flourishes that suggest he is channeling Richard's spirit; it sounds almost like a form of possession. This rocker is a practice run for the Pennimanesque vocal pyrotechnics of "Oh! Darling." ("I'm Down" is equally challenging to sing, which I know first-hand from performing it in cover bands.) Yet "I'm Down" seems at odds with itself, inasmuch as McCartney's vocals seem not brought down but amped-up. Here, as in "Oh! Darling," the addressee doesn't believe the singer, perhaps assuming that he is faking misery to manipulate her. And why *is* he down? Because she won't have sex with him (she cries, "keep your hands to yourself!"). "I'm Down" thus anticipates the later song's shouted apostrophe to the loved one, reminding us that "make it" also refers to having sex. The needs so obliquely referenced in "Oh! Darling" are boldly explicit in the earlier tune.

McCartney introduced "Oh! Darling" at the Get Back sessions in early 1969. In a take from January 14, his voice is buried under "Elvis" reverb; keyed in B-flat instead of A, the song is unfinished, as the repeated verse suggests. About a minute into the track, he effortlessly swoops up to the high notes, easily landing Cs and even a D-flat more than an octave above middle C (i.e., C5 and D-flat5). At around two minutes, he begins to ad lib,

his spoken improvisations recalling Elvis's on, say, "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" ("Paul McCartney"). In a later take (still in B-flat, but minus the overpowering reverb), Lennon tries to sing harmony, but soon gives up ("The Beatles oh darling RARE"). This version is even more reminiscent of the earlier R&B numbers I have listed, but on these embryonic renditions McCartney sounds less like Little Richard than like Jackie Wilson. Both takes, however, confirm that he did not *need* to scream to reach those top tones; he did so both to heighten the intensity and to parrot Penniman.

Lennon later insisted (perhaps half-seriously) that he himself should have sung "Oh! Darling," because it fit his style better than McCartney's (Golson 171; Emerick 284). I beg to differ![6] The vocal is an utter tour de force, one of the most powerful performances in the entire Beatles catalog. If you don't believe me when I tell you, just try to sing it yourself, especially if you're a male. It was a challenge for Paul too: engineer Geoff Emerick recalls that McCartney came to the studio on several successive days, trying to make each take sound as though he had been performing it before a live audience all week (283; Beatles 339). After a reported 26 takes, those earlier croons had become cries: we hear the tears that are "nearly" shed in the lyrics, as well as an undertone of violence that I discuss further below. In short, Little Paulie had to work hard to grow into a Bigger Richard.[7]

These Boys

Equally significant precursors of "Oh! Darling" are the Beatles' original 12/8 songs "This Boy," "Baby's in Black," and "Yes It Is." Lennon's lovely "This Boy" (1963) revolves around a circular I / vi / ii / V7 progression in D on the verse; like "Oh! Darling," it moves to the IV chord (here, G) on the bridge. Lennon admitted that the song was his attempt to write a Smokey Robinson pastiche in three-part harmony (Golson/Sheff 163).[8] Even so, "This Boy" delivers a more harmonically complex bridge (G/F#7 / Bm / D7 / G/E7 / A7 Asus / F#m A; or IV / III7 / vi / I7 / IV / V7 Vsus/iii V) that lifts it beyond mere imitation. Even more pertinent is "Baby's in Black" (1964), one of the most unconventional of the Beatles' early compositions. See Table 1 Co-written by Lennon and McCartney (Golson/Sheff 74; Miles 175), the song is, like "Oh! Darling," in the key of A, and it too begins with an exclamation of "Oh!," though this opening was probably adopted from the folk song "Johnny So Long at the Fair" ("Oh, dear, what can the matter be?"). The tune incorporates a unique structure in which, after a one-measure intro, three sections of three, three-and-a-half and two measures, respectively, alternate, separated by a three-bar instrumental section.[9] It looks something like this:

In this song, the "baby" in question, thinking of another man, wears black; it is not clear whether she is in mourning or hoping to win him back by sporting his favorite hue (also the Beatles' favorite at the time). In any case, her black clothes make the narrator blue. A few months later, the Beatles recorded Lennon's "Yes It Is," which reprises the color-word games of "Baby's in Black" (the song, in the key of E, was the B-side of the "Ticket to Ride" single).[10] This narrator is trying to forget "her" while singing to a different woman. His current lover's clothing reminds him of his previous amour, so he asks the new love not to wear red, because, well, it makes him blue. This song, like "Baby's in Black," includes a single measure of 6/8 at the end

Table 1. The Structure of "Baby's in Black".

