

Cole Porter: the social significance of selected love lyrics of the 1930s

by

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SUMMARY

This dissertation examines selected love lyrics composed during the 1930s by Cole Porter, whose witty and urbane music epitomized the Golden era of American light music. These lyrics present an interesting paradox – a man who longed for his music to be accepted by the American public, yet remained indifferent to the social mores of the time. Porter offered trenchant social commentary aimed at a society restricted by social taboos and cultural conventions. The argument develops systematically through a chronological and contextual study of the influences of people and events on a man and his music. The prosodic intonation and imagistic texture of the lyrics demonstrate an intimate correlation between personality and composition which, in turn, is supported by the biographical content.

KEY WORDS:

Broadway, Cole Porter, early Hollywood musicals, gays and musicals, innuendo, musical comedy, social taboos, song lyrics, Tin Pan Alley, 1930 film censorship

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This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Heather Gwen Verster, who played the very songs that I have chosen and remember from my childhood.

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INTRODUCTION

As a professional broadcaster for more than twenty years, I have always been fascinated by words. Because I worked in an aural medium, the pauses, nuances and inflection of words had great meaning, as did the silences. I was trained to recognize the ‘unsaid’ in an answer, the hint at a point to be developed, a hesitation that might need prompting. This combined with a love of poetry, particularly spoken poetry, led me to an interest in the lyric writers of the twentieth century. Married to a world authority of light music of the 20s, 30s and 40s, and having, through a process of osmosis, absorbed so many of the lyrics of the great composers of that time, it was almost inevitable that I discovered Cole Porter, whose witty and urbane music epitomized what is known as the Golden Era of American light music. My mother, a skilled pianist, introduced me to the music of Porter and, even today, on hearing one of his melodies, I know the words of his song.

I have been extremely fortunate to have had access to one of the world’s largest private collections of light music. This, together with the guidance of a number of respected light music authorities, has helped me identify those aspects of Porter’s work significant to this dissertation. At my request they summed up their appreciation of Porter and his work. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the following:

Larry O’Brien, Music Director, The Glenn Miller Orchestra.

Cole Porter was one of few composers who wrote both the words and music. His lyrics were bold, sometimes ‘racy’, and some dealt with the social taboos of the day; cocaine, prostitution, etc. but his melodies graced some of the most popular and respected big band libraries, like Artie Shaw ‘Begin the Beguine’, Frank Sinatra with Nelson Riddle, ‘Night and Day’ and Stan Kenton, who revived ‘Love for Sale’ with an instrumental version of that steamy song. He was certainly a ‘master craftsman’ who successfully married words and music to unique, enduring melodies.

2009. *O’Brien to Holloway*. Letter: September 27.

Ronny Whyte, American pianist, jazz singer and ASCAP award winning songwriter.

For me as a songwriter, jazz singer and pianist, Cole Porter is one of the greatest American songwriters of all time. Unlike most Broadway and film songwriters of the Great American Popular Song era, except for Irving Berlin, Frank Loesser and, more recently, Stephen Sondheim, he wrote both words and music. His rhymes were always impeccable; he was able to write whatever was needed for a scene in a show or film, on just about any topic. His words and music are still an important part of the music and jazz scene, even when butchered by some of today’s pop and rock stars. He is an inspiration to me and other songwriters. His expressions of love, desire, sadness and humour are always fascinating and stand up to

various interpretations, fast or slow, or even bossa nova. For example, I have recently been doing a bossa version of 'All of you' from *Silk Stockings*, which brings a new sensuousness to the song. May his work live on!

2010. *Whyte to Holloway*. Letter: September 12.

Gavin Fullard, Director: Track Five Vocal group (arguably the leading close harmony singing group in South Africa).

A Cole Porter song typically has a good enduring melody with interesting chords, a song that is enjoyable to sing or play. In addition, his own brilliant lyrics and catchy variations of the simple assertion 'I love you' as in, for example, 'You're the Top!', 'I get a kick out of you' and 'I've got you under my skin' are so original (and hip for the late 1920s) that I am sure they would place him in a very special category in the realm of the top songwriters.

2010. *Fullard to Holloway*. Letter: August 13.

Professor J.L.K.Human, Professor Emeritus, Department of Music, University of the Orange Free State.

His lyrics were technically without flaw, strongly influenced by the melodic line. His compositions were unconventional for that time, sweeping in nature with a strong Slavic influence, which resulted in the use of minor keys that led to exciting climaxes. He was both sophisticated and intellectual, and his verses often included allusions that were racy and suggestive, and tantalizingly witty. His songs have endured and remain in the repertoire of leading bands and singers: a tribute to his musical genius.

2010. *Human to Holloway*. In conversation: September 22.

Dr Doug Masek, internationally renowned saxophonist, master teacher and lecturer, Professor of Saxophone at UCLA, and Director of California Los Angeles Community Music School 'Music for Life'.

Unforgettable, witty, sensual, and truly a master of melody and mood, Cole Porter wrote music and words that touched our soul, and stirred our senses. He is the embodiment of 'anything goes' in life, and a symbol of lyricism in song.

2010. *Masek to Holloway*. Letter: September 29.

It is important at the outset to state that I do not have an academic background in the formal study of music and that, in consequence, I have not attempted to analyse Porter's musicality from a technical perspective, although I have commented extensively on musical structures and rhythmic content. In a work of this nature it is hardly possible to divorce words from music. Noel Stockton, Senior Lecturer in Composition and Jazz Studies at the University of the Free State, emphasizes this important point:

Richard Strauss' last opera, *Capriccio*, deals with the comparative importance of lyrics (libretto) and music (score) in a creative work, or, in other words, that of librettist and composer. At the end of the opera, the question remains unresolved. In the creations of Cole Porter, we have an extraordinary balance between Lyric and Music. One is never sure whether the music is driven by the words, or vice versa. The lyrics border on poetry and the music can only be described as highly individual. His wonderful conceptualization of light music places him at the forefront of American composers for the musical theatre, as well as in the field of light music. In my opinion, he ranks with Jerome Kern, George Gershwin, Richard Rodgers and Irving Berlin. His achievement is all the more remarkable when we consider that he was, together with Berlin, both lyricist and composer.

2010. *Stockton to Holloway*. Letter: September 14.

A great deal has been written about Cole Porter, and I am indebted to those historians, authors and biographers who have provided the framework for this dissertation. After extensive research, I was drawn in particular to Charles Schwartz's comprehensive biography. His detailed reappraisal of earlier works and meticulous research provides a comprehensive and objective account of this talented and fascinating man. The inclusion in the biography of personal documents, musical manuscripts and memorabilia provided an authentic context within which I could situate my approach to the topic. Schwartz offers a new dimension to the man and his music. He enjoyed the co-operation of dozens of Porter's friends, members of his family, lawyers and trustees, who assisted in providing the intimate details that are lacking in other biographies. Many of the important nuances of Porter's intimate life, so essential to my studies, had either been omitted or glossed over, as had details about his work habits, even the songs themselves. Schwartz provides a comprehensive biography and discography, and my many cross-references attested to his accuracy and careful perspective. This biography also assisted me in placing the major events that affected American people during the 1920s and 30s, and, in turn, Cole Porter, in a chronological order, which allowed me to show whether (or not) Porter's lyrics reflected the changing times.

Porter was to write for a society shaped by outside influences. In order to justify certain observations I make in analysing his lyrics, I chose not only a chronological but a biographical approach, to demonstrate the significant correlation between Porter's personality and his compositions, and the influences of people and major events on this talented, yet restricted, musician, who is still considered one of the greatest composers of American popular song.

Although the focus of this work falls on Porter's songs of the 1930s, I believe there is merit in discussing his development as a composer in order to draw certain conclusions. Porter's music was a reflection of a man indifferent to the moral values of the time, unscathed by the hardships of war or economic deprivation. American society at that time was influenced by a strong Puritanical streak, which imposed its own restrictions on people and their choices. This was the result of a belief that the

growing numbers of immigrants, from different backgrounds and cultures, were undermining the morality of the American people. The influence of the church and the Temperance movement placed heavy restrictions on 'average' Americans, regarding their beliefs, values and even their forms of entertainment. It was this atmosphere of pious propriety that dictated the accepted social mores that Porter was to challenge. Despite this socially constrained environment, Porter developed his own style, which was in direct contrast to the norms of the day, and expressed a complex, paradoxical and highly entertaining amalgam of worldliness and cynicism; in short, a true reflection of his personality. It is through close examination of his lyrics that we can identify the people and events that influenced his writing.

Of all the influences on Cole Porter's life that of his mother was most profound. His formative years were shaped by the support and encouragement that nurtured his desire to compose music and, by the time he was to write his first song for Broadway, he was a trained musician and skilled lyricist. I contend that by recognising the influence of his mother, Kate, Porter's intimate friends, and his wife, Linda, it is possible to trace the effects those relationships had on his work, and, in particular, his lyrics.

Porter surrounded himself with wealthy and influential friends, who shared his taste for unbridled hedonism. Initially, it was for these friends that he wrote his sardonic and witty lyrics. However, in order to be successful and, despite his apparent nonchalance, he longed to be accepted by an American public inhibited by social mores, just as he was obliged to conform to the demands of the music industry. It is significant that we recognize the power of the publishers of sheet music, who dominated the music industry of the 1920s and 30s. With the advent of radio and the growing sales of pianos, the sheet music publishers grew in importance. Now geared to standardization and mass marketing, sales depended on successful formulae, which made music easy to write but, because of its rigidity, placed severe restrictions on composers. The non-conformist Porter found that these restrictions inspired lyrics with shifts in rhyme, syntax and imagery. The feeling that lent itself best to the required pattern was love, and it is that theme, and Porter's handling of it, that is the principal subject of this dissertation.

Cole Porter was a prolific composer whose career spanned five decades. As the focus of this dissertation is on the music of the 1930s, I was obliged to make a selection of those lyrics that featured different aspects of the craft of lyric writing, and the correlation between Porter's personality and his compositions. The choice of lyric was prescribed by the theme of love, and I attempt to convey Porter's range of attitudes to that emotion. Every major Broadway show or Hollywood musical, from 1929 to 1940, that carried a score by Cole Porter, has been represented. It was necessary that my final choice of lyrics allowed me to examine the urbanity, wit and elegance of the

composer, in both words and music, often in sharp contrast to the mocking, sardonic tone of those songs that reflected a man at odds with himself and the world. With the assistance of a number of light music authorities, I identified those songs that remain as popular today as they were decades ago. The American weekly entertainment-trade magazine, “Variety”, founded in 1905, and still in existence, lists six Porter songs on its list of the 100 Most Popular Songs of All Time: *Night and Day*, *Begin the Beguine*, *Just One of Those Things*, *What is This Thing Called Love?*, *I Get a Kick out of You* and *I’ve Got You under My Skin*. These six songs, and others, comprise the major part of the selection and are discussed in detail, while others are referred to where they help make a particular point.

Fellow composers and writers of the time were offering social commentary about the horrors of war, the loss of individuality brought about by urban sprawl and the economic deprivations that followed in the aftermath of the Depression. Porter evaded all these issues, and brought escapism and gaiety to a people longing to forget the grim realities of living in the 1930s. Porter approached his work with a singular purpose – to entertain and be recognised as one of the top composers of the Golden Age. His private life which should have appalled, fascinated; his songs that should have offended, captivated. Through a careful examination of the relation between text and context, I hope to provide convincing evidence that Porter was a social commentator, inasmuch as he reflected a society defined by specific cultural codes and conventions. A particular challenge lies in identifying these codes in order to show that Porter wrote on two levels so as to appeal to a wider audience who would understand the obvious, while his inner circle would appreciate the subtleties and innuendoes. Through careful analysis, I trace the link with a society that served as a catalyst for his talent and from which he drew inspiration and gratification. The biographical details serve to support my analysis.

Porter moved in sophisticated circles, where experimentation was the norm and which contrasted sharply with the conventional behavior expected of the average American. At a time of large-scale poverty and unemployment in America, Porter lived a life of luxury and self-gratification, flaunting prohibition and accepted sexual conduct. Despite his acceptance into the international elite, where his risqué songs were welcomed at elegant parties, he aspired to compose romantic and ‘popular’ songs for a wider audience. Given the tenor of his compositions, it will be necessary to speculate about Porter’s attitude to romantic love in the light of his homosexuality. Whereas fellow composer, Irving Berlin, could write:

I’ll be loving you, always
 With a heart that’s true, always
 When the things you’ve planned
 Need a helping hand

I will understand always
Always.

Porter preferred:

What is this thing called love?
This funny thing called love?
Just who can solve its mystery?
Why should it make a fool of me?

In his lyrics of the 1930s, Porter appeared to distance himself from any direct admission of love, which would support my hypothesis that he preferred to remain sexually neutral, writing androgynous lyrics that gave an urbane, often scandalous, twist to love. He maintained a heterosexual façade with the help of his wife, Linda Lee, eight years his senior, but many of his most popular love songs were inspired by male lovers. In the constrained moral climate of the theatre, Porter honed his skills at creating sexual innuendoes and double entendres, which enabled him to circumvent criticism. With the advent and growth of the film industry, Porter was exposed to an even wider audience, while composing within the framework of a production code, which provided a set of censorship guidelines. Porter was at variance with the political and moral ideology of the time, but his genius was such that he could embrace the current idiom with a technique of implying everything by saying nothing.

I trace his development as a composer, selecting those lyrics of the 1930s that focus on Porter's attitude to love. Throughout the decade, Porter provided social commentary, taking advantage of controversy and capitalizing on the events and gossip of the moment. In his writing we are given a unique perspective on the interplay between unbridled hedonism and the power of the creative imagination. Porter combined his knowledge of exotic places and his friendships with celebrated people with off-beat humour, sexual innuendo and rhyming ingenuity. His urbane and polished songs delighted audiences, hungry for new experiences.

The biographical approach I have adopted enables me to support the claim that Porter's success as a composer can be traced chronologically through his shows of the 1930s, with a corresponding sense of narcissism, ennui and intolerance, brought to a climax by his accident in 1937. I am aware that the final chapter falls beyond the ambit of my topic but, as I elected to work chronologically, I felt that I needed to complete Porter's story.

In conferring the degree of Doctor of Humane Studies on Porter, Provost Norman S. Buck of Yale included the following statement in his citation:

You have achieved a reputation as a towering figure in the American musical theatre. Master of the deft phrase, the delectable rhyme, the distinctive melody, you are, in your own words and your own field, the top. (Schwartz, 1979: 262).

CHAPTER 1

What is this thing called love?

Early Influences

Cole Porter was born in Peru, Indiana on June 9, 1891. He was the only child of a weak, ineffectual father and a headstrong mother, who had lost two infants in quick succession and was determined that Cole would want for nothing. As the adored and indulged daughter of a self-made millionaire, James Omar Cole, or J.O. as he was known, Kate was brought up in a manner befitting the daughter of one of Indiana's wealthiest and most prominent citizens. J.O. was unrelenting in his pursuit of wealth, and had a loathing for wasteful living, yet dressed his daughter in the height of fashion and hired instructors to teach her French and how to sing and play the piano. Kate's choice of Samuel Fenwick Porter, a shy druggist of limited means, incensed J.O. Sam was the antithesis of everything J.O. looked for in a son-in-law, and his position as Kate's husband was compromised from the start. Young Cole, cosseted from birth, flourished in a home dominated by a humourless despot of a grandfather and an ambitious mother. His early upbringing was to have a profound influence on his personal life and his career.

Cole was a fragile and exceptionally tiny baby. Although he grew into a healthy, active child, he remained small for his age. His mother frowned on any excessive physical activity, preferring to develop his interest in studying the piano and violin, and encouraging him to compose. His first published work, 'The Bobolink Waltz', was published at his mother's expense and, while it showed little of the songwriting talents of the later years, it was a testimony to the nurturing and encouragement that Cole received from his mother. When the two-hours-daily piano practice became boring for the child, Kate would revive his interest by accompanying herself as she satirized the popular tunes of the day. Cole's subsequent witty and satirical approach to many of his works may well have stemmed from those early musical burlesques.

Kate's interest in Cole's musical achievements was not shared by his grandfather, who considered his musical training not only a waste of time and money but a sissified pursuit. Cole's father slowly faded into the background, leaving Kate to nurture his growing interest in the stage with trips to the theatres in Chicago. Ironically it was Cole's father who displayed

artistic interests, which included a passion for romantic poetry. Kate's decision to send Cole to Worcester Academy, which had a reputation for emphasizing the classics, marked a break with his childhood. Cole became increasingly reticent in speaking about his family. He tended to play down his small-town background to the extent that many classmates thought that he was an orphan because of his reluctance to share information about his family and, in particular, his ineffectual father.

It was during the four years at Worcester that Cole enjoyed the personal interest of Dr Daniel Webster Abercrombie, the headmaster of Worcester and the school's teacher of Greek. Abercrombie was both enlightened and demanding, and Cole's grades in Greek were higher than any other subject. Dr Abercrombie made Cole aware, through careful examination of the epic poems of Homer and other Greek poets, of the correlation between metre and verse. This led Cole to examine the unity between music and words which we recognize today as a trademark of his work.

Porter had the advantage of being a trained musician, coupled with a talent for writing lyrics. Often a title or phrase would inspire a verse which Porter would then set to music; in other instances a rhythm or snatch of sound would result in a melody. Porter was one of few composers at that time with the ability to manipulate words to match melodic sound. He stated: 'words and music must be so inseparably wedded to each other they are like one' (Schwartz, 1979: 27).