· One bar intro
· A (3 bars): "Oh, dear"
· B (3 ½ bars): "She thinks"
· Repeat A and B
· C (2 bars): "Oh, how long"
· A (3 bars): "Dear what"
· D (Instrumental break: 3 bars; chord pattern repeats that of A, except for final E)
· C (2) "Oh, how long"
· A (3) "Oh, dear"
· B (3 ½): "She thinks"
· A (4): "Oh, dear" (includes final measure).

of the verse, but its most striking feature is its unorthodox five-bar bridge, which holds for a measure on C# minor (with the descending bass line that the group so frequently employed) while the singer testifies before resolving via a II7-V7 cadence. This holding pattern recalls the bridge in "You Really Got a Hold on Me," which remains on A for "hold me, hold me, hold me," then moves to E7 for the fermata before resolving through F#m-E to A on "tighter."

Clearly, both Lennon and McCartney had experimented with the 12/8 ballad before 1969. These earlier Beatles tunes, with their close harmonies, recall the R&B songs cited above while nodding both to Black doo-wop conventions and to white harmony ensembles like the Four Freshmen. In each composition the writer tries a new structure, but none of them displays the soaring urgency of "Oh! Darling." Even so, our investigation has revealed that "Oh! Darling" evolved from these previous efforts—reusing the 12/8 time signature, reiterating harmonic patterns, and removing the vocal harmony parts, moving forward by harking back. Paul McCartney did not make this song alone.

Break Down

Another set of ancestors are what I am calling the Beatles' "poor me" songs, which anticipate the male tears alluded to "Oh! Darling." The singer of "Misery" (1963), for example, although not the "kind of guy" who ever used to cry, knows it's "gonna be a drag" not to see his girlfriend anymore. It is kind of a bummer—but not terrible enough to warrant a scream of angst. By contrast, in "Not a Second Time," the singer remembers that she made him cry, but pledges that his "cryin' is through": as in "Misery," tears are recalled and banished in the same song. The first line of "Tell Me Why" asks why the addressee cried and lied. Is she crying over the lies? Lying about crying? Whatever the reason, if she does not explain her own tears and lies, the singer will not be able to "hold back these tears" in his eyes. Here male weeping is presented as a threat. But by the end, the singer is begging on "bended knees," having switched quickly from menace to melancholy (thereby anticipating the pleading tone of "Oh! Darling"). In its companion piece, "I'll Cry Instead," Lennon's narrator sobs instead of making his lover sad "somehow." These tears are, as in "Tell Me Why," hypothetical, looming as a possible future.

Tellingly, in "I'll Cry Instead," weeping supplants an anger so violent that, if expressed, might get him "locked up today." He will shelter himself, but when he returns, somebody had better "hide all the girls." He may break their hearts or, the song implies, he might

just break something else. Romance is converted to revenge, and, again, weeping functions as a threat. "I'm a Loser" changes the valence of "I'll Cry Instead." Instead of envisioning future tears, the singer reflects on how he lost his lover, wondering if the tears that fall "like rain" are for her or himself. These lyrics contrast with those of "This Boy," where the singer warns that his amorous rival won't be happy until he has "seen you cry." Again, however, tears are part of a threat. All these songs, except for "Tell Me Why," were written primarily by John Lennon. On the other hand, the singer of McCartney's "The Night Before" "want[s] to cry" when he "thinks of things we did." It must have been a very bad night! Still, he does not actually cry. "Wait" (by McCartney) also refers to "the tears we cried" at some unspecified earlier moment; this is the only Beatles song I have found in which the tears are shared by lovers.

There are other weeping songs: "For No One" features tears, but not the singer's; "Cry Baby Cry" (in which she, not he, cries) refers to tears sarcastically; and, of course, George Harrison's guitar "gently weeps" for the entire world. Crying also occurs elsewhere on *Abbey Road*: in "Because," the whole group waxes lachrymose over the sky's blueness, and after the addressee of "You Never Give Me Your Money" breaks down, she is told to "wipe that tear away." But it is important to note that the singer of "Oh! Darling" does not in fact sob: he "*nearly* broke down and cried" (italics mine). Rather than promising revenge, like Lennon's speaker in "I'll Cry Instead," he seems to be using tears as a tool of manipulation, as if to say, "come back to me, or I swear, I'll start crying!" But if he hasn't even shed a tear, perhaps he is not all that upset. As in most Beatles songs, then, the crying in "Oh! Darling" is present by its absence. Indeed, throughout the Beatles' canon, male tears are recalled, promised, or used as threats, but seldom actually shed, and when they are, they are quickly wiped away. These narrators do not really break down; instead, they let their lovers down.

Let You Down

These contexts lie outside of *Abbey Road* itself. How does the song fit into the album on which it is the fourth selection? Despite the opening exhortation to "come together," most of the album's characters, including the figure described in the song by that title, are isolated and needy. Although the narrator of "Oh! Darling" is far more agitated and desperate than the singer of "Something," the two songs share the theme of belief, but whereas the latter's singer "believes" and how, the former pleads with his interlocutor to believe *him* now. As one of two (pseudo) confessional powerhouses—the other being "I Want You (She's So Heavy)"—positioned among novelty numbers, "Oh! Darling" stands at a pivotal point on the album, providing a gust of authentic emotion after the cartoonishly violent events of the third selection, "Maxwell's Silver Hammer." Programmed before "Maxwell" until late in production, "Oh! Darling" gains further nuance from its placement after that character's bludgeonings: Maxwell never hesitates to hurt women, whereas the next McCartney mouthpiece complains that a woman has hurt *him*.[11] Yet the lingering aura of violence adds a dark penumbra to the singer's pleas. Indeed, although the singer of "Oh! Darling" pledges to do her "no harm," this assurance is surely shadowed by its opposite, a covert warning—"I may do harm to you or to myself"—if she doesn't "believe" him and come back. Hence, we hear in McCartney's vocals a threat not present in the lyrics: he is not merely mooning; he's also menacing.

The true companion piece to "Oh! Darling" on side one, however, is Lennon's "I Want You (She's So Heavy)," where we land after our tour of Ringo's undersea garden. Tim Riley (337) calls the two tracks "different versions of the same song." Indeed, in his taxonomy of the Beatles' love songs, Ian Inglis lists both "Oh! Darling" and "I Want You" as (relatively rare) examples of "mania," songs in which the lovers' emotions are "beyond control or understanding, as are their demands for unconditional surrender and constant reassurance" (46, 52).[12] The similarities are palpable, though I detect significant disparities. Whereas McCartney's pleas seem submissive and sympathy-seeking, Lennon's tone is blunt, terse, and relentless: "I want you so bad it's driving me mad. Let me repeat that. And again." Riley comments that if the urgency of "Oh! Darling" is "out of control," Lennon's "carries the weight of holding back" (321). But not completely—note the throat-ripping scream that occurs at the end of the last "I Want You" verse. Lennon's narrator promises nothing, for the song is not about her; it is about him.

Jonathan Gould even contends that in "Oh! Darling," McCartney's "heartbroken sentiment" may have "some basis in his rejection by John" (579). And what is he singing? "I'll never make it alone." The line, already laden with a double meaning (both "I'll never survive without you," and "I'll never have sex without you"), would acquire a third connotation here: "I won't make it as a musician and friend without you." This is, admittedly, quite speculative and perhaps far-fetched. Even so, the rage propelling both songs might become more explicable if we perceive them as part of a dialogue between the long-time partners. "I'll never let you down," McCartney sings. Where had he recently heard similar sentiments? From John Lennon, who had composed and recorded "Don't Let Me Down" earlier that year. As it turned out, of course, each let the other down, leaving him with tears to cry—and bills to pay.

"I Want You" begins in A minor before moving to D minor (the actual tonic) in what promises (but fails) to become a standard blues progression. Its meter in the second section is 12/8, affirming my contention that the two songs converse. Everett and others have further pointed out that the tonal centers of *Abbey Road* toggle between A major and C major. "Oh! Darling" is in A major, as are the final sections of "You Never Give Me Your Money." Everett adds that the medley's "selfish moments"—such as the shady doings in "She Came in Through the Bathroom Window"—transpire mostly in "the tonal center of A" (271).[13] If Everett is correct, then perhaps A is the wrong key to unlock McCartney's lover's door, for it implies that his love is selfish. The lyrics bear this out: like "I Want You," "Oh! Darling" is about his needs, not hers.