Songwriting is both an art and a craft. As a craft it is confined to a set of rules and limitations. But these need not suppress expression; instead, they offer a framework in which the composer can communicate his or her ideas. Learning to work with and around the rules is a test of the artist's creativity. The music publishers of the 1920s required songs to be crafted to a set musical form. Pianos were being produced at a steady rate, with the result there was a huge increase in the demand for sheet music. In order to cope with mass marketing, publishers felt it necessary to devise a musical formula, based on earlier successes; this, in turn, meant standardizing songs so that a new song would immediately sound familiar. 'The formula for the sentimental ballad, the dominant kind of popular song in the 1890s, for example, differed radically from the "ballads" of the 1920s and '30s (Furia, 1990: 22). These earlier songs told a story, but even the storytelling had a rigidity devised from nineteenth

century songs of a number of verses, followed by a chorus. The story was contained in the verses and echoed in the chorus. But in the 1920s the relationship between chorus and verse shifted and it was the chorus that contained the chief melodic material.

The impact of records and radio had a negative effect on the sales of sheet music. Publishers believed that 'love songs' would sell and required composers to craft music within a melodic framework. This could have had the effect of stifling creativity, but Porter's genius was such that he could bend the rules by using words so creatively that they fitted the musical score. His lyric writing repertoire developed as he matured through a range of musical styles, from the risqué school songs and suggestive lyrics to sophisticated ennui, made tolerable by passing liaisons and underscored by melodic content which was both appropriate and sympathetic. He was able to wed idiosyncratic speech patterns to musical notes that highlighted the overall effect. Seemingly casual, every word has been chosen with care to blend into musical expression that complements the language.

It must be noted that although the emphasis of this dissertation falls on the lyrics, through careful analysis of Porter's lyrical style and the significance of his allusions and 'listings', a pattern emerges that substantiates Porter's statement regarding the marriage of words and music.

Porter's childhood was dominated by his mother. Her influence was profound and she would continue to play a role throughout his life. Her choice of Worcester Academy ensured that he would receive a sound education, with particular emphasis on the classics. Porter flourished in this all-male environment, indulged by teachers and pupils, who recognized and encouraged his precocious talent. It might well have been at this time that Cole was drawn to virile, well-muscled boys; a fact that was later obvious in his choice of lovers. Biographers have written at length about his relationships with male friends. It has been suggested that Porter's insatiable sexual appetite was linked to his creative output, and that lovers provided inspiration for many lyrics. Certainly, his circle of intimate friends largely comprised homosexuals and lesbians for whom he wrote lyrics, crafted with hidden meanings and, which later, he would adapt for the American people, who were captivated, rather than repelled, by his apparent disregard for the social mores of the time. At Worcester, as an enlightened pedagogue, Dr Abercrombie would have discussed Greek pederasty in his

examination of the texts of the Greek poets, and it is not unreasonable to assume that in the all-male surroundings of Worcester and later Yale Cole would have displayed homosexual tendencies. His shy and unprepossessing father, financially dependent on his father-in-law, was totally dominated by his wife, who had suffered the loss of two children and lavished attention on her only child. Cole was an exceptionally small baby, dressed in frills and laces. Kate discouraged physical activities, preferring to focus on social graces, including dancing lessons and music instruction. At the time Cole entered Worcester Academy he was physically immature, but his sparkling eyes and broad smile endeared him to fellow students. He avoided sports, concentrating on composing the risqué songs that continued into his later years at Yale. There is no record of when Cole's homosexuality began, but close friendships with boys who displayed homosexual tendencies would surely have influenced both the sexual preferences he pursued throughout his adult life and his compositions, with their sexual innuendoes and paradoxical allusions. In his book 'Public School Life', published in 1922, author Alec Waugh offers an explanation for homosexuality in boarding school:

In this environment there is nothing unnatural about the attraction exercised by a small boy over an older one. A small boy is the nearest approach possible to the feminine ideal. Indeed, a small boy at a Public school has many of the characteristics that a man would hope and expect to find in a woman. He is small, weak and stands in need of protection. (Waugh, 1922: 137-138).

But in these early years Cole did nothing to confirm any suspicions of his homosexuality, despite his close friendships with Monty Woolley, born Edgar Montillion Woolley, son of the owner of the Bristol Hotel in New York City, and Leonard Hanna, son of a Cleveland industrialist, who were both openly homosexual, and were to remain lifelong friends. Cole graduated from Worcester as the valedictorian of his class and, in recognition of his excellent record at the school, his grandfather awarded him an extended tour of Europe, before entering Yale. This vacation was the beginning of Cole's love of travel and, in particular, his love of Paris.

In 1909 Cole Porter enrolled at Yale College. His musical talent was to ensure his social success, despite his youthful appearance and outlandish clothes. His mother had selected his wardrobe, which included an extraordinary collection of shirts, ties and accessories which, together with his slicked down hair, offered the impression of a young French gigolo. Amongst the numerous pieces of luggage that accompanied Cole to Yale was an upright

piano, which kept him occupied in writing tunes. Cole was in great demand, writing songs for Yale's Dramatic Association and for alumni groups. Notwithstanding his poor scholastic performance, he gained sufficient credits to graduate with his class in 1913.

The four years spent at Yale offered Cole every opportunity to develop his talent as a composer/lyricist. Included in the curriculum at Yale was a course with the abbreviation 'T and B'. A club of ten undergraduates (including Porter), known as the Pundits, studied the works of Tennyson and Browning. Their motto was reduced to the letters T.B.I.Y.T.B. standing for 'The best is yet to come' from the Browning poem, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*:

'Grow old along with me/The best is yet to be/ The last of life, for which the first was made.'
Browning, a master of syncope and sprung rhythm, was to have a profound effect on Porter's lyrics. He appeared to learn as much from the poet as he did from W.S.Gilbert. Perhaps it was no co-incidence that, after his marriage, Porter chose to spend many holidays at the Palazzo Rezzonico in Rome, where Browning had lived and died.

As a member of all the social clubs, Porter performed his songs for colleagues; his football songs remain Yale classics. Along with the frenetic pace of his social and academic life, Cole managed, between 1911 and 1913, to write the scores for four musical comedies: *Cora*, *And the Villain Still Pursued Her*, *The Pot of Gold* and *The Kaleidoscope*. Although the plots were slight and incidental to the musical numbers, Cole ensured that he performed some of the best songs. He had had wide exposure as a member of the university glee, banjo and mandolin clubs, while concerts on campus, as well as tours, had allowed him to develop his sense of timing and mimicry. His script for *The Pot of Gold*, based on a book by Almet Jenks, is still extant. Although the storyline was muddled, his lyrics were fresh and interesting:

My little Salvation Army queen,
My little Salvation Army queen.
She was so seraphic
That she blocked the traffic
When she beat that tambourine.
And like an angel, divinely tall
She shouted, "Down with King Alcohol!"
So when I once found she flirted
I was very soon converted
By my blue-eyed Christian soldier,
My Salvation Army queen.

It is not surprising that the lyrics for *The Pot of Gold* reflect elements of Gilbert and Sullivan, Viennese operetta and Broadway. Cole admired the music of Sir Arthur Sullivan, while the pointed humour and caustic wit of librettist, Sir William Gilbert, inspired his own lyrics; in particular, the patter and list songs with their regular rhythmic patterns where each syllable of text corresponded to one note. Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance* had premiered in New York City on 31 December, 1879, and was an immediate success:

I am the very model of a modern Major General.
 I've information vegetable, animal and mineral.
 I know the kings of England, and I quote the fights historical
 From Marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical.

Gilbert drew on a wide range of topics to surprise and delight his audience, as did Cole in his later songs. For the 1934 musical *Anything Goes* Porter wrote 'You're the Top', which was to be imitated and parodied for years afterwards.

You're the top!
 You're the Colosseum.
 You're the top!
 You're the Louvre Museum.
 You're a melody from a symphony by Strauss,
 You're a Bendel bonnet,
 A Shakespeare sonnet,
 You're Mickey Mouse.

I shall be examining the lyrics in full in a later chapter, but have chosen this example to show Porter's flirtatious use of words and ideas. His catalogue songs offer a list of witty images and playful allusions. He could blend the colloquial with crisp diction, while juxtaposing images from both high and low cultures:

You're a rose,
 You're Inferno's Dante,
 You're the nose,
 On the great Durante. (‘You're the Top’, 1934).

Porter's playfulness was crafted, indicating his extraordinary care with words:

He said my bronchial tubes were entrancing,
 My epiglottis filled him with glee,
 He simply loved my larynx
 And went wild about my pharynx,
 But he never said he loved me. ('The Physician', 1933).

Porter implied rather than stated:

Birds do it, bees do it,
 Even educated fleas do it,
 Let's do it,
 Let's fall in love. ('Let's do it', 1928).

He was a master of clever word-play, using puns and double entendres. He created a technique of repeating a word but shifting its meaning:

Do do that voodoo that you do so well. ('You do something to me', 1929).

The simple prefix offers a range of possibilities:

It's delightful, it's delicious,
 It's delectable, it's delirious

which then spills into slang:

It's de-limit, it's deluxe, it's de-lovely. ('It's De-lovely', 1936).

In the early years of the century, operettas had a distinct 'European' sound. Many of them came from central Europe, imported from Vienna or Germany. Plots were sentimental and based on love; settings were imaginary and music was in the tradition of the Viennese waltz. Musical comedies, on the other hand, had contemporary settings, used colloquial language and music based on the Tin Pan Alley style. In 1913, of the thirty-four musicals on Broadway, thirteen were operettas, with two revivals of earlier shows, eight revues and eleven American book musicals. The outbreak of war was to see a drastic reduction in shows from Europe and England. Musical comedy had to be supplied by American composers, lyricists and librettists. As anti-German sentiment swept America, Broadway banned all

European operettas until nearly a year after Armistice. American talent was required to fill the gap and create the entertainment and diversion that Americans needed during the grim war years. Vaudeville, burlesque and reviews were becoming popular. Broadway, in 1914, began to succumb to the force of the vernacular. Jerome Kern moved music away from European traditions to an American nonchalance. This was complemented in the lyrics of P.G. Wodehouse who had been raised in the tradition of Gilbert and Sullivan.

Gilbert had a distinct style that was ironic and witty. He had been writing fanciful lyrics from his youth, often accompanied by caricatures. By the time he teamed up with Sullivan, who had attended a number of music academies and conservatoires, he was concocting outrageous stories to be delivered in a deadpan manner. Sullivan, who considered himself a composer of serious music, was obliged to simplify his compositions to allow the words to be heard. With the libretto dictating the score, Gilbert and Sullivan were often in disagreement, but, by 1878, they were considered a creative and successful team whose operettas would precede musical theatre. (Mike Leigh, *The Guardian*, 4 November 2006).

Wodehouse, on the other hand, discovered that by composing the music first the lyricist could rhyme in clever ways without departing from colloquial diction. ‘Till the Clouds Roll By’ is from the 1917 stage show, *Oh, Boy!*

What bad luck! It’s
coming down in buckets.

The constraints imposed by music sparked inventiveness, and lyrics by Wodehouse inspired young composers. It would be a fair assumption that Cole Porter was amongst these emerging musicians.

Despite his poor academic record, Cole was accepted at Harvard Law School. His grandfather had threatened to discontinue financial support unless Cole concentrated on a legal career and, as encouragement, had offered Cole a holiday trip to England, which Cole was to enjoy with several of his friends from Yale. Cole, with his collaborator and roommate, T. Lawrason Riggs, continued to write scores for Yale musicals. The pair earned the title of the Gilbert and Sullivan of college dramatics, according to the Yale News of the time. In his second year at Harvard, Cole switched to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, with the

intention of majoring in music. His mother did not advise J.O. whose generous monthly allowance afforded Cole the luxury of moving from his dormitory room to a house which he shared with friends, and where partying took precedence over academic pursuits. Stimulating company stoked Cole's ebullience and charm; he worked at avoiding ennui. In one of his lesser known numbers, 'Poor Young Millionaire', the lyrics with their repetition of the words 'tired' and 'bored' seem to have sprung from some early and bitter experiences:

After hunting all over for pleasure
 With some measure of success,
 I've decided the pace known as rapid
 Leads to vapid nothingness.
 And I'm tired of betting,
 Tired of sporting,
 Tired of flirting,
 Tired of courting,
 Tired of racing,
 Tired of yachting,
 Tired of loafing,
 Tired of rotting,
 Tired of dining,
 Tired of wining,
 Tired of being,
 Tired, tired, tired.
 Oh won't somebody care
 For a poor young millionaire.
 If you knew what blues meant
 You'd find me amusement.
 I've had every thrill
 From a Rolls-Royce to a Ford.
 And there's no concealing
 That fact I'm feeling
 Bored, bored, bored.

Fortunately during the Yale and Harvard days, Cole's ever increasing social circle of wealthy and influential friends staved off the feelings of ennui that were to plague him in later years. Elisabeth 'Bessie' Marbury, a Broadway 'professional', who was both theatrical producer and agent, was amongst Cole's early friends. Bessie succeeded in selling two of Cole's songs to Broadway musicals. In 1916, she produced his show *See America First* which survived only fifteen performances. Reviewers found Porter's love lyrics unimpressive.

Ah, worse than death the plight
of heart for heart repining

and

From far thou dost bring
on magical wing
a memory ever dearest.

This was a first attempt of Porter and Riggs at creating a full-scale musical for Broadway. While for Cole it was a springboard to greater things, Riggs gave up the theatre. He joined the priesthood, eventually becoming a chaplain at Yale. Porter returned to Broadway in 1919 with the revue, *Hitchy-Koo*.

Porter's songs were now recognized as being 'clever', but the show closed early. One song, however, did sell substantial copies of sheet music. 'Old Fashioned Garden' was a classic Tin Pan Alley song, full of clichés and nostalgia. Its gushy sentiments endeared it to an American audience.

One summer day, I chanced to stray
to a garden of flow'rs blooming wild
It took me once more to the dear days of yore
and a spot that I loved as a child.

The major benefit that Cole derived from the show was the eventual acceptance of his grandfather that Cole would be neither a lawyer nor a businessman. J.O. set up a trust for Cole which would provide a very substantial income to support his songwriting pursuits. Cole was now in a better financial position to polish his technique.

Since boyhood, Porter had selected friends who were supportive and influential, among them Bessie Marbury, who was to remain one of Cole's closest confidantes, together with her lover, Elsie de Wolfe, who abandoned stage design to become a most successful interior decorator. Elsie was to become prominent in Parisian society in the 1930s. In 1926, at the age of sixty, and to the astonishment of all who knew her, she married Sir Charles Mendl, a

British diplomat, and, although the couple kept separate apartments in Paris, Elsie performed her social duty as Lady Mendl. Despite her age, her exercise regime was famous and she often scandalized French diplomatic society with a party trick of making a spectacular entrance, turning handsprings. This inspired the Cole Porter words in his song 'Anything Goes' from the show *Anything Goes* of 1934:

When you hear that Lady Mendl, standing up,
Now turns a handspring, landing up-
On her toes
Anything Goes!

Elsie and Mendl were to remain amongst Cole's closest friends. They shared a lifelong love of France, and a passion for elaborate and imaginative entertaining; the perfect antidote for Cole to avoid ennui.

On April 6, 1917, after nearly three years of neutrality, the United States Congress declared war on Germany. Six weeks later, on May 18, 1917, the U.S. Congress passed the Selective Service Act, which authorized President Woodrow Wilson to draft one million men, between the ages of 21 and 30, for military service. Within a few months some ten million men had registered in response to the draft. Cole Porter, now aged 26 (or 24 according to his school records) was not amongst them.

I think it is reasonable to assume that apart from the hardships and rigors of Army life, Cole could have been concerned that his homosexuality would cause him not only embarrassment but imprisonment. From the days following the Revolutionary War, the Army and Navy had targeted the act of sodomy rather than homosexual persons, and any soldier convicted of sodomy could be sent to prison. Later in 1921, the Army included psychiatric screening standards in their selection process. Feminine characteristics were regarded 'as stigmata of degeneration' (Berube, 1990: 13) and, undeniably, Cole fitted the profile. In July, 1917, with a portable piano, he sailed for France.

Very little is known of Cole's involvement with the war effort. He did associate himself with an organisation founded by Nina Larre Smith Duryea, an American socialite living in Paris. As her personal aide, Cole had opted for the more glamorous job of humanitarian work in

distributing food supplies in wartime France. His wardrobe now included a closet of tailor-made military uniforms. Cole derived great amusement from the stories that circulated about his various activities, which ranged from joining the French Foreign Legion to receiving the Croix de Guerre. But not only had Cole managed to avoid the restrictions and hazards of war, he had been hard at work composing, and had succeeded in getting a number of his songs accepted for London musicals. In contrast, fellow-composer, Irving Berlin, a sergeant in the U.S. Army, spent his war years writing songs to help boost morale and raise funds. One of the most popular was from the 1918 stage show, *Yip, Yip, Yaphank*, that was performed entirely by soldiers. ‘Oh! How I hate to get up in the morning’ had lyrics that moved from the mundane description of camp life to hyperbole as he described escaping reveille.

Someday I’m going to murder the bugler.
 Someday they’re going to find him dead.
 I’ll amputate his reveille,
 And step upon it heavily,
 And spend the rest of my life in bed.

While American composers were rallying to support the war effort, providing shows with songs of patriotic fervor, Porter’s reaction to the war was a parody of a Jerome Kern song ‘They didn’t believe me’ which Porter re-titled ‘War Song.’

And when they ask us how dangerous it was,
 We never will tell them, we never will tell them.
 How we fought in some café
 With wild women night and day
 ‘Twas the wonderfulest war you could ever knew.
 And when they ask us, and they’re certainly going to ask us,
 Why on our chests we do not wear the Croix de Guerre,
 We never will tell them,
 We never will tell them,
 There was a front, but damned if we knew where.

Porter’s solitary contribution to the war effort showed his singular detachment from the hardships of war.

When the armistice treaty between the Allies and Germany was signed on 11 November, 1918, American servicemen looked forward to returning home. Celebrations would be

tempered by the fact that the push for Prohibition, which made the production and sale of alcohol illegal, had resulted, in 1919, in the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which led to complete prohibition of alcohol consumption. While it was the 18th Amendment that established prohibition, it was the Volstead Act that clarified the law: this act described any beverage that was more than 0.5% alcohol by volume as being illegal.

The Temperance movement considered alcohol the root of many of society's ills, including crime and murder. With Temperance organizations in nearly every state from the beginning of the twentieth century, the focus moved from moderation to prohibition. On December 5, 1933, the 21st Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, repealing the 18th Amendment; alcohol was once again legal. Porter and his friends had remained unaffected by prohibition. Post-war Paris attracted artists and intellectuals, seeking creative freedom and exhilaration. Victor Hugo had declared the 'City of Lights' the cultural leader of the world; in painting, music and literature Paris was synonymous with avant garde. The city had survived the war relatively unscathed and had become a mecca for artists from all over the world, who encouraged experimentation in all its guises. This devil-may-care attitude for living-for-the-moment suited Porter.

'A Toast to Volstead', from *Fifty Million Frenchmen* of 1929, was based on the book by Herbert Fields and directed by Porter's friend, Monty Woolley.

Rotarian:	Step right up to the bar, gentlemen, And have a drink on me.
Barman:	Step right up to the bar, gentlemen, What will your pleasure be?
Ist man:	A martini.
2 nd man:	A manhattan.
3 rd man:	A gin ricky.
4 th man:	A gin fizz.
5 th man:	A mint julep.
6 th man:	A Tom Collins.
7 th man:	Give me the same thing, whatever it is.
Rotarian:	Just step up to the bar, gentlemen, And don't forget I'm host. Raise your glasses high And pause while I

Propose a little toast.

Here's a long life to Volstead,
 Our senator from heaven sent.
 Let us give our endorsement
 To his act of enforcement,
 What a noble experiment!
 Let's sing a swan song to liquor
 That blight with which we once were cursed.
 Here's a long life to Volstead,
 And I hope he dies of thirst.

Porter's contempt for Prohibition resulted in this male ensemble number being dropped from the show, five weeks after the New York opening. As Prohibition was still being enforced, one must presume that the director found it politic to remove the song which was the show's opening chorus. In a very different vein, Porter continued blatantly to use alcohol as a topic for his songs. Inspired by a book by Guy Bolton and P.G.Wodehouse, Porter's musical *Anything Goes*, which opened in November 1934, included some of his most successful songs, including 'I get a kick out of you':

I get no kick from champagne.
 Mere alcohol doesn't thrill me at all,
 So tell me why should it be true
 That I get a kick out of you?
 Some get a kick from cocaine.
 I am sure that if I took even one sniff
 That would bore me terrific'ly too
 Yet I get a kick out of you.
 I get a kick ev'ry time I see
 You standing there before me.
 I get a kick though it's clear to me
 You obviously don't adore me.
 I get no kick in a plane.
 Flying too high with some guy in the sky
 Is my idea of nothing to do,
 Yet I get a kick out of you.

Here we find Porter, the lover, fighting the old ennui. The colloquial 'I get no kick' or 'I get a kick' is repeated throughout the refrain and is counteracted by the somewhat arch diction of

‘Mere alcohol’, while the laconic hyperbole acts as an understated tribute to the power of his beloved: ‘so tell me why should it be true that I get a kick out of you.’ The controlled ennui is broken by skillful phrasing and the use of triplets that throw the phrasing off-balance, breaking it into segments such as ‘-hol-does-n’t’ and ‘thrill-me-at.’ When the image of cocaine is introduced there is an even more tipsy disruption:

If-I-took
e-ven-one
sniff-that-would
bore-me-ter-
rif-ic’-ly

The triple rhyme – if/sniff/’rif- strengthens the imbalance, and the talented Ethel Merman, for whom Porter wrote the original song, highlighted the irony and even inserted an additional pause in the middle of ‘rif-ic’-ly’ to give the impression of the effects of cocaine. Porter moves from imagery to the feeling that his love is unrequited. There is an admission of the hopelessness of the situation. The rebuff expressed in ‘I get a kick though it’s clear to me/ You obviously don’t adore me’ depicts a character who is addicted to ‘kicks’. Porter’s own behavior would have given him the personal experience to write so accurately. It would seem that the pronoun ‘I’ is intended. His flamboyant life allowed for extravagant excesses detailed in the rhymes ‘champagne’, ‘cocaine’, ‘plane.’ The overall effect is one of nonchalant sophistication.

Since childhood Cole had been indulged. Financially secure, he had the means and talent to follow his own interests. His first trip to Paris at the age of eighteen had a profound influence, exposing him to a very different society, while allowing him the independence to sever ties with Peru. When he married Linda Lee Thomas in 1919, he found a partner who would complement him socially, sexually, and aesthetically. Linda was a replica of his mother, while her wealth and social connections exposed him to an international set in pursuit of pleasure. Cole was determined to keep abreast of social and artistic trends. His songs radiated an effortless ease, delighting friends with their topical and witty references, delivered in a droll manner. Cole was the epitome of a sophisticated dilettante. His ability to amuse and entertain made him the darling of café society. He was to seek this attention and acceptance throughout his life.

Porter was aware of, and used, the vocal idiosyncracies of singers to great advantage in his writing, concentrating on the strong points and playing down any weaknesses. Ethel Merman had a strong voice and the volume to sustain it, and Porter wrote songs for her that capitalized on those strengths, allowing her to repeat certain striking notes. On the other hand, when writing for Fred Astaire, a magnificent dancer and stage personality, but with a limited vocal range, Porter would use only a few notes in a register that Astaire could handle. With Fred Astaire in mind, Porter wrote 'Night and Day' stressing repeated sounds such as the beat, beat, beat of the tom tom, the tick, tick, tock of a clock, the drip, drip, drip of raindrops. Porter used only three notes, a half-step apart, and he repeated these notes throughout the verse. B flat is repeated in the first 8 bars, then, in the next 8 bars, the note ascends through B natural to C, then descends back to B natural and B flat, ready for the refrain. Because Astaire was a master of rhythmic punctuation, Porter used insistent rhymes. 'Night and Day' was the most popular tune from the 1932 show, *Gay Divorce*, and prompted this comment from Irving Berlin:

I am mad about 'Night and Day', and I think it is your high spot. You probably know it is being played all over, and all the orchestra leaders think it is the best tune of the year - and I agree with them. (Schwartz, 1979: 119).

Porter believed he had found the formula for writing his songs. David Jasen in his book, *Tin Pan Alley*, writes at length about the requirements of the sheet music publishers, who demanded that lyrics be androgynous in order to be sung by both male and female singers, ensuring better sales and widespread publicity. Despite J.O.'s prediction that his grandson would never be a businessman, Cole had the sense to maintain this sexual neutrality with songs aimed at sophisticated audiences, able to appreciate topical, witty allusions. The most popular theme was love, and Porter exploited the subject through a range of styles and emotions. As many of the hit tunes of that time were written by Jewish musicians, including Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin and George Gershwin, Porter decided he needed to write Jewish tunes, and this meant minor-key melodies which sounded eastern Mediterranean. It is ironic that Porter had little, if anything, to do with Jews socially, but Rodgers seemed to accept Porter's formula, and commented:

It is surely one of the ironies of the musical theatre that despite the abundance of Jewish composers, the one who has written the most enduring 'Jewish' music should be an Episcopalian millionaire who was born on a farm in Peru, Indiana. (Schwartz, 1979: 118).

Above all, to be successful, Porter had to conform to the dictates of Tin Pan Alley.

I am indebted, in particular, to David A. Jasen, who traces the influence the Alley had on songwriters, performers and publishers from 1886 until the mid-1950s; also to Philip Furia, who offers a unique perspective on the solutions songwriters used to work within a rigidly established genre.

Tin Pan Alley was the name given to the publishing business that hired musicians (composers and lyricists) to create songs. Monroe H. Rosenfeld, a songwriter, was commissioned in 1900 by the *New York Herald* to write a story of the new sheet music industry. He visited the area of West 28th Street, between Broadway and Sixth Avenue, where most of the publishers had offices. The noise of the pianos, despite the fact that strips of newspaper were woven between the strings, sounded like the rattling of pans and gave Rosenfeld the idea of the nickname 'Tin Pan Alley'. This name later became the generic term for all publishers of popular American sheet music, irrespective of their location.

Prior to 1900, older firms had dealt in classical music compositions and choral church music. Light music composers and lyricists did not exist. Popular songs were written but nobody was paid to compose on demand. Sheet music was purchased only by the affluent who could afford a piano. As mass production made pianos affordable, so the demand for sheet music grew. Members of the public were encouraged to buy sheet music when they saw their favourite performers incorporate the music into their acts. Music was heard either on stage or through recordings, first on cylinders and then later on flat discs known as 78 r.p.m. (revolutions per minute), and even later on radio, film and finally television. This music would be marketed in the form of sheet music for voice and piano. The visual appeal of sheet music was not neglected by the Tin Pan Alley publishers, who believed that the cover played an important part in the overall appeal of the music. Famous illustrators and cartoonists of books, magazines and posters were employed to create art works. The artwork of each era in Tin Pan Alley's history is distinctive and highly prized by sheet music collectors.

Sheet music publishers dominated the popular music business. Most of these ‘new’ publishers were first or second-generation Jewish immigrants and many of them were salesman. It was in the marketing of songs that they displayed great originality. Demand came from the ‘stars’ who required music to complement their shows or personalities. Often publishers requested tunes to compete with popular songs produced by rival publishers. Many of these salesmen believed that they could turn out better songs than the ones they were selling, working on a commission basis. Songs were promoted wherever people gathered, from brothels to bars. Cheap editions of the songs without illustrated covers, called ‘Professional copies’, would be given away to band leaders and singers to encourage them to perform new songs. Bribing a performer was to become known as ‘Payola’. Later efforts to promote songs became more sophisticated. Men, known as ‘pluggers’, were hired to sing these songs during the day, and in theatres and beer halls during the evening. Plugging songs, particularly in the theatres, was an effective way of achieving wide attention. But mass marketing meant mass production. The lyricist Charles K. Harris offered the advice:

Look at newspapers for your story-line; acquaint yourself with the style in vogue; know the copyright laws; avoid slang. (Furia, 1990: 19).

The rapid growth of vaudeville was a factor that contributed to the development of Tin Pan Alley. Vaudeville had developed in the nineteenth century to provide theatrical entertainment to the working classes who lived in the densely populated cities of Great Britain and the United States. The entertainment included a variety of short acts or turns, such as song-and-dance routines, juggling, slapstick comedy. Vaudeville thrived in the 1900s but faded in the 1930s when ‘talking movies’ became popular. Benjamin F. Keith (1846-1914) opened his first vaudeville theatre in 1893 and so earned the nickname, ‘father of vaudeville.’ The venue was open to all ages and sexes and this made the theatre so popular that he was encouraged to introduce a chain of theatres along the east coast of America. In these theatres the star singer introduced new songs, and often a ‘plugger’ would be amongst the audience to sing a chorus of the song and so encourage audience participation. Vaudeville performers were constantly on the lookout for new songs. These songs could be altered to suit the range and temperament of the singer, while, for star performers, composers and lyricists would write material for exclusive use. Operettas would continue to be popular into the 1920s, but vaudeville and the American musical had taken hold of Broadway with smaller costs and orchestra and bright sophistication. The plot in the American musical was merely the frame to the song and dance routines. It was common to have a star, or a number of stars, and concoct a story that would

highlight their talents. Gradually musicals evolved that were more sophisticated, with a story-line that included the music. Eventually the musical play emerged, integrating song and humour with a credible story and three-dimensional characters.

The dominant kind of popular song told a story to music and often ‘allowances’ had to be made to fit words to music. The diction might allow for inversions and elisions, but there was very little vernacular ease. The musical formula during this period consisted of regular verses followed by the same chorus. The story unfolded in the verses, but it is the chorus that reflects the early beginnings of the standard chorus of the golden age. Songwriters regarded the lyrical formula of the ballad as one of strophic story-telling, with the chorus (or refrain) serving to echo the verses. The love songs of the golden age would be very different from the sentimental ballad and would also absorb certain elements of ragtime with its strongly syncopated rhythm and lively melody, which was gaining in popularity and required a different lyrical formula. The music was used to distort or ‘rag’ the lyric.

Musical notes that break up words and phrases would become a feature of the writing of Cole Porter. Colloquial simplicity offered a new idiom for song. Suddenly it was possible to use slang and disrupt verbal syntax. Songs were written regardless of the story, but they were required to be sophisticated with a certain vernacular ease that had evolved from the ballad and from ragtime. Most of these songs would conform to the formula of 32 bars, comprising four eight-bar units, usually in an AABA sequence. This meant that the main theme A was played, then repeated, followed by a different theme B (generally known as the bridge), followed by A again. ‘What is this thing called love?’ is a classic example of the 32 bar form, where the melody is simple, providing a musical structure upon which to place words.

A: What is this thing called love?

 This funny thing called love?

A: Just who can solve its mystery?

 Why should it make a fool of me?

B: I saw you there one wonderful day

 You took my heart and threw it away.

A: That’s why I ask the Lord in heaven above,,

 What is this thing called love?

The AABA formula made songs relatively easy to write while the persistence of a musical style was strengthened by the founding in 1914 of ASCAP (the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers), today the world's largest performing rights organization with over 150,000 composers, lyricists and publishers as members. The ASCAP ensured that, before songs could be performed, fees needed to be paid to the Society, who then distributed monies to copyright holders. This resulted in the standardization of a style saying 'I love you' in 32 bars. This standardization could be either constraining or inspiring, requiring lyricists to explore levels of creativity in shifts of rhyme, syntax and imagery. Cole Porter described his method of working thus:

First I think of an idea for a song and then I fit it to a title. Then I go to work on a melody, spotting the title at certain moments in the melody. Then I write the lyric- the end first- that way it has a strong finish. It's terribly important for a song to have a strong finish. I do the lyrics the way I'd do a crossword puzzle. I try to give myself a meter which will make the lyric as easy as possible to write, but without being banal... I try to pick for my rhyme words for which there is a long list with the same ending. (Jasen, 1988: 266).

In 1877, scientist Thomas Edison introduced the phonograph which received and replayed sound, using tinfoil wrapped around a grooved cylinder. The quality of the sound was poor and the recording could only be played once. The phonograph was followed by the graphophone which used wax cylinders that could be used many times. But each cylinder had to be recorded individually, limiting production. It was not until 1887 that a German immigrant, Emile Berliner, patented a method of sound recording that could be mass-produced. He abandoned the use of cylinders and started to record on flat discs originally made of glass, then zinc, finally plastic. A groove was etched into the disc which rotated on a gramophone. A needle that was inserted into the arm of the gramophone 'read' the grooves, translating the vibrations to the speakers. This meant that records could now be mass produced from a master recording. But it was not until the 1920s that the sales of records had an impact on Tin Pan Alley, largely due to the small royalty given by the record companies after the Copyright Act of 1909 was enacted. This Act made provision for works to be copyrighted for a period of 28 years from the date of publication, and renewable once for a second 28-year term. If no notice of copyright was attached to a work then the work received no protection of the Copyright Act and became part of the public domain.

CHAPTER 2

Let's do it Broadway beckons

In 2000, the Library of America, a non-profit publisher which aims to preserve America's literary heritage, published *American Poetry: The Twentieth Century*. This is a two-volume anthology in which Cole Porter's 'I get a kick out of you' was printed, together with poems such as T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' and Robert Frost's 'Stopping by woods on a snowy evening.' Porter's inclusion reflected a growing consensus that certain works of the lyricists were worthy of inclusion as a species of poetry. In the American Poets Project section, there is a volume, edited in 2006, by Robert Kimball, titled *Cole Porter: Selected Lyrics*.

A lyric is designed to be sung. It needs to be in the vocal range and abilities of the singer; a confusing word and the listener is lost. The writer is forced to choose words that can roll off the tongue in a conversational, often informal, style. Porter described his lyric writing rather like tackling a crossword puzzle. (Mast, 1987: 191). He often began his songs by finding a suitable title and then creating words to develop the theme. The melody to support the words and structure of the lyrics would follow. He would select a metre which would suit the lyric and establish the mood. A sad song would be taken at a slow pace. He used a basic principle of open-ended vowel sounds which allowed him to pick rhyme words from a long list with the same ending.

You do something to me,
Something that simply mystifies me.
Tell me, why should it be
You have the pow'r to hypnotize me?
Let me live 'neath your spell,
Do do that voodoo that you do so well.
For you do something to me
That nobody else could do.

'You do something to me' from *Fifty Million Frenchmen* (1929).