The Love You Make

Now let me briefly outline how "Oh! Darling" fits into the love theme that traverses *Abbey Road*. As I have noted, it resonates strongly with the medley and particularly with "You Never Give Me Your Money." The latter song is similarly addressed by a McCartney narrator to someone who fails to give him what he wants. But whereas "Oh! Darling" is imploring and desperate, "You Never Give" begins in disillusionment before its apotheosis in "one sweet dream," a denouement that may be just as imaginary as the reconciliation in "Oh! Darling." The addressee "break[s] down" in the middle of negotiations, which cannot help but bring to mind the fractious business disagreements that were occupying the Beatles' time and emotions during

this period. In the song, negotiations break down because the "you" figure cries or collapses. In the second verse, it is the narrator himself who breaks down, seeming to fulfill the promise (or threat) of tears in "Oh! Darling." The key word, of course, is "break"—as in "break up." At the end of "You Never Give Me Your Money," the narrator advises the addressee to "wipe that tear away." It is unclear whether this is the same "you" addressed in the title. The narrator's role here is chiefly to comfort the loved one and provide a means of escape; his own tears seem to be forgotten. But then the two are forced to observe the outrageous, nasty (and potentially criminal) characters in "Mean Mr. Mustard" and "Polythene Pam." Soon, however, things look up: in "Golden Slumbers," McCartney addresses a different (?) darling (she's pretty!), but instead of beseeching her to love him (with an implied threat), he sweetly consoles her, requesting softly that she go to sleep. Smiles, not tears, will greet her upon rising. Here the singer soothes *her* tears rather than using *his own* tears as a tool of persuasion. Instead of a scream, we have a lullaby.[14]

"Oh! Darling," with its tone of mania, thus marks an early stage in the album's extended narrative of troubled love and intimacy. *Abbey Road* travels from its opening invitation to "come together" into a yearning ballad about erotic love and wooing ("Something"), moving through songs of violence, pleading, and outright demands. Then (on side two of the original LP) it blossoms into happiness and a sense of rejuvenation for yet another "darling," prompting intense visions of nature so beautiful that they bring tears ("Because"). After that, the narrative tunes in to cynical complaints about betrayals (shadowed by the sinister figures Mustard and Pam) before offering an invitation to serenity, as slumbers, not tears, fill eyes. These scenes give way to an exhortation to remain strong and empathetic, even as the narrator again breaks down during the celebration ("Carry That Weight"). The journey concludes with a call for reciprocal love that, tellingly, incorporates a solo by each band member. The road thus leads from tears of pain to tears of joy, from threats, violence, desperation and alienation to a final coming together, not least of the Beatles themselves, who sing "love you" in tight harmony behind the solos on "The End." We have, then, traveled, in Inglis's terms, from the "Mania" of "Oh! Darling" to "Agape"—a love that is "altruistic and unqualified"—in the album's stirring finale (46). How better to express this unity musically than with a song that begins in A—the key of selfishness and dishonesty—but resolves to a satisfying C major as the lyric lands on a single word? And what is the word? "Make." The singer of "Oh! Darling" should heed the advice offered in "The End": he must learn to make love as well as take it.

Of course, this is not really the end: after a break, McCartney, tongue back in his cheek, playfully admits that he cannot express his love for "a pretty nice girl" without slugging a lot of wine. If the song is actually addressed to Queen Elizabeth II, it is in character for a band that famously smoked weed in Buckingham Palace. However, if the song is referring to some other woman as "her majesty," it comes across as a mellower version of "Oh! Darling," as if the singer has imbibed the sentiments of "The End" along with the wine. This timid narrator cannot even speak to "her majesty," let alone covertly threaten her. In any case, the album's tag complicates, in typical Beatles fashion, its seemingly definitive conclusions about love. *Abbey Road* ends not with a bang, and not with "make," but with "mine." That glorious unity once again gives way to possessiveness.