Lyricists found that the title needed to be repeated in the lyrics. In her book, 'The Craft of Lyric Writing' (1985), Sheila Davis describes the process of creating successful lyrics. She emphasizes the importance of repeating the title throughout the song. After all, the intention

was to sell songs and there should be no doubt about the title. The strongest place to put the title was in the first line of the chorus. It was useful to find a 'hook' – a memorable word combination – in this case '*you do.*' Porter has a preference for one-syllable words. He often employs a technique of using a lyric which goes full circle, employing the power of repetition. The writing is concise, with the pronouns telling us the story. The virtue of simplicity holds interest.

Porter had yet to achieve international acclaim. He suffered moments of self-doubt about his work while pursuing a glamorous lifestyle, unlike the other songwriters of the time who were pestering music publishers and theatrical producers for the opportunity to perform their songs. Instead of the relentless grind of promoting his work through Tin Pan Alley channels, Porter elected to use his parties and social connections as a means of performing his newest songs. His habit of dominating social events by singing and playing his own compositions to amuse friends gave rise to the impression that, for him, song-writing was merely a hobby, while it was business for fellow composer Irving Berlin. To many of his friends and associates he was a wealthy dilettante, the darling of American and European café society. But Porter, the trained musician, yearned to be taken seriously on his terms, as well as those of Tin Pan Alley. His friend, Elsa Maxwell, consoled him by stating: 'your standards are too high. The wit and poetry of your lyrics are far beyond the people. But one day you will haul the public up to your own level' (Ewen, 1978: 372). For Elsa, the social scene provided her with financial support. Her party-arranging talents were in demand and offered an environment in which Porter could flourish. He continued to write songs, playing them at every opportunity. He also worked hard to build contacts in both theatre and publishing worlds. With sufficient money and his growing circle of influential friends, Porter could indulge in his own personal promotion campaign. He was certainly not a stereotype of popular songwriters, many of them from Middle and Eastern European Jewish backgrounds, with a strong drive to succeed. Although Cole had the drive, he had been conditioned from birth that he could have practically anything he wanted and so could be more sanguine about achieving his goals. He continued steadily to write his music, in the hopes that he would compose a hit. Elsa Maxwell noted that even when Cole 'was cutting capers all over Europe, he was working hard and steadily, six hours a day, experimenting with lyrics, polishing his technique and building up a large inventory of songs' (Schwartz, 1979: 59).

Various biographers have written about Elsa Maxwell, but I found her autobiography, *RSVP: Elsa Maxwell's Own Story*, written in 1954, provided me with fascinating details about this remarkable woman and offered an interesting perspective on the social scene of the time.

Elsa Maxwell had come from humble beginnings to make a name for herself as America's most successful party-giver. As a self-taught musician, she had worked as a piano accompanist, while her work in vaudeville had taken her all over Europe where she developed a formidable list of social contacts. Her party-arranging skills were legendary and her reputation as a social director grew. Even Governments, recognizing her formidable social contacts, sought her help. When the principality of Monaco wished to promote Monte Carlo as a tourist destination, Elsa handled the campaign. In 1923, the Italian Government asked her to help put the Lido, the beach resort near Venice, on the social map.

It was inevitable that Elsa and Cole would meet in postwar Paris, not only through their social contacts, but because Elsa admired Cole's work. They were an unusual pair. She was a lesbian, masculine-looking with no sense of fashion; he was effeminate, homosexual, with a deep concern for his personal appearance. Their friendship was by no means diminished by the arrival, in 1918, of another woman in Cole's life - a beautiful American divorcee, Linda Lee Thomas, whose wealth, beauty and social standing made her a leading figure in Parisian society.

At age thirty five, eight years older than Cole, Linda Lee exuded a worldly sophistication which included impeccable taste in both art and her choice of friends, drawn from a circle of some of the most distinguished minds of the time. Cole's talent and sparkling irreverence impressed Linda. Her previous husband was a philanderer with a reputation as a sportsman and playboy. She was repelled by his machismo mentality and was far more comfortable with Cole's sexual leanings. However, she did, throughout their relationship, insist that Cole maintain appropriate taste and discretion in his affairs. In terms of their sexual choices, both were highly liberated people and, as such, were leaders in setting the tone for a promiscuous and international café society. (Schwartz, 1979: 53-61).

World War 1 had brought about socio-economic changes which had deepened during the years of the Depression. But restrictions and rationing had no effect on either Linda or Cole, who could afford every luxury. The American upper and middle classes were encouraged to adopt virtues of piety and purity, values scorned by Cole, who delighted in the physical

sensations of life. As a challenge to the Temperate Movement, which considered the consumption of alcohol to be at the root of society's ills, he composed the song 'The Lost Liberty Blues', written for a show *La Revue des Ambassadeurs*. The song, which has the Statue of Liberty bemoaning her fate, was never performed in the United States.

I've got the lost liberty blues.
 Those lost liberty blues.
 With a pair of handcuffs on my wrists
 And padlocks on my shoes.
 Can you expect me to be gay
 Or ask me to enthuse?
 While reformers lead 'em
 From the battle cry of freedom
 To the lost liberty blues.

This refrain can be considered unusual in the Porter repertoire. Porter abandons his racy, sophisticated style for a change in tempo and adopts a typical 'blues' arrangement, following an African-American trend that developed in the deep South from spirituals and slave work songs. By listening to songs that expressed sadness and longing, one could overcome 'the blues.' The songs were simply structured, usually in three line verses, with the third line summing up the sentiment. As record companies searched for new sounds, so the distinct style became popular throughout America in the 1920s and 1930s. Porter's choice of the Statue of Liberty, a symbol of freedom, is ironic, superimposed against the image of black Americans who moved from the rural South to the urban North, in their longing for a better life, and felt that they had lost their freedom. Porter was not known to pursue social causes or injustices, but he delighted in opposing anyone who 'opposed' another person's pleasure. He was prepared to explore the 'unmentionable' and displayed disdain for received values, the morality of a national culture. Yet, as he was working in a medium most intent in preserving those values, this makes for an interesting set of internal contradictions. Musical restraints had been imposed by Tin Pan Alley with their formula which often resulted in musical repetition with banal phrases. Sweet bland words of courtly love sold songs, reflecting a pious and pure aspect of true love. Porter was obliged to write lyrics that would not shock. Ever conscious of censorship laws, Hollywood demanded even blander songs that were simple, with universal appeal. Lyrics that contained double entendres were taboo, although more sophisticated songs were accepted by Broadway. Porter must have chafed at the

banality of popular songs with their themes of romantic love while pursuing his own sexual preferences.

Despite the success of 'Old Fashioned Garden' which brought in a small fortune in royalties, Porter was not in a financial position to consider marriage to Linda Lee. He was still dependent on a monthly allowance from his grandfather, who was not prepared to advance any trust-fund income out of disapproval of Cole's lack of a solid career. His mother, Kate, agreed to supplement his income, and, on December 18, 1919, Cole married Linda Lee in a civil ceremony, attended by a few close friends. Linda purchased a house in the fashionable *quartier des Invalides* which she soon turned into a Parisian showplace. Linda and Cole had separate apartments, while the house was also home to Howard Sturges, who was Cole's closest confidant and deeply attached to Linda.

The *Coleporteurs*, as the couple became known in Parisian society, enjoyed both a flamboyant and extravagant lifestyle. Linda handled their enormous expenses; in many respects she was a close replica of Kate, Cole's mother. As an older and very rich woman, she was able to indulge and spoil Cole. Her devotion was such that their friends considered her the ideal wife. She exulted in his successes and was gratified as his talent grew. Linda is often credited with keeping Porter's career going. She encouraged him to enrol for classes in composition and orchestration at the Schola Cantorum in Paris, while inviting leading theatrical personalities to perform with Cole at the sumptuous parties she held in Paris, Venice and on the Riviera. Porter expressed some envy of the 'serious' composers but he decided to focus on his first love: Broadway musical comedy. Musical theatre in New York offered a freedom to songwriters which encouraged Porter to write to the limits of what was acceptable and accessible. Critic Ring Lardner wrote: 'suggestiveness and dirt in songs on the radio' are cropping up 'under the influence of Mr Cole Porter' (McBrien, 1998: 149).

Porter was constantly on the lookout for an idea for his songs. 'The Blue Boy Blues' was written in 1922 to highlight the sale of Gainsborough's famous painting, owned by the Duke of Westminster, to an American railroad magnate for a princely sum. The art dealer, Sir Joseph Duveen, triggered an outcry when he displayed the painting at London's National Gallery, prior to its journey to America. Porter took advantage of the event and wrote of the sad plight of Blue Boy.

As a painting you must have heard a lot about me,
 For I lived here for many happy years;
 Never dreaming that you could ever do without me,
 Till you sold me in spite of all my tears.
 It's a long way from gilded galleries in Park lane
 To the Wild West across the winter sea.
 If you don't know quite what I mean,
 Simply ask Sir Joseph Duveen
 And he'll tell you what he gave 'em for me.

Porter was following a basic principle of popular songwriting: take advantage of any controversy. Publicity generates interest. Porter was resourceful in capitalizing on topical matters. He invariably started out with a list of ideas before attempting to put them to music.

For I'm the Blue Boy, the beautiful Blue Boy,
 And I'm forced to admit I'm feeling a bit depressed.
 A silver dollar took me and my collar
 To show the slow cowboys
 Just how boys
 In England used to be dressed.
 I don't know what I shall do
 So far from Mayfair:
 If Mister Gainsborough knew, I know he'd frown.
 As days grow fewer, I'm bluer and bluer.
 For I am saying goodbye to London town.

The audiences at London's New Oxford Theatre loved 'The Blue Boy Blues' as an effective production number, but when the show *Mayfair and Montmartre* ended its run, so did the song.

In many of his songs Porter's particular interest was with ideas which he portrayed in various ways. He manipulated and used repetition in his lyrics for dramatic purposes. Some of his songs were lists of questions:

Do I love you, do I?
 Doesn't one and one make two?
 Do I love you, do I?
 Does July need a sky of blue? ('Do I love you', 1937)

Porter often repeated rhyme:

Like the moon
 Growing dim
 On the rim
 Of the hill,
 In the chill
 Still
 Of the night.

(‘In the still of the night’, 1937)

Often each line of a song would begin and end with the same words, or the same rhyme:

If driving fast cars you like
 If low bars you like
 If old hymns you like
 If bare limbs you like

(‘Anything goes’, 1934)

It was just one of those things
 Just one of those crazy flings
 One of those bells that now and then rings
 Just one of those things.

(‘Just one of those things’, 1930)

Porter was eager for a successful show on Broadway, but fate intervened when his grandfather, now aged ninety-four, died in his home in Peru. The trust fund set up for Cole in 1916 entitled him to a large income, based on coal, gas and timber sales. His mother, Kate, ever mindful of her son, divided her inheritance with Cole. Cole’s newfound wealth allowed the Porters to seek out fresh pleasures, which were to take them to Venice, where they would spend the next four summers, surrounded by friends for whom life was one big treasure hunt, dance or masked ball. Amongst the friends was Noel Coward, who was often to parody Porter’s lyrics with words of his own. In poking fun at their homosexuality, Porter wrote:

Weren’t we fools to lose each other?
 Weren’t we fools to say goodbye?
 Tho’ we knew we loved each other
 You chose another,
 So did I.

Coward's response:

Weren't we fools to lose each other
 Weren't we fools to say goodbye?
 Though we knew we loved each other
 You chose your brother,
 So did I.

Despite the frivolous atmosphere, Porter continued to work. He had an opportunity in 1923 to compose the music for a ballet for the Swedish Ballet Company, based in Paris. He was given the brief to write an 'American' ballet, titled *Within the Quota*. The plot satirized contemporary American life, and in his score Cole included diverse elements such as taxi horns, the fox trot, and piano accompaniment to a silent movie. The orchestration of his work was left to the renowned French composer and teacher, Charles Koechlin. The ballet had its premiere in Paris in October, 1923, after which the company began an American tour. Paul Rosenfeld, a highly respected music critic, described the ballet as good burlesque.

Cole Porter's music brings a talented and original humorist to light. The snoring of New York with the horns of taxi-dom faintly blowing; the fatigues and exaggerated suggestiveness of the jazz-baby's undulations; and the finale, when the orchestra becomes an electric piano, and the trumpet sobs with soulfulness, would be creditable to any living musician, and gives one great hopes for the new composer. (Schwartz, 1979: 82).

Unfortunately, the ballet company folded in 1924 and Porter decided to concentrate on writing popular songs. However, his interest in the ballet brought him in contact with the Russian dancer and librettist Boris Kochno, of the Ballet Russes, with whom he was to have a passionate love affair.

In the summer of 1927, the police raided the Palazzo Rezzonico which had been the home of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and the most palatial of the Porter residences. Young Italian boys, dressed in female costumes, were providing the entertainment for Cole and his all-male friends. The son of the police chief was amongst the youngsters in drag. It was time for Cole to leave Venice and return to social pursuits in Paris where he divided his time between play and work. Although he and Linda Lee had spent a few years moving between Paris, Venice and New York, he had never stopped writing in order to develop a song style which would be distinctly Porter. George Gershwin already had a string of Broadway successes; Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart were drawing packed audiences to their shows;

Irving Berlin stirred up a ragtime craze. Porter was combining his knowledge of exotic places and celebrated people with offbeat humour, sexual innuendos and rhyming ingenuity.

E. Ray Goetz, a Broadway producer, had approached Rodgers and Hart to write a score for a musical, *Paris*, which was to feature his wife, the vivacious musical-comedy star, Irene Bordoni. Goetz, who was familiar with Porter's work, approached Cole with the suggestion that he return to Broadway as composer-lyricist for the show. This marked a psychological turning point for Porter. When the show opened in New York City on October 8, 1928, it was a triumph. It was created as a showcase for Bordoni, who brought a nonchalant sensuousness to a lyric, providing a delivery that was the perfect foil for the kind of lyrics that had titillated Porter's friends. Porter had finally arrived, at the age of thirty-seven, as a composer for Broadway.

Birds do it, bees do it
 Even educated fleas do it
 Let's do it, let's fall in love.
 In Spain, the best upper sets do it
 Lithuanians and Letts do it
 Let's do it, let's fall in love.
 The Dutch in old Amsterdam do it
 Not to mention the Fins
 Folks in Siam do it – think of Siamese twins.
 Some Argentines, without means, do it
 People say in Boston even beans do it
 Let's do it, let's fall in love.
 Romantic sponges, they say, do it
 Oysters down in oyster bay, do it
 Let's do it, let's fall in love.
 Cold Cape Cod Clams, 'gainst their wish, do it
 Even lazy jellyfish, do it
 Let's do it, let's fall in love.
 Electric eels, I might add, do it
 Though it shocks 'em I know
 Why ask if shad do it- Waiter bring me
 "shad roe."
 In shallow shoals English soles do it
 Goldfish in the privacy of bowls do it
 Let's do it, let's fall in love.
 The most refined ladybugs do it
 When a gentleman calls.

Moths in your rugs do it
 What's the use of moth balls?
 Locusts in trees do it, bees do it,
 Even highly educated fleas do it,
 Let's do it, let's fall in love.

'Let's Do It' from *Paris* (1928)

'Let's do it' was the first of Porter's commercially successful catalogue songs, where he not only uses the list as a framework, but a method of heightening passionate intensity. He takes us on a geographical tour where he lists peoples and creatures and their methods of copulation with wry and fertile imagination. The opening line reflects a genteel reference to love-making, using the elementary metaphor of sex education: 'the birds and bees'. There is a forthrightness in the phrase 'do it'. He starts by singling out humans who do it, choosing types we would seldom think of in erotic terms; the Dutch, the Finns, the Lapps and, as a pun on his song title, the Letts. There is a sense of refined gossip in his use of the phrases, 'not to mention' and 'I might add.' Despite that gentility, the most prudish of creatures succumbs to the urge to 'do it': 'refined lady bugs', 'educated fleas', 'goldfish in the privacy of bowls', even in Boston, considered the model of Puritan propriety, 'beans do it.' While the song is supposed to be about 'love', it results in reproduction: 'think of shad roe', 'think of Siamese twins', 'what's the use of moth balls'. Porter employs figures of speech such as alliteration and assonance: 'cold Cape Cod clams', 'electric eels'. The clams 'do it' against their wishes, while 'it shocks' the eels.

In other refrains, Porter refers to: 'the nightingales, in the dark, do it', 'canaries, caged in the house, do it', 'high-browed old owls do it', 'courageous kangaroos do it', 'heavy hippopotami do it', 'pekineses in the Ritz do it.' Porter takes us on a rollercoaster of images of birds and animals copulating merrily, despite the inconveniences of time or place. Making love can be awkward: 'old sloths who hang down from twigs do it', and then there is a predictability about the outcome of 'doing it': 'sweet guinea-pigs do it/Buy a couple and wait.'

Porter had always been considered a wealthy dilettante who amused himself with some songwriting. Finally his extraordinary lifestyle was being put to advantage, and as a man of the world his urbane and polished songs were delighting audiences hungry for new

experiences. Porter was in the right place and time to promote a picture of himself that the world quickly accepted.

Porter's marriage to Linda provided him with the outward signs of a stable relationship, providing an environment in which a composer could write love songs that reflected the mores of the time. The added sparkle and wit of a Porter lyric was appreciated by sophisticated audiences familiar with the work of Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, who already had had successes on Broadway. But Porter's more daring, often risqué, allusions delighted theatre-goers, apparently oblivious to the hidden meanings contained within the songs. For decades, Americans had been exposed to a variety of entertainments centred around New York City. As early as 1732, two theatres existed in New York. As Irish and German settlers arrived to swell the population, more theatres were established, offering musical and non-musical entertainment. The Bowery Theatre which opened in 1826 seated 3,500 people. Its original intention was to cater to upper-class audiences attending performances of ballet, opera and high drama, but, after a fire and under new management, acts included animals, blackface minstrels and melodramas. Rowdy audiences from the working classes packed the low price gallery section. 'New York was divided among class lines: opera was chiefly for the upper classes, minstrel shows and melodramas for the middle class with variety shows for men of the working class' (Snyder, 1995: 1226).

In New York City the public transport system of the nineteenth century helped foster certain distinct districts such as the banks on Wall Street, jewellery on Maiden Lane, theatres on Broadway. Not only was New York able to sustain a growing population, but it was easily accessible through a developed system of rail and canal routes. The number of people swelled from 123,700 in 1820 to 813,700 in 1860, then to over 3,000,000 in 1900. The diverse population provided an environment to support writers and performers.

Broadway is the name of a wide avenue which runs the length of Manhattan and into the Bronx. It is the oldest north-south thoroughfare in the city, its name being a literal translation of the Dutch name *Breede Weg* (Broad Way). In the late nineteenth century many theatres were clustered along this street, first below and then above what is now known as Times Square. In 1880 the first arc electric streetlights in New York were placed along Broadway; the brilliance earned the nickname the 'Great White Way'. In 1883 a London visitor commented:

The plan adopted in New York has been to bring them [theatres] as nearly as possible together, so that the overflow of one house finds another theatre ready at hand. Hence the New York houses are nearly all situated in the Broadway, and have therefore a continual stream of life passing backward and forward before their doors. (White and Willensky, 2000: 21).

The location of theatres on expensive real estate meant that they needed to be profitable. With the best seats in the house costing \$1.10 to \$2.00, Broadway was a marketplace for mass entertainment. With the outbreak of World War 1, audiences flocked to theatres for light relief.

By 1920, Broadway resembled a huge carnival with vaudevilles, burlesques, peep shows and musicals. Despite a growing Temperance movement, alcohol was freely available to Americans, who sought amusement after the grim years of war. Evangelical preachers denounced drinking as a vice that led to crime and violence. Many states prohibited the distribution and consumption of alcohol and on the stroke of midnight, January 6, 1920, the manufacture, sale and possession of alcohol was prohibited. Prohibition was to last thirteen years. Speakeasies, which illegally sold alcoholic beverages, replaced neighbourhood saloons. By 1925 there were over 100,000 speakeasies in New York City alone, offering plush nightclubs with exotic floor shows. It is believed that the name ‘speakeasy’ came from the manner of ordering a drink. Patrons were requested to “speak easy” for fear that a government official might overhear. (Allen, 1995: 72). Dances such as the Black Bottom, the Tango and the Charleston were the craze, but the lighthearted mood of the Prohibition era was to fizzle out with the stock market crash of 1929. A year earlier, in 1928, Cole Porter was to have his first Broadway success with the show *Paris*, which featured the musical comedy star, Irene Bordoni.

The French-born comedienne had travelled steerage to America, landing at the Port of New York in 1907. Her coquettish personality and seductive brown eyes made her a firm favourite with audiences. Avery Hopwood, theatre critic for the New York Times, wrote: ‘Of Miss Bordoni one can report only what has been reported many times. Her voice, her accent and particularly her reeling eyes are, as ever, unmistakably attractive.’ (N.Y. Times, Mon. Nov 23, 1925). It was Miss Bordoni who would provide Cole Porter with his first major success with the song ‘Let’s Do It’, a song that would remain the epitome of a Porter song for many years with its witty and risqué words and melodically appealing music.

Porter had replaced Rodgers and Hart who were already committed to another Broadway show. Composer Richard Rodgers and lyricist Lorenz Hart produced an interesting blend of society verse and popular song. Hart had criticized Tin Pan Alley for its insistence on a rigid structure, but, despite Rodgers' often repetitive melodies, Hart produced lyrics with intricate and elaborate rhymes. While Porter was struggling to gain acceptance, Rodgers and Hart were producing hits as early as 1925. When producer Ray Goetz approached Porter with the offer to be both composer and lyricist for *Paris*, he was delighted. Goetz and Porter had worked together as co-lyricists for a 1920 revue, so the opportunity of returning to Broadway with a show that gave every indication of being a huge success was irresistible. The show *Paris* was polished over a six month period in performances in a number of cities before opening in New York City on October 8, 1928, at the Music Box Theatre. Despite the mediocre book, the slick production and Bordoni's insouciant Gallic manner, which suited Porter's slyly suggestive songs, delighted audiences. Porter's songs were considered highlights, among them 'Let's Do It' and the lesser known 'Two little Babes in the Wood', which Porter had introduced in 1924 to a lukewarm reception but now had audiences shouting their approval throughout the run of the show. Irene Bordoni told the story of the two pretty girls who were left to die in the woods by their cruel uncle and were saved by:

A rich old man in a big sedan,
And a very, very fancy beard.
He saw those girls and cheered,
Then he drove them down to New York town,
Where he covered them with useful things,
Such as bonds and stocks, and Paris frocks,
And Oriental pearls in strings,
And a show case full of rings.

In this deceptively simple song, Porter displays his trademark use of internal rhymes: *man/sedan*, *down/town*, *stocks/frocks*. His flippant choice of the word 'things' contrasts sharply with his examples of stocks and bonds, while his reference to Paris frocks and jewellery is drawn directly from personal experience and his friendship with the Maharani of Baroda, Sita Devi. Not only was the show called *Paris*, but Porter was still spending much of his time in the French capital, which in the 1920s was home to a host of glamorous exiles and émigrés, including the beautiful Maharani, who was labelled the Indian 'Wallis Simpson' by the French press. Both had a penchant for royal lovers, a flair for fashion and exquisite taste. Sita Devi, who was hailed as an icon by the fashionable, was several times named one of the

world's best-dressed women. Her fabulous jewels included the Baroda pearls. She was adored by the fast-living international set which included Cole Porter and his wife, Linda. Her love life was as legendary as her sense of style and inspired Porter to dedicate a song to her for the show *Paris*.

We're all alone, no chaperone
 Can get our number,
 The world's in slumber --- let's misbehave.
 There's something wild about you child,
 That's so contagious,
 Let's be outrageous --- let's misbehave.
 When Adam won Eve's hand,
 He wouldn't stand for teasin',
 He didn't care about those apples out of season.
 They say that spring means just one thing to little love birds,
 We're not above birds --- let's misbehave.
 It's getting late and while I wait
 My poor heart aches on
 Why keep the breaks on? Let's misbehave.
 I feel quite sure affaire d'amour
 Would be attractive,
 While we're still active --- let's misbehave.

The sentiments expressed define Porter's attitude to casual sex with its exhortation to 'misbehave'. He suggests a light-hearted frolic of no lasting importance. Apart from his devotion to Linda, Porter encouraged no long-term commitments from lovers, preferring less constricting casual affairs. Backed by a lively melody, 'Let's Misbehave' pleads somewhat coyly to take advantage of the situation 'while we're still active'. Bordoni's style could radiate erotic force, but 'Let's Misbehave' was dropped before the New York opening of the show *Paris* and replaced by 'Let's Do It' which has a cool urgency with a shift in the title from the quaint 'misbehave' to a forthright 'let's do it.' Both the title and the lyrics are purely suggestive. The words catalogue all the animals that are 'doing it'. I have offered an analysis of the lyrics earlier in this chapter but here we have a lesser known refrain from the song which was re-written many times.

The dragon flies in the reeds do it,
 Sentimental centipedes do it,
 Let's do it, let's fall in love.
 Mosquitoes, heaven forbid, do it,

So does ev'ry katydid do it,
Let's do it, let's fall in love.

Porter keeps refreshing the list with references to surprising creatures and surprising plays on sounds and meanings. The rigid structure provides the matrix for the surprises: 'So does ev'ry katydid do it' takes the same verb through three declensions within six words and one line. 'Moths in your rugs do it, What's the use of moth balls?' Although mothballs kill moths, from mothballs come more moths. Whatever hints are made about love the result is biological, not romantic.

The word 'It' was a common euphemism for the sex act in the 1920s. Porter takes linguistic advantage of that euphemism and repeats that exhortation 'do it' on almost every line. Not only is the song a catalogue but it heightens in intensity as the growing list of creatures and their ways of copulating mirrors a very erotic world. Porter's list gives us examples of how even prudish and elegant creatures give in to the urge: sedate barn-yard fowls, high browed old owls, refined lady bugs and over-educated fleas. The sly puns required a delivery that was crisp and pointed and here Irene Bordoni excelled.

The song has been parodied many times. Porter's friend, Noel Coward, could not resist his version of the lyrics:

Mr Irving Berlin
Often emphasizes sin
In a charming way.
Mr Coward, we know,
Wrote a song or two to show
Sex was here to stay.
Richard Rodgers, it's true,
Took a more romantic view
Of that sly biological urge.
But it really was Cole
Who contrived to make the whole
Thing merge.

(Castle, 1972: 185).

After years of disappointment, with *Paris*, Cole Porter had finally succeeded on Broadway. The following year, 1929, his score for his next show *Wake up and Dream* included the now famous 'Let's do it'. This show opened at the London Pavilion while *Paris* was still running on Broadway. Despite his concern that the song might be too risqué for British audiences, the

London public loved it. The show also included what was to become one of Porter's most popular songs: 'What is this thing called love?'

What is this thing called love?
 This funny thing called love?
 Just who can solve its mystery?
 Why should it make a fool of me?
 I saw you there one wonderful day.
 You took my heart and threw it away.
 That's why I ask the Lord in heaven above
 What is this thing called love?

Porter is at his best when providing a witty inventory, but the simplicity of the words in 'What is this thing called Love?', written to a classic 32 bar form, demonstrates great harmony between structure and function. The musical formula seems to contain the subject matter. Porter chooses the time-proven first line device of a question which he repeats as musings. He conveys his preference for one syllable words, with open-ended vowels and liquid consonants which help make the song easier to sing.

At the end of the London run, *Wake up and Dream* was moved to Broadway where it received such mixed reviews that Porter and his songs actually benefitted from the publicity. Another musical, with music by Cole Porter, opened in November, 1929. *Fifty Million Frenchmen* was a lavish production even by Broadway standards. The musical score of twenty songs was Porter's most comprehensive. It included the big hit of the show 'You do something to me'.

You do something to me
 Something that simply mystifies me.
 Tell me, why should it be
 You have the pow'r to hypnotize me?
 Let me live 'neath your spell,
 Do do that voodoo that you do so well,
 For you do something to me
 That nobody else could do.

Porter never specifies what effect the person has; he had a gift for implying something while saying nothing. The choice of words such as 'hypnotize', 'power', 'spell', 'voodoo' conjures up a strong image of witch-craft, while the simplicity of the words is supported by a persistent rhythm which is akin to a mystical incantation. The musical line descends in

accented beats, suggestive of a hypnotic trance. There is a detachment in the words 'do do that voodoo that you do so well', but also an urgency with each 'oo' rhyme falling on a different note while 'that' is used first as an adjective, then as a relative pronoun.

As 1929 drew to a close, Porter had the satisfaction of having two shows running on Broadway. His success meant a great deal to his wife, Linda, who had always encouraged and supported him. She kept scrapbooks of every production, including in them letters, reviews, programmes. The extensive amount of material she gathered is now housed at Porter's alma mater, Yale University. For each new show Linda commissioned a cigarette case, designed by Cartier or Fulco di Verdura. The Porters had first met Verdura while on honeymoon in Sicily; later he was to design jewellery for fashion icon, Coco Chanel. When he decided to move to America, Cole Porter helped set up an exclusive store on Fifth Avenue. The last cigarette case that Linda gave Cole was for the Broadway premiere of *Can-Can* in 1953. But even after her death, as a memorial gesture, friends, including the Duke di Verdura, presented him with a handsome gold case. Despite Linda's chronic respiratory problems, she, like Cole, smoked excessively. Emphysema made breathing extremely difficult for her. She died on May 20, 1954, with Porter at her bedside. As a token of his love for her, Porter had horticulturists develop a pink rose in her honour. The exquisite 'Linda Porter rose' was a fitting tribute for Linda Porter, who was buried in the Porter family plot at Mount Hope cemetery in Peru, where Porter's mother had been buried in 1952.

CHAPTER 3

You do something to me

Pursuit of Pleasures

The 1920s saw Porter's development as a popular composer. Broadway was on the brink of the golden age of extravagant musicals, offering opportunities for composers of light music. George and Ira Gershwin, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart had already established themselves. Charles Hamm observes that in the golden age the style of American popular songs became a New York style:

Even more than had been the case during the formative years of Tin Pan Alley, the field was dominated by composers and lyricists born and trained in New York. There was little effective cultural input from the rest of America into New York in these days, and to the extent that Tin Pan Alley songs reflected American culture in a Even more than had been the case during the formative years of Tin Pan Alley, the broader sense, they did so because the rest of the country was willing to accept a uniquely urban, New York product. (Hamm, 1979: 377-78).

It was time for Porter to focus on Broadway and provide music that was stylish and uniquely urban. After World War 1 the American public craved entertainment, but the United States was on the brink of economic collapse. The war had devastated European business, factories, homes and farms had been destroyed and Europe was struggling to rebuild. During the war, the United States Government had lent billions of dollars to its allies, and later to Axis Germany. The many nations to whom the United States had lent money were unable to pay off debts or pay interest on loans. Tariffs on imports protected American business, but this meant that Europeans were not able to sell their own goods in reasonable quantities.

In America there was an enormous gap between the rich and the working-class people. The economy relied upon luxury spending and the investment of the rich. President Coolidge's administration supported business and those who invested in business. Tax cuts for the rich meant an even greater socio-economic gap. Technology had brought about an over-supply of goods and, while production costs fell, wages scarcely increased. The vast majority of Americans were buying on credit. Sales of luxury articles such as cars and radios were thriving on instalment plans. The automotive industry was booming, as were businesses connected with radio. But these could not be expected to expand ad infinitum. Demand no

longer matched supply. Industrial production fell dramatically; unemployment figures rose. The federal government, which had subsidized farms to encourage them to produce more, ceased their aid; food prices tumbled.

The United States economy was dependent on investment from the rich. But the rich had practically stopped lending money to foreign countries. There were tremendous profits to be made on the stock market and investors were not prepared to offer low-interest loans. To protect businesses, the imposition of trade barriers prevented foreigners from buying American goods. The search for ever greater returns on investments led to speculation which saw record volumes of shares being traded on the New York Stock Exchange. Then, towards the end of October 1929, stock prices started to fall. The country was headed for financial catastrophe. The Great Depression had begun.

For Mr and Mrs Cole Porter, however, with their considerable resources, the economic recession had little effect. Linda had cautioned Cole about his lavish spending and criticized his extravagance in renting an entire train for a party while holidaying in Japan. Again, it was Linda who quashed Cole's idea for presenting Monty Woolley with a gift-wrapped baby elephant. The danger of antagonizing the press far outweighed the element of surprise. It was not often that Linda did not support Cole's ideas. She encouraged freedom of choice as long as Cole was discreet.

Despite the partying and extensive travelling, Porter never stopped writing. With *Paris* running on Broadway, his next show *Wake up and Dream* opened at the London pavilion on 27 March, 1929. The after-show party given by Lady Cunard in honour of Porter helped make the show's opening night a glittering social occasion, with guests travelling from the Continent to attend the evening. Linda had her own way of celebrating the opening of each new production with an inscribed cigarette case. Each case was a minor work of art and reflected different aspects of the shows.

Cole's score for *Wake up and Dream* included a tune he had written previously, 'Let's do it'. His concern that the emphasis on lovemaking might not be appreciated by British audiences was allayed when he was congratulated by England's Lord Chamberlain for the song's creative lyrics. After 263 performances the show moved to Broadway, where it received mixed reviews. In the Herald Tribune, review critic Richard Watts panned both the show and the song 'Let's do it':

A number of us who long have admired the lyrics of Mr Cole Porter and had wished that he would write a whole score without demonstrating his passion for zoology had our wish last night , but it hardly can be said that we were altogether satisfied. (Schwartz, 1979: 104.

But a song from the show called ‘What is this thing called love?’ was to become one of Porter’s most successful songs.

What is this thing called love?
 This funny thing called love?
 Just who can solve its mystery?
 Why should it make a fool of me.
 I saw you there one wonderful day.
 You took my heart and threw it away.
 That’s why I ask the Lord in heaven above
 What is this thing called love?

‘What is this thing called Love’ from *Wake up and Dream*.

Porter adopted the classic Tin Pan Alley AABA for this deceptively simple composition. The lyrics start and end with a rhetorical question. The virtue of simplicity and directness shows a concise construction. He uses the most singable consonants, the liquid *l* and the nasals *m,n*, and *ng*. Like ‘Let’s do it’ the song has since become one of Porter’s best-loved and most successful tunes.

The story for *Fifty Million Frenchmen*, another Porter musical of 1929, was by Herbert Fields, directed by Monty Woolley, and was to inspire Porter’s most comprehensive score for a Broadway show. Apart from being mere songs in the production, they were integrated into the show, which included the big hit ‘You do something to me’. The musical was to run for 254 performances. It was backed by Warner Brothers, who wanted the rights to shoot a film of the story in 1931. Despite the fact that the songs showed Porter in excellent form with jazz-influenced numbers and French-flavoured tunes, the Porter touch in his witty song ‘The Tale of the Oyster’ was considered disgusting and dropped from the show. The description of a social-climbing oyster being eaten by a wealthy woman who has a bout of seasickness triggered an outcry:

See that bi-valve social climber
 Feeding the rich Mrs Hoggenheimer,
 Think of his joy as he gaily glides

Down to the middle of her gilded insides.
Proud little oyster!

After lunch Mrs H. complains,
And says to her hostess, "I've got such pains,
I came to town on my yacht today.
But I think I'd better hurry back to Oyster Bay."
Scared little oyster!

Off they go thru the troubled tide,
The yacht rolling madly from side to side,
They're tossed about until that poor young oyster
Finds that it's time to quit his cloister.
Up comes the oyster!

'The Tale of the Oyster' from *Fifty Million Frenchmen*.

The big hit of the show was 'You do something to me', but not all the reviews were positive. Americans were going through grim financial times and many found Porter's casual indifference unseemly. But audiences flocked to see the show, encouraged by the words of the New York Times: 'The words and music leap lightfooted from Cole Porter' while fellow composer, Irving Berlin, described the show as 'the best musical comedy I have seen in years.' (Kanfer, 2003: 5).

The plot lacked substance, but one song became a classic.

You do something to me,
Something that simply mystifies me.
Tell me, why should it be
You have the pow'r to hypnotize me?
Let me live 'neath your spell,
Do do that voodoo that you do so well
For you do something to me
That nobody else could do.

'You do something to me' from *Fifty Million Frenchmen*.

Porter's apparent detachment has an urgency which is underscored with rhyme. The 'oo' sound had long been a favourite with tunesmiths. But Porter showed his skill in making it more than repeat an agreeable sound; he made an incantation of it with each 'oo' rhyme

falling on a different note as the melody descends. Another lyrical device he employs is repetition – repeating the same word but shifting its meaning as he does with ‘do’ in ‘do do’ and ‘that’, using it as an adjective (‘that voodoo’) then a relative pronoun (‘that you do so well.’). Porter expresses a bewilderment that someone could affect him so deeply. Apart from enduring friendships with a small circle of friends, Cole reviewed the world with cynical detachment. His every whim had been indulged from childhood; he pursued and took pleasures, irrespective of approval or censure. He weaves an interesting verbal thread through the words ‘hypnotize’, ‘spell’, ‘voodoo’, implying that not only is he unable to resist, but welcomes the feeling of being powerless. The deliberate vagueness of the phrase ‘do something’ was necessary in the constrained moral climate of the theatre, where Porter could merely hint at an underside of life with which he was familiar. Cole was in the enviable position of having three American productions opening within a five-week period. *Fifty Million Frenchmen* began its run on 27 November 1929, with *The Battle of Paris* starting a day later, while *Wake up and Dream* opened on 30 December. Considering that the American economy was at its lowest after the Wall Street crash, the almost simultaneous opening of the three Porter musicals was an extraordinary achievement. Porter’s professional status attained new heights in the closing days of the decade. His ever-increasing abilities as a composer-lyricist was drawing audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. It was inevitable that Hollywood would show interest. The early talking pictures placed a great emphasis on music. Entertainment with mass appeal on the silver screen meant singing and dancing. The film industry was hiring song writers, and now that Porter was a well-known name in popular music his music would be a welcome addition to a talkie. After the success of *The Jazz Singer* of 1927, and then *The Singing Fool*, both of which featured singing star, Al Jolson, Hollywood was anxious to satisfy the voracious appetites of film audiences.

The New Yorkers was to be Porter’s first musical of the 1930s and was an attempt to counteract the Depression blues with a dynamic cast and sparkling production. The biggest hit from the show was ‘Love for sale.’ In that original production it was sung by Kathryn Crawford who, as the character May, was a young white woman of the streets. This fact did not disturb the audience, who attended the opening on December 8, 1930, but a press review described the song as being in appalling taste. Out of concern that the song would affect the sale of tickets to the show, the setting of the song was changed from the original street scene with a white protagonist to the famous Cotton Club in Harlem, where a black woman sang

the tune as part of her night-club act. The club was famous for its exclusionary racial policies: a white-owned club, only whites could be members, while African Americans provided the entertainment. The décor was modelled after the old South plantations, which helped perpetuate widely held stereotypes about Black Americans as savages or cotton pickers. Set against the background of the Cotton Club, 'Love for Sale' was accepted by the audiences to *The New Yorkers*. The song, however, was banned from radio.

Radio was already a powerful tool in the business-oriented decade of the 1920s. While only a quarter of American homes enjoyed listening to the radio in 1927, by 1934 the number had increased dramatically. Radios were getting cheaper and the costs of programming were carried by the advertisers. In England radio had become a government monopoly, but in the United States it was open to private development. A number of radio conferences held in the 1920s supported the claim that the airwaves were the property of the American people and should be used to further the public interest. The Radio Act of 1927 brought in an independent commission, the Federal Radio Commission, (FRC) which had the authority to allocate frequencies and extend and renew licenses. Section 29 of the Act barred the broadcast of 'obscene, indecent or profane language.' Cole Porter's 'Love for Sale' was permitted only as an instrumental piece. Despite the censorship there were enough printed copies of the song to be re-created by dance bands and night-club performers. The tune was to become one of Porter's biggest hits.

love for sale
 appetizing young love for sale
 love that's fresh and still unspoiled
 love that's only slightly soiled
 love for sale

who will buy
 who would like to sample my supply
 who's prepared to pay the price
 for a trip to paradise
 love for sale

let the poets pipe of love
 in their childish ways
 I know every type of love
 better far than they
 If you want the thrill of love

I have been through the mill of love
 old love, new love
 every love but true love

love for sale
 appetizing young love for sale
 if you want to buy my wares
 follow me and climb the stairs
 love for sale

‘Love for sale’ can be referred to as a melancholy ballad. Porter’s impassive account indicates a moral indifference. Phrases that might be revealing appear to cancel each other: ‘unspoiled’ is negated by ‘soiled’, ‘appetizing young love’ is diminished by ‘I’ve been through the mill of love’ which in turn is trivialized by the clever rhyming ‘old love, new love, every love, but true love.’ The negative side of love, the frustration rather than the fulfillment, the despair rather than the delight, yielded some of Porter’s most memorable songs. In his lyrics Porter often equated sex with money. Free from social and financial restraints, he was cynical about the power of money which bought not only worldly goods but sexual favours. The words ‘I know every type of love’ could well have been Porter’s affirmation of an ambivalent personality, emerging from an era of high living and romantic disillusion. Porter was quite capable of mocking the price of respectable love:

If my wife have a bag of gold,
 What care I if the bag be old.

Porter is able to produce a volatile mix of cynicism, sophistication and world-weariness in these lines from ‘I’ve come to wive it wealthily in Padua’, from the 1948 show, *Kiss me Kate*.

After a frustrating affair with ballet dancer Boris Kochno, Porter restricted his sex life to emotionless encounters with ‘rough trade’ – sailors and prostitutes. In his song ‘Love for sale’ he explores the world of prostitution with a wry knowledge and lack of sentiment. There is a sense of worldly weariness about the words, as Porter exposes his experience of bought sex. For Porter sex was a commodity that could easily be purchased. His marriage of convenience provided an acceptable façade behind which Porter could trade money for sex. For all his charm and brilliance, Porter seems at times to be wondering about his own humanity, berating himself for moral emptiness: ‘I should like you all to know, I’m a famous

gigolo, and of lavender, why nature's got just a dash in it.' Porter confesses to being unnatural: 'I'm a flower that blooms in winter' and sexually abject: 'still I'm just a pet that men will forget.' He often hints at being marginalised: 'I'm a toy balloon that's fated soon to pop.' Despite many of his songs being an assault on sexual prudery, he never bothered with social or political issues, yet he displays a depth of feeling when he veers towards the melancholy.

Cole was now in the prime of his life while Linda was eight years older. Her recurring respiratory difficulties meant that she limited her travelling, opting for rest cures for her bronchial-asthma in the Swiss Alps. The majority of Cole's pleasure trips now were with one or more of his close friends, a favourite companion being Monty Woolley, who, apart from directing *The New Yorkers*, assisted Cole in procuring sexual partners. Cole's strong homosexual drive was becoming more obvious as he became more famous and his escapades more self-indulgent. It seems that he was attracted to strong burly men whom he and Monty would seek out in seedy areas, in marked contrast to the environments that fueled his creativity. (Schwartz, 1979: 114). Apart from casual pick-ups, Cole and Woolley had various procurers at their disposal to supply them with the types that appealed to them. It seems that Cole was titillated by the idea of paying for sex and knowing that the men he favoured would never be encountered in his personal circle.

The north-eastern colonies of America with their Puritan religion condemned all forms of sexual excess. Followers should be clean in mind and body. There was a relatively even ratio between men and woman which resulted in marriage, but as the population grew and small towns developed so the proportion of men to women changed. Women were a scarce commodity. The arrival of women of African descent and the practice of indentured servitude, which drew young women from Europe, brought about a dramatic change in the social lives of the early colonists. Expanding maritime trade and commerce at ports brought sailors seeking female company. The American War of Independence (1775-1783) provided a trade for prostitutes and as sexual commerce grew so did venereal disease.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Cult of Domesticity grew amongst American white women of the middle and upper class, who adopted the virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. But in brothels in New Orleans, New York, Chicago and San Francisco high class prostitutes entertained men of means in elegant surroundings. A class distinction among

sex workers evolved, with middle class prostitutes plying their trade from apartments or furnished flats, while the lower class worked from rooms or walked the streets. Reformers, from various backgrounds in the early twentieth century, teamed up in an attempt to eliminate vice. This had the effect of moving prostitution underground, while the advent of the automobile and the telephone provided sex workers with fresh opportunities.

Since the 1930s New York City had supported a vibrant gay community. Well-known gay people casually mixed with other patrons to enjoy Harlem's basement cabarets; lesbians owned speakeasies where Greenwich Village poets gathered to read their verse; gay writers, actors and musicians produced a distinctive literature and style which became so popular that many were the darlings of Broadway. Porter had surrounded himself with the international elite who welcomed his sophisticated lyrics with their sexual innuendoes and double entendres, but he believed that in order to be commercially successful he needed to write songs about romantic love from a heterosexual perspective. The demands of friends and the demands of the public were very different, but Porter was able to cope with this stylistic schizophrenia.

Everything stopped when Cole sat down at a piano to entertain at a party. When he took off on one of his merry, witty flights of fantasy, nothing was sacred. He would sing his numbers in their original version and would often parody them, using off-colour humorous lyrics. (Schwartz, 1979: 52).

Porter's talent was such that he could deliver just what the public wanted - unforgettable melodies with lyrics that matched them in simplicity and elegance. Perhaps it is the polarity between the witty suggestive lyrics and the throbbing minor chords that makes Porter's songs so memorable and elicits still today many contrasting interpretations by both male and female singers. His music rivalled that of George Gershwin, Jerome Kern and Richard Rodgers, but his power lies in his words. Who but Porter would rhyme 'lymphatics' with 'ecstatics', 'Padua' with 'cad-you-ah', 'heinous' with 'Coriolanus', with the double entendre on the last two syllables?

In the many examples of lyrics still to follow, I hope to support the statement that Porter's music was, and still is, unforgettable to the extent that along with Irving Berlin he achieved the enviable position of being the 'most performed member of ASCAP, which meant the most performed songwriter of his time.' (Shaw, 1987: 278).

As 1929 drew to a close, the prospects for the future were decidedly optimistic.

With three musicals running simultaneously at the end of 1929, Porter faced the thirties with renewed energy and optimism. While he was now in the prime of his life, physically and professionally, Linda could not match his stamina for the extensive travelling that Cole undertook between shows. With the exception of a six-month trip to the Far East and Europe in 1930, and two cruises to the South Seas in 1935 and 1940, Cole's pleasure trips were taken with one or more of his close male friends. His long-time colleague from college days, Monty Woolley, who produced *Fifty Million Frenchmen*, was a favourite companion. Openly gay, Woolley went to great lengths to procure male prostitutes for Cole, whose strong sexual drive seemed fuelled by success. Cole was known to boast of his glutinous sexual appetite and his preference for encounters with crude men of a different social class. Porter's love affair, in 1925, with Boris Kochno, regisseur for Diaghilev's Ballet Russes, has been well documented, as were his sexual relationships with architect Ed Tauch, dancer Nelson Barclift, and actor Robert Bray, all of whom inspired songs, but Porter's sexual appetite appears to have been insatiable, and, with the help of friends Howard Sturges and Monty Woolley, he sought emotionless encounters. Biographer Charles Schwartz speculates that Porter's desire for liaisons with men of a lower social class were 'external manifestations of some basic inner need, and that, when satisfied, these drives served as an important creative stimulant for him.' (Schwartz, 1979: 114).

Not only did Monty Woolley find lovers for Cole, their professional association brought them together for Cole's first musical of the thirties, *The New Yorkers*, directed by Woolley and produced by E. Ray Goetz, who re-created the lavish production and sparkle of his former show, *Fifty Million Frenchmen*. The big hit from the show was 'Love for Sale', which, aside from its earthy lyrics, had a plaintive melody. It was one of the songs that Porter described as 'Jewish', written in a minor key that sounded typically eastern Mediterranean. Many of Porter's songs were to follow this minor key formula: 'Begin the Beguine', 'My Heart Belongs to Daddy', 'I Love Paris', and 'Night and Day', which was to be Porter's next big hit from the 1932 musical, *Gay Divorce*. In the moral climate that existed in America in 1930, the theme and title of the show was considered racy. Although divorce was on the increase, grounds for divorce were rooted in adultery, drug or alcohol addiction, or acts of cruelty. The implication that divorce could be 'gay' might well have amused Porter, who had such an irreverent attitude to marriage. The plot was a light-hearted look at the difficulties of getting a divorce and, when RKO produced a film version, the title was changed to *The Gay Divorcee*,

suggesting that while divorce cannot be happy, divorcees might be merry. (Bergan, 1985: 61). The show was written specifically for Fred Astaire, who, with his sister, Adele, was at the height of his popularity. Until *Gay Divorce*, Adele had been considered a bigger star than her brother but, in 1932, she married an English lord and retired from the stage. For Fred Astaire this musical was to be the first professional collaboration with Porter, and the start of a friendship with both Cole and Linda. When the show opened on November 29, 1932, at New York's Ethel Barrymore Theatre, it had all the components for success - including Fred Astaire, who was a superb dancer with a great stage personality, but a singer with a limited range and vocal quality.

In writing for Astaire, Porter was adopting a tactic he had used in his early years at Yale in tailoring his songs to match the abilities of college students. Porter recognized Astaire's limitations. He used repeated notes in a limited range in 'Night and Day', now considered to be his most famous song. Stressing repeated sounds in the lyrics like the 'beat, beat, beat' of the tom-tom, the 'tick, tick, tock', of a clock, the 'drip, drip, drip' of raindrops, Porter arrives at a formula that blends the heavily chromatic music with corresponding images, moon and sun, near and far, night and day. To simulate the pulse of the opening verse, Porter uses only three notes in the middle register which suited Astaire's voice: B flat, B natural and C.

Like the beat, beat, beat of the tom-tom
 When the jungle shadows fall
 Like the tick tick tock of the stately clock
 As it stands against the wall
 Like the drip drip drip of the raindrops
 When the summer shower is through
 So a voice within me keeps repeating, you, you, you

Night and day, you are the one
 Only you beneath the moon or under the sun
 Whether near to me or far
 It's no matter darling where you are
 I think of you

Day and night, why is it so
 That this longing for you follows wherever I go
 In the roaring traffic's boom
 In the stillness of my lonely room
 I think of you

Night and day,
 Under the hide of me
 There's an oh such a hungry yearning burning inside of me
 And this torment won't be through
 Until you let me spend my life making love to you
 Day and night, night and day

Porter demonstrates his ability to imitate sounds through alliteration, consonances and internal rhymes. Lines such as 'tick, tick, tock of the stately clock' and 'when the summer shower is through' are indications of his sensitivity to the lyrics. His repetition of single syllable words creates an impression of obsession, highlighting the mental state of the protagonist. An air of expectancy develops as the word meanings strengthen from 'think' to 'longing', 'yearning' to 'torment'. The emotion builds steadily to the despairing cry of 'hungry yearning burning'. The listener is aware of a beating heart through the repetitive rhythmic writing. The juxtaposition of the ticking of the clock with the beating of the tom-tom reflects the oscillation between night and day, love and obsession. The lyrics become wordier possibly to convey increasing anxiety and passion, while the melodic repetition highlights the feeling of obsession and preoccupation. In his examination of 'Night and Day', Will Friedwald writes: 'I don't think it's indulging in psycho-babble or reading too much into something to describe the ending as a sexual, even orgasmic, release.' (Friedwald, 2002: 252).

The lyrics and melody fuse perfectly, becoming a perfect example of Porter's approach to his compositions: 'Words and music must be so inseparably wedded to each other that they are like one' (Schwartz 1979: pg 27). Porter was able to wed an idiosyncratic speech pattern to musical notes to highlight the words. His use of repetition of words was often accompanied by the repetition of musical notes. The music supports the thrust of the lyric, and changes of mood are reinforced by the score. Seemingly casual, every word has been chosen with care to blend with the musical expression that complemented the language. Although the emphasis of this dissertation falls on the lyrics, through careful analysis of Porter's style, a pattern emerges that substantiates the quotation regarding the 'wedding of words and music.'

Porter was known to offer conflicting stories about the origins of his songs. Inspiration often came from his travels to exotic places. David Ewen suggests in his book 'All the Years of American Popular Music' that the hypnotic opening of the song was inspired by Moroccan tom-toms which Porter had heard on a trip. Another explanation comes from a weekend spent

in Vincent Astor's 'cottage' in Newport, where Porter retreated to write songs for the show. 'A summer rainstorm was in progress and as we dined, Mrs Astor became unnerved by the noise caused by a broken drainpipe and said, "I must have that eave mended at once. That drip, drip, drip is driving me mad". Cole jumped up from the table, saying "I think that will work!' (Grafton, 1987: 76). Porter's puckish humour and love of practical jokes make claims as to inspiration questionable. Porter described the background to 'Night and Day' as follows:

I wrote the piece as a spot in *Gay Divorce*. I wasn't trying to plumb any depths or interpret mass psychology of the times...I was living down at the Ritz Carlton when the song was put together. I put the tune on paper, I remember, on a Saturday and wrote the lyrics the next day while lying on a beach in Newport. (Schwartz, 1979: 142).

Whatever the inconsistency of the stories, in 'Night and Day' Porter displays a total command of both musical and semantic material. For most composers of the time, songs were a collaboration; Porter was able to retain executive control of his songs. He was in the enviable position of being able to select his shows, suggest performers and direct his songs. He was personally involved in nearly all levels of his sheet music publication, including correcting proofs. He went to painstaking efforts to submit completed piano-vocal scores, checking the proofs before publication. When choosing performers Porter was careful to select those who would adhere to his musical direction. For this reason he especially enjoyed working with Astaire, who tended to stick to the printed score, while Porter was sympathetic to Astaire's dance routines and made appropriate allowances. Porter was able to put vocal idiosyncracies to use. Performer Bert Lahr had a mannerism of spitting out words, so Porter gave him sibilant-laden lyrics in the 1939 show, *DuBarry was a Lady*, while, from the same musical, Porter gave Ethel Merman sustained high notes that brought the audiences to their feet. Porter appreciated her powerful voice, writing melodies that gave her the opportunity to display her talents and selecting words that would allow her to roll out the r's with force. Porter often gave her the word 'terrific' to use with great effect.

The success of *Gay Divorce* on Broadway resulted in the show opening in London in 1933. That same year Porter agreed to write the score for a musical based on a controversial story about a young English lady intent on losing her virginity. Because the producer, Charles E. Cochran, wished to emphasise the 'Englishness' of *Nymph Errant*, this show was not seen by American audiences until 1982.

The various settings which detailed the amorous adventures of the young woman in places such as a Turkish harem, a sheik's desert tent and a nudist camp, allowed Porter to create a score that radiates suggestiveness and sexual sophistication. Porter had always endeavoured to match his songs with the storyline. In *Nymph Errant* he was able to work closely with the scriptwriter, Romney Brent. The result was that Porter considered the score the best he had ever written. It included 'The Physician', which allowed Cole to use his list formula in writing an anatomical inventory of the heroine's body, explored by an over-zealous doctor.

Once I loved such a shattering physician,
 Quite the best-looking doctor in the state.
 He looked after my physical condition,
 And his bedside manner was great.
 When I'd gaze up and see him there above me,
 Looking less like a doctor than a Turk,
 I was tempted to whisper, "Do you love me,
 Or do you merely love your work?"

He said my bronchial tubes were entrancing,
 My epiglottis filled him with glee,
 He simply loved my larynx,
 And went wild about my pharynx,
 But he never said he loved me.
 He said my epidermis was darling,
 And found my blood as blue as could be,
 He went through wild ecstasies,
 When I showed him my lymphatics,
 But he never said he loved me.
 And though, no doubt,
 It was not very smart of me,
 I kept on a-wracking my soul
 To figure out
 Why he loved ev'ry part of me,
 And yet not me as a whole.
 With my esophagus he was ravished,
 Enthusiastic to a degree,
 He said 'twas just enormous,
 My appendix vermiformis,
 But he never said he loved me.

He said my cerebellum was brilliant,
 And my cerebrum far from N.G.,

I know he thought a lotta
 My medulla oblongata,
 But he never said he loved me.
 He said my maxillaries were marvels,
 And found my sternum stunning to see,
 He did a double hurdle
 When I shook my pelvic girdle,
 But he never said he loved me.

He seemed amused
 When he first made a test of me
 To further his medical art,
 Yet he refused
 When he'd fixed up the rest of me,
 To cure that ache in my heart.
 I know he thought my pancreas perfect,
 And for my spleen was keen as could be,
 He said of all his sweeties,
 I'd the sweetest diabetes,
 But he never said he loved me.

He said my vertebrae were "sehr schone,"
 And called my coccyx "plus que gentil,"
 He murmured "molto bella,"
 When I sat on his patella,
 But he never said he loved me.
 He took a fleeting look at my thorax,
 And started singing slightly off-key,
 He cried, "May heaven strike us,"
 When I played my umbilicus,
 But he never said he loved me.

As it was dark
 I suggested we walk about
 Before he returned to his post.
 Once in the park,
 I induced him to talk about
 The thing I wanted the most.
 He lingered on with me until morning,
 Yet when I tried to pay him his fee,
 He said, "Why, don't be funny,
 It is I who owe you money,"
 But he never said he loved me.

The opening verse offers little hint of the clever list of anatomical features, which displays an originality of imagery and understanding of medical terms. The refrains move through a torrent of emotions, using words such as ‘entrancing’, ‘glee’, ‘ravished’, ‘brilliant’, ‘stunning’, which then drop to the wistful observation ‘But he never said he loved me.’ As expected in a Porter catalogue song, the images change rapidly with clever alliteration: ‘my maxillaries were marvels’, ‘my sternum stunning to see’, ‘my blood as blue as could be’, and assonance: ‘spleen was as keen as could be’, ‘of all the sweeties/ I’d the sweetest diabetes’. Porter is completely at ease with his choice of German, French and Italian phrases, “sehr schone”, “plus que gentil”, “molto bella”, while his rhyming scheme is Porter at his best with hurdle/girdle, strike us/umbilicus, a lotta/oblongata.

Porter displays a remarkable knowledge of human anatomy, perhaps the result of his absorption with his own physical well-being. Friends were conscious of his daily rituals of ministering to his health with lotions and potions, all deemed necessary to maintain the suave, public image of a successful composer. Helped by the media, Porter offered the world a portrait of elegance, wit and glamour that matched his songs.

Despite the gifted cast, which included Gertrude Lawrence, the brilliant score and polished production, *Nymph Errant* closed after only 154 performances. It seemed that English audiences were not yet prepared to accept Porter’s free-wheeling approach to the sexual adventures of a schoolgirl. Nevertheless with both *Nymph Errant* and *Gay Divorce* running simultaneously in London, Porter’s name was constantly in the news.

The stock market crash of October, 1929, had plunged America into an economic depression that would last for nearly a decade. For the average American, a drop in income and an increase in unemployment meant 1934 was to be another grim year. But, for Cole Porter, November, 21, 1934 was to be an auspicious day. It marked the start of *Anything Goes*, which was to be Porter’s longest-running show up to that time, with four major hit songs: ‘You’re the Top’, ‘Blow, Gabriel, Blow’, ‘I get a Kick out of You’ and the title tune, ‘Anything Goes’, which sums up Porter’s attitude:

In olden days, a glimpse of stocking
Was looked on as something shocking,

But now, God knows,
 Anything goes.
 Good authors too who once knew better words
 Now only use four-letter words
 Writing prose,
 Anything goes.
 If driving fast cars you like,
 If low bars you like,
 If old hymns you like,
 If bare limbs you like,
 If Mae West you like,
 Or me undressed you like,
 Why, nobody will oppose.
 When ev'ry night, the set that's smart is in-
 Truding in nudist parties in
 Studios,
 Anything goes.

Porter's lyrics reflected the free-wheeling spirit of the show and its impudent and racy script. With Ethel Merman joining the popular team of William Gaxton and Victor Moore, Porter could compose music for three great performers. From the age of ten, Porter had been composing songs for himself, highlighting his crisp diction and playing down his rather high-pitched voice; now he could write for virtuoso entertainers. Knowing that Ethel Merman could project the notes A, B-flat and C, Porter concentrated on these notes, ensuring that her songs reflected her dual stage personalities of classy and brassy. He had the ability of creating an expectancy in his lyrics; audiences enjoyed a sense of anticipation when hearing his songs with their clever and unusual images, coupled with tidbits of gossip. Porter's reference to Mae West was an acknowledgement to a fellow exponent of double entendres and sexual innuendos. At that time Mae West was a box office success; her mere silhouette provoked outrage. The films she appeared in were controversial and resulted in the studios enforcing a production code to regulate words and content of new movies. The principles of this code stemmed from an organization known as the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association which was formed in 1922, headed by Republican lawyer, William H. Hays, who had experience with various United States censorship bodies. Hollywood was facing a public outcry after a series of scandals had rocked the film industry: the manslaughter trial of a comedy star charged with the death of an actress; the murder of a director; and the drug-related death of a popular actor. These, and other incidents, made headline news, confirming

a widespread view that Hollywood was immoral, and that that immorality was spilling over into the movies of the 1920s.

With the advent of talking movies, there was renewed pressure for stricter controls. As the movie picture industry entered the 1930s, so the studios brought racier films to the screen. The list, compiled by Hays in an effort to encourage the studios to adopt a form of self-censorship, was not having its desired effect. There was a need to compile and enforce a code which offered the studios guidelines. The code was adopted on March 31, 1930, but the strict enforcement of its principles only came into effect from July 1, 1934. The 1933 Paramount film, *I'm no Angel*, written by and starring Mae West, spearheaded the formation of the Catholic League of Decency, which encouraged the boycotting of the film, and all films that did not conform to the code.

The 'Hays' Code stipulated morally acceptable and unacceptable content for films to be viewed by American audiences. Amongst the principles listed in the Production Code were certain specific restrictions:

The depiction of illegal drug use was forbidden, as well as the use of liquor, "when not required by the plot or for proper characterization"

References to alleged "sex perversion" (such as homosexuality) were forbidden

The language section banned various words and phrases that were considered to be offensive

The sanctity of marriage and the home had to be upheld. "Pictures shall not imply that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing." Adultery and illicit sex, although recognized as sometimes necessary to the plot, could not be explicit or justified and were not supposed to be presented as an attractive option

Portrayals of miscegenation were forbidden

(David Hayes: The Production Code of the Motion Picture Industry, 1930-1967.)

For the average American 1934 was another grim year, but glamorous musicals provided an immediate and accessible escape route that took people away from dole queues and bread-lines. They could also circumvent the Hays Code. Along with scantily dressed women, and provocative dances, sexual innuendos went unnoticed within the confines of the genre.

Because of an on-going battle with the censors, Porter was obliged to be more subtle than he might have wished. He pursued the double entendre in the song ‘I get a kick out of you’, also from the show *Anything Goes*:

I get no kick from champagne
 Mere alcohol doesn't thrill me at all,
 So tell me why should it be true
 That I get a kick out of you?
 Some get a kick from cocaine
 I'm sure that if I took even one sniff
 That would bore me terrific'ly too,
 Yet I get a kick out of you.
 I get a kick ev'ry time I see
 You standing there before me.
 I get a kick though it's clear to me
 You obviously don't adore me.
 I get no kick in a plane.
 Flying too high with some guy in the sky
 Is my idea of nothing to do,
 Yet I get a kick out of you.

Porter's songs were written with an intellectual structure, starting with an idea and then organizing its development. Everything in the lyric has a bearing on the central theme. Porter writes about “getting a kick”, better known as “getting high.” The first eight bars are devoted to sipping champagne and the second eight bars to sniffing cocaine, which rhymes with champagne. The pattern alters by “getting high” merely seeing the beloved, while in the final eight bars the refrain returns to “getting high” with a literal pun – flying in a plane. The structure demonstrates his skill with internal rhyming: ‘Flying on *high* with some *guy* in the *sky* is my *i*-dea of nothing to do.’ In the lyrics and the titles of the songs, there was a predominance of the personal pronouns ‘I’ and ‘me’, but, while he seemed to be pre-occupied with personal expression, those songs could be sung by performers of either sex, making his choice financially appropriate.

Porter enjoyed displaying originality in his lyrics, using words in an off-beat way.

Brush up your Shakespeare
 Start quoting him now,
 Brush up your Shakespeare

And the women you will wow.
 If your girl is a Washington Heights dream,
 Treat the kid to 'A Midsummer's Night's Dream,'
 If she then wants an all-by-herself night,
 Let her rest ev'ry 'leventh or 'Twelfth Night,'
 If because of your heat she gets huffy
 Simply play on and "Lay on, Macduffy.'
 Brush up your Shakespeare
 And they'll all kow-tow.

'Brush up your Shakespeare', from the show *Kiss Me Kate*.

The song 'Can-Can' from the show *Can-Can* is a Porter list with a geographical slant:

There is no trick to a can-can,
 It is so simple to do,
 When you once kick to a can-can.
 'Twill be so easy for you.
 If a lady in Iran can,
 If a shady African can,
 If a Jap with the slap of her fan can,
 Baby, you can can-can too.
 If an English Dapper Dan can,
 If an Irish Callahan can,
 If an Afghan in Afghanistan can,
 Baby, you can can-can too.

The show *Anything Goes* offered Americans a musical with clever jokes, speciality acts and terrific songs, and the chance to forget social concerns for a brief few hours.

CHAPTER 4

You're the top! Puns and Parodies

The Broadway success *Anything Goes* was typical of Porter's world where everything was acceptable. It was a fast-paced production for which Cole wrote the complete score and remained on Broadway for 420 performances. A London production was equally successful.

By now audiences expected a list song. In 'You're the Top' they not only got a rapid-fire list of images, but a relentless energy that builds a torrent of rhymed images.

You're the top!
 You're the Colosseum.
 You're the top!
 You're the Louvre Museum.
 You're a melody from a symphony by Strauss,
 You're a Bendel bonnet,
 A Shakespeare sonnet,
 You're Mickey Mouse.
 You're the Nile,
 You're the Tow'r of Pisa,
 You're the smile
 On the Mona Lisa.
 I'm a worthless check, a total wreck, a flop,
 But if, baby, I'm the bottom
 You're the top!

You're the top!
 You're Mahatma Gandhi.
 You're the top!
 You're Napoleon Brandy.
 You're the purple light of a summer night in Spain,
 You're the National Gall'ry,
 You're Garbo's salary,
 You're cellophane.
 You're sublime,
 You're a turkey dinner,
 You're the time
 Of the Derby winner.

I'm a toy balloon that is fated soon to pop,
 But if, baby, I'm the bottom
 You're the top!

You're the top!
 You're a Ritz hot toddy!
 You're the top!
 You're a Brewster body.
 You're the boats that glide on the sleepy Zuider Zee,
 You're a Nathan panning,
 You're Bishop Manning,
 You're broccoli.
 You're a prize,
 You're a night at Coney,
 You're the eyes
 Of Irene Bordoni.
 I'm a broken doll, a fol-de-rol, a blop,
 But if, baby, I'm the bottom
 You're the top!

You're the top!
 You're a Waldorf salad.
 You're the top!
 You're a Berlin ballad.
 You're a baby grand of a lady and a gent,

You're an old Dutch master,
 You're Mrs Astor,
 You're Pepsodent.
 You're romance,
 You're the steppes of Russia,
 You're the pants on a Roxy usher.
 I'm a lazy lout that's just about to stop,
 But if, baby, I'm the bottom
 You're the top!

I have not included refrains 6 and 7 as it is questionable, according to Robert Kimball, editor of 'The Complete Lyrics of Cole Porter', as to whether they were included in the 1934 production. (Kimball, 1992: 169). The song has been re-written many times (Porter kept adding refrains to keep the song fresh) and there have been numerous imitations and parodies. Even Porter offered a parody:

You're the Top!
 You're Miss Pinkham's tonic.
 You're the top!
 You're a high colonic.
 You're the burning heat of a bridal suite in use,
 You're the breasts of Venus,
 You're King Kong's penis,
 You're self-abuse.
 You're an arch
 In the Rome collection.
 You're the starch
 In a groom's erection.
 I'm a eunuch who
 Has just been through an op,
 But if Baby, I'm the bottom
 You're the top!

Despite the fact that we cannot prove that Porter wrote that parody, certain telling phrases suggest that he was the author. Porter was obsessed with bodily functions and regularly visited the spa at Carlsbad where he retreated, usually with Linda, to 'take the waters' and recover from the excesses of too much partying. The mocking, sardonic note in the words of the parody seem distinctly Porter. He offers a list of sexually charged images that he expects his sophisticated audience to appreciate. Miss Pinkham's tonic was a vegetable compound that claimed to cure female complaints. It is ironic that at the time women were campaigning against alcohol and drug abuse, 'patent' medicines such as Mrs Pinkham's tonic (she was Mrs) often contained narcotics, such as morphine, laudanum, alcohol, all of which Porter was known to use. Porter stays with the medical images in his reference to 'high colonic.' He was known to self-administer a suppository every day, not only to cleanse the colon, but prepare for anal sex, which he refers to in his positioning of himself in a homosexual relationship: 'I'm the bottom', 'You're the top.' Porter uses the superlatives of the breasts of the Roman goddess of love, Venus, the penis of King Kong, the gigantic prehistoric ape that featured in the 1933 film, the burning heat of the bridal suite, and contrasts these with 'self-abuse', 'eunuch'. He displays an ambivalent attitude to love, ranging from masochism and the tendency to find pleasure in self-abuse to the frustration of castration.

'You're the Top' epitomizes an era when song lyrics sprang from the verve of society verse. Carolyn Wells in her *Vers de Societ  Anthology* writes of the ease and spontaneity of the

language which should not be ponderous or sentimental. Anthony Burgess offers the following distinction between poetry and song lyrics: 'Poetry demands the concentration of the reader on content, on originality of imagery or verbal trope; the true lyric deliberately damps the striking image.' Instead of providing the 'verbal shocks' of poetry, the lyricist's art consists of 'matching long vowels or diphthongs to long notes, the disposition of primary and secondary syllabic stress, and the management of climax.' (Burgess, 1982, 105-6). But Porter's lyrics are full of verbal shocks; just as Gerard Manley Hopkins believed that sounds could drive poetry, so Porter uses alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeia with technical competence. He often shortened a word by omission of a sound, letter or syllable, imitating the rhythm of speech. Ezra Pound wrote in 1912 that for poetry to be considered modern it should follow certain principles including:

- direct treatment of the 'thing' (objectively or subjectively)
- use no word that does not contribute
- compose in sequences of musical phrases (O'Connor, 1963: 20-22).

There is no record that Porter studied the techniques of modern poetry, but those principles are apparent in his lyrics that were focused and carefully crafted verses with words selected for their aural effect. Because Porter's lyrics had to be set to music, he provided the singer with words that were easy to enunciate (unless specifically writing for singers known for their vocal dexterity.) Just as lyric poetry tends to convey feelings and emotions, so the lyricist in Porter addressed the subject of love in various ways, with nonchalance, cynicism, wry humour – he seldom drops the mask of composure and, when he does, there is a despair that often suggests bewilderment at the 'thing' called love. Music then had to be used as a grid against which he must fit words, ever mindful of the Tin Pan Alley formula of a 32 bar chorus, structured in four eight bar units, normally in an AABA rhyming sequence. This rigidity allowed little freedom for a storyline; a description of love became the accepted theme. It forced lyricists to be clever and inventive. (Furia, 1990: 14). Porter could end a romance with a shrug 'It was just one of those things', and then add a metaphor that would contradict the emotion: 'a trip to the moon on gossamer wings.' Implying 'I love you' in different ways was a challenge that Porter could not resist.

In his song 'You're the Top', Porter's wit and apparent effortless polish is intended for a sophisticated audience who could appreciate his topical references among the list of

superlatives. The enthusiastic praise moves from the banal to the splendid, offering snippets of cultural history in a catalogue full of imaginative surprises. He juxtaposes images of European art, ‘the Louvre Museum’, ‘the Mona Lisa’, ‘the Tow’r of Pisa’, with some unashamedly American creations such as ‘a Bendel bonnet’ and ‘Mickey Mouse’. Mickey Mouse was an icon for the Walt Disney Company, while Henri Bendel had established an upmarket women’s fashion shop in New York. Porter’s visual imagery ranges from spectacular architectural and natural triumphs such as the Colosseum, the Nile, the steppes of Russia, to modern inventions such as Pepsodent toothpaste and cellophane, and he chooses to list personalities for different reasons: Greta Garbo’s headline making salaries; the severe reviews from theatre critic, George Jean Nathan; the ire of Episcopalian Bishop Manning; the politics of Viscountess, Nancy Astor, the first American woman parliamentarian (and a great friend of Linda and Cole Porter).

Porter’s reference to a ‘Waldorf salad’ and ‘a baby grand’ offers a glimpse into the private life of the composer. Another great friend, Elsa Maxwell, had by 1931 moved to New York, where she lived rent-free at the Waldorf Astoria, the world’s largest luxury hotel, owned by the Astor family. Elsa’s success at masterminding huge social events around the world was so impressive that the Waldorf hoped she would encourage friends to make use of the residential suites in the hotel. Linda and Cole Porter had been regular guests, and, in 1935, Cole took up residence in the Waldorf Towers, the top twelve floors devoted entirely to permanent guests, where he was given a large apartment on the 41st floor for a nominal rental, and where he and Linda, a dachshund, cat and two grand pianos would reside for many years. (When the cat and dog died, they were replaced by two felines called ‘Anything’ and ‘Goes’) Acoustical ‘mud’ was installed to deaden the sounds made by Porter’s piano which he would play at all hours, especially when working on a score. (Schwartz, 1979: 170).

Porter’s only two musical references in the lyrics of ‘You’re the Top’ are interesting: there was mutual respect between Irving Berlin and Porter, both of whom wrote words and music. ‘You’re a Berlin ballad’ was praise indeed from Porter, reflecting the good relationship that existed between the two composers, recognized as America’s leading composer-lyricists. But whereas Berlin would write ‘I’ll be loving you always’, Porter would offer ‘It was just one of those things’. Porter’s inclusion of ‘You’re a melody from a symphony by Strauss’ is a charming hyperbole, as Strauss never wrote a symphony, a fact that the trained musician, Porter, would have known. The closing words of each refrain grow in intensity from ‘I’m a

worthless check', to 'I'm a toy balloon that is fated soon to pop' to 'I'm a broken doll', and, finally, 'I'm a lazy lout'.

Perhaps the most revealing and audacious phrase is the repetition of the words 'But if, baby, I'm the bottom, You're the top!', a pun on the gay code for sexual positions. As master of the seemingly innocent double entendre, Porter was conscious of current laws of censorship. He enjoyed the challenge of writing on two different levels, to be appreciated by two different groups; his adoring public and his 'in' circle, comprising intimate friends, many of whom were homosexuals. His 1955 song, 'All of You', from the show *Silk Stockings*, contained the words: 'I like the looks of you, The lure of you/ I'd like to make a tour of you/ The eyes, the ears, the mouth of you/ The east, west, north and the south of you'. Censors felt certain that 'south' was a reference to genitalia, but performers and listeners alike were unaware of any sexual word-play, and Porter continued to write about love, in all its different ways. He appeared to take a wicked delight in challenging accepted social values. His ballad 'Love for Sale', banned from radio, proffered a sympathetic glimpse at a prostitute's life, while his narrative song 'Miss Otis Regrets' traces the downfall of a southern belle, a paragon of good manners and about to be hanged for killing her faithless lover. The song became such a fixture at Elsa Maxwell's parties at the Waldorf Astoria that Porter dedicated it to her.

Miss Otis regrets she is unable to lunch today,
 Madam,
 Miss Otis regrets she is unable to lunch today.
 She is sorry to be delayed,
 But last Sunday down in Lover's lane she strayed,
 Madam,
 Miss Otis regrets she's unable to lunch today.

When she woke up and found that her dream of love was gone,
 Madam,
 She ran to the man who had led her so far astray,
 And from under her velvet gown
 She drew a gun and shot her love down,
 Madam,
 Miss Otis regrets she's unable to lunch today.

When the mob came and got her and dragged her from the jail,
 Madam,
 They strung her from the old willow across the bay,

And the moment before she died,
 She lifted up her lovely head and cried,
 Madam,
 Miss Otis regrets... she's unable to lunch today.

Porter's song is rather like a dramatic monologue, not written for a musical but the result of a bet made by his friend, Monty Woolley, that Porter could not compose a song with such a title. Porter won the bet by composing an apology delivered by a dignified butler, explaining the predicament to someone who has arrived at the Otis home for lunch. The dry description of the dramatic event, delivered with such detachment, simulates the irony of the Browning poem, 'My Last Duchess'. Despite the juxtaposition of indiscretion and propriety, the censors could not fault 'Miss Otis Regrets', which, although it falls beyond the parameters of this dissertation (being a song of the 1950s), helps illustrate that Porter was as familiar with the life of a street walker, as he was comfortable in the drawing rooms of the wealthy. Porter was able to share personal experiences and observations without revealing ownership.

Although Porter displayed little regard for serious social concerns of the time, he went to creative lengths to avoid his work being banned. His lyrics were androgynous and, while Porter worked gay references into his songs, which would only be understood by the cognoscenti, he did not destroy them for his audiences, who expected a heterosexual approach to love. His songs offered a promise, which he sustained through building a beat and writing more stanzas based on the refrain. He hinted at pleasures; nothing is stated or explained. He often uses the sentence construction: simple noun, verb, direct object. He limits his use of adjectives; he assumes the listeners will appreciate what love means.

Now at the height of his fame, he needed to conceal his true sexuality. After the grim years of the Depression, American audiences were avid for sophistication and glamour, but Porter believed they would not accept his songs if they knew about his homosexuality. He was now sharing the musical limelight with Irving Berlin, who, like Porter, also wrote words and music, composers Jerome Kern, George Gershwin and Richard Rodgers; also lyricists Oscar Hammerstein II, Ira Gershwin and Lorenz Hart. All these musicians were instrumental in shaping the twentieth century musical; they were Jewish or gay, or both. It is not within the scope of this dissertation to explore the reasons, but, in the early days on Tin Pan Alley, talented Jewish immigrants were writing songs for sheet music for music publishing houses,

owned by Jews. Many of these musicians came from Eastern Europe, where klezmer music would be played at special events. The evocative and haunting sound, meant to simulate the sound of the cantor in synagogue, once integrated with European and American influences, produced melodies that were very specific to American popular music of that time. The constant need for fresh talent allowed little time for social discrimination. Musicals offered gay people a chance to use their creative talents and turn their alternative vision of social relationships into dazzling conceits. (Furia, 1990: 72).

Porter had often commented that the secret of composing successful songs lay in writing 'Jewish music'. He had perfected his musical formula of sliding between major and minor scales, often replicating the sounds of cantorial prayer. He was, however, not prepared to risk being ostracized by a public with a particular view of sexual behavior. His wife, Linda, helped make his social life witty, extravagant and fashionable. In his songs he offers no glimpse at the real Porter. He keeps a distance from true sentiment; for Porter, love is a mere idea, a 'thing': 'What is this Thing called love?', 'Just one of those things', 'You do something to me', or love was an 'it': 'Let's do it', 'It's de-lovely'.

With a string of successes on Broadway and four films to his credit, Porter was in demand by producers of film and stage musicals. His presence at every opening night, flanked by a large party of friends, was noted by critics and columnists who described in print his obvious enjoyment. The after-show parties made front-page reading, attended as they were by well-known socialites and public figures. Porter's close friendship with society hostess turned gossip columnist, Elsa Maxwell, whose name often appeared in his songs, ensured that her columns covered his private and professional life. Porter was known to seek publicity and leak information to columnists Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons, as well as Elsa Maxwell. But such was his charm that reports remained flattering, if not entirely accurate.

The success of the show *Anything Goes* earned Porter the title of Broadway's 'King Cole' (Lubbock, 1962: 854). It seems likely that this achievement led to an even greater self-awareness. In his lyrics there is an increasing use of the first person singular pronouns, far higher than prior to 1930; in his personal life there was a greater need to retreat, to surround himself with intimate friends who kept boredom at bay. Author of *The Psychological Consequences of Fame*, Mark Schaller, writes that scientific research advances the hypothesis that fame heightens the level of self-consciousness and makes certain people more vulnerable

to certain forms of self abuse. Porter's boredom seemed to increase with fame. The lyrics of a number of his songs include the words 'tired' and 'bored'. He arranged his day so that he was kept busy, both at work and play. Hard drinking and drugs were part of the social behavior of his circle of friends. A great sensualist, Porter would try anything for a 'kick'.

The combined effects of smoking and drinking would eventually have a deleterious effect on his health. In 1952, he underwent a series of electric-shock treatments to alleviate depression. Part of the lyrics of his 1936 song 'Down in the Depths', from the show *Red, Hot and Blue*, were:

I'm deserted and depressed
In my regal eagle nest
Down in the depths on the nineteenth floor.

In 1935, Porter collaborated with the young playwright, Moss Hart, on a new show, *Jubilee*, which opened on Broadway, at the Imperial Theatre, on October 15, 1935. That same year, England was celebrating the silver anniversary of the reign of George V. The British Foreign Office was concerned that the show might be in poor taste, but the comic extravaganza, with its story of a king and queen who, tired of the formalities of royal life, leave their castle and venture into the world as 'Mr and Mrs Smith', was a romp, not to be taken seriously. Most of the songs for the show were written aboard the Cunard liner, *Franconia*. Moss Hart had joined Linda and Cole Porter and their friends, Monty Woolley and Howard Sturgess, on a five month cruise which allowed Hart to write a new play, with a new score by Cole Porter. The musical received rave reviews, but the show had a relatively short run. The depressed economy of the 1930s was having an impact on theatre productions, and musicals in particular, which were expensive to stage, but two songs remain from that original score: 'Begin the Beguine' and 'Just one of those things'.

Porter was seldom consistent when it came to creative stimulus; he delighted in providing different stories regarding the inspiration for his songs. But it would seem that he first heard the sound of a dance, called the Beguine, performed by Black Martiniquois in Paris. (Schwartz, 1979: 143). Years later, on a visit to the islands of the Dutch East Indies, Porter watched the locals perform a type of rumba which was re-created in the music and lyrics of 'Begin the Beguine'.

When they begin the beguine
 It brings back the sound of music so tender
 It brings back a night of tropical splendour
 It brings back a memory evergreen

I'm with you once more under the stars
 And down by the shore an orchestra's playing
 And even the palms seem to be swaying
 When they begin the beguine

To live it again is past all endeavour
 Except when that tune clutches my heart
 And there we are, swearing to love forever
 And promising never, never to part

What moments divine, what rapture serene
 Till clouds came along to disperse the joys we had tasted
 And now when I hear people curse the chance that was wasted
 I know but too well what they mean

So don't let them begin the beguine
 Let the love that was once a fire remain an ember
 Let it sleep like the dead desire I only remember
 When they begin the beguine

Oh yes, let them begin the beguine, make them play
 Till the stars that were there before return above you
 Till you whisper to me once more: "Darling I love you!"
 And we suddenly know what heaven we're in
 When they begin the beguine
 When they begin the beguine

Cole Porter considered himself as a 'self-adopted Latin' (Hubler, 1965: 52). He enjoyed the rhythm of the rhumba, and often his musicals included a Latin number. 'Begin the Beguine' was not an immediate hit. It was only when clarinetist Artie Shaw recorded an instrumental version in 1938 that both Shaw and the music became famous. Despite the huge success of the recording, few performers wanted to tackle the 108 bar lyrics, yet the beguiling rhythm continues to be reproduced by countless instrumental soloists. Porter's song 'Just one of those things' was also not an overnight success. Perhaps the idea of a one-night stand was a little too avant-garde for a middle-class American public.

It was just one of those things,
 Just one of those crazy flings.
 One of those bells that now and then rings,
 Just one of those things.
 It was just one of those nights,
 Just one of those fabulous flights,
 A trip to the moon on gossamer wings,
 It was just one of those things.
 If we'd thought a bit
 Of the end of it,
 When we started painting the town,
 We'd have been aware
 That our love affair
 Was too hot not to cool down.
 So goodbye, dear, and amen.
 Here's hoping we meet now and then,
 It was great fun,
 But it was just one of those things.

Porter dismisses love as 'just one of those things'. The slang phrase contrasts strongly with the image: 'a trip to the moon on gossamer wings'. His repetition of the phrase 'now and then', in 'one of those bells that now and then rings' and 'here's hoping we meet now and then' suggests a more genuine feeling of regret.

Despite the fact that the musical *Jubilee* was not a financial success, Porter had the satisfaction of having a production of his previous show, *Anything Goes*, opening in London, while the American version was still running on Broadway. Porter's reign as a leading composer-lyricist was so strong by 1935 that Hollywood could no longer afford to ignore him, and MGM invited him to write a film score. A film version of the 1932 musical *Gay Divorce*, renamed *The Gay Divorcee*, had been released by RKO in 1934, giving huge publicity to both Fred Astaire and Porter's song 'Night and Day'. As theatre audiences dwindled, so the film industry increased its lead in the entertainment industry, offering Americans escape from economic woes for a modest price of a ticket to a cinema. The emergence of the movie musical coincided with talking films. Prior to 1926, motion pictures were silent; theatre orchestras would provide appropriate musical accompaniment. In 1926, Warner Bros. released *Don Juan* with pre-recorded speech and sound effects. A year later, in October 1927, Warner Bros presented *The Jazz Singer*, featuring the popular singer, Al

Jolson. For the first time dialogue was linked to action. The success of the film forced the other studios to adapt to new technology. (Shipman, 1982: 390).

With the arrival of sound came the need for new productions, and many previous Broadway stage shows were re-written to suit the new medium. Fred Astaire was one of the early stars who was able to combine dancing with the demands of singing, and quickly became a firm favourite of the composers. But as stage originals were adapted to film, so songs were dropped to accommodate new material. Porter's only song to survive from *The Gay Divorcee* was the classic 'Night and Day'. (Hemming, 1986:156). Financial reasons dictated the musical content of films. Studios owned no interest in original scores, but new songs, written specifically for films, gave the studios the rights to license these songs. As composers were offered huge fees for their material, this practice was accepted with few objections. Songs that were not already popular with the public would be dropped in favour of new tunes and to shorten the running time of films.

The now famous landmark of the Hollywood sign originally read *Hollywoodland*, and was erected in 1923 to advertise a housing development. The *land* was dropped from the name in 1949 and, while Hollywood remains