Yet what matters most is that, after the contentious White Album and *Let It Be* sessions, on *Abbey Road* the Beatles *did* come together again, along with George Martin, not to break something but to *make* something. "Oh! Darling" both recognizes that necessity and puts it into practice by nodding to musical ancestors and by modifying and building upon McCartney's and the band's earlier experiments. The song (indeed, the entire album) shows that, without cooperation, reciprocity, and empathy—between lovers, among bandmates, between ancestors and heirs, among business partners—each person will "break down," shed tears, and end up all alone. "Come together," it urges us, "right now."

Notes

1. Transcribers do not always agree about notation. Some of these songs are transcribed in 4/4 with a triplet feel or in 6/8. For the purposes of this paper, as long as a song feels like 12/8, it qualifies.
2. Led Zeppelin was sued by Willie Dixon for using "You Shook Me" without crediting him and by Anne Bredon for their uncredited use of "Babe, I'm Gonna Leave You" (Till 162). Chester Burnett (Howlin' Wolf) also sued the band for failing to list him as the writer of "Killing Floor" (used in "The Lemon Song"), and they were forced to change the credits for "Whole Lotta Love" after Dixon sued (Till 164). Although there was not much love exchanged, Dixon did win a whole lotta money from the suit, which he used to start a nonprofit called The Blues Heaven Foundation, devoted to remunerating blues artists and their heirs for income lost due to such copyright violations. See also Till's remarks on "How Many More Times" (163).
3. Ian MacDonald (among others, 136) alleges that the guitar riff on "I Feel Fine" was copped from Parker's song (which is, as Till points out, itself based on Dizzy Gillespie's "Manteca" [160]). In Part 1 of *John Lennon's Jukebox* (at 13:50), Lennon acknowledges that the band "used [Parker's riff] in various forms." (This video is no longer available on YouTube.) But they also adapted it freely: "Watch Your Step" uses a standard blues progression, but the Beatles' song employs an altered form, and Parker's tune has no bridge; the songs are also in different keys (E for Parker's; G for the Beatles'). A YouTube video posted by Mohammed Shariff ("Beatles vs. Bobby Parker") plays the lick from Parker's tune side-by-side with that of "I Feel Fine." My conclusion: they are similar but not identical enough to sustain a charge of plagiarism.
4. This would not have been the only theft in their catalog. As MacDonald notes, "Come Together" purloins a lyric from Chuck Berry's "You Can't Catch Me." Sued by Berry's publishers, Lennon agreed to record two of Berry's tunes on his *Rock 'n' Roll* album (358).
5. This is an ethical but not a legal gray area, because chord progressions cannot be copyrighted. For a discussion of the legal decisions that established this convention, see Osteen 95–103.
6. Even so, McCartney claimed that he would have sung it much more easily five years earlier (Alan Parsons, qtd in Guesdon/Margotin 567).
7. The difficulty of the vocal part may be one reason that, according to at least one well-informed source, McCartney has never performed "Oh! Darling" in public.
8. The specific model is Robinson's "I've Been Good to You," which uses the same circular I-vi-ii7-V7 harmonic progression (albeit in A-flat).
9. Aaron Krerowicz transcribes it in 6/8 (41) and McCartney says it is in 3/4 (Miles 175). My sheet music, transcribed by Todd Lowry (64–67), notates the song in 12/8, albeit with an additional 6/8 measure on "black" (65).
10. "Yes It Is" also uses a vi7/ii7/V7 cadence on the bridge. Lennon dismissed it as a failed attempt to rewrite "This Boy" (Golson 165).

11. The decision to devote side two of the original recording to a suite—apparently a joint decision by McCartney and producer George Martin (Everett 269–70)—obviously affected the programming order of side one. Given that Martin determined the order of the tracks on *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (see Martin 148–50), it seems likely that he played a major role in programming *Abbey Road* as well. Whoever made the decision, it was wise to insert "Oh! Darling" between the two novelty tracks.
12. Inglis also points out that such songs are rare in the group's catalog, comprising only 10% of their original output between 1966 and 1970 (54).
13. However, Pam and Mustard dwell in the land of E and "Here Comes the Sun" rises in A.
14. According to Inglis's categories, "Golden Slumbers" is centered on *Storge*, which he defines as love "built around friendship and caring" (46).

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Mark Osteen http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9197-5273

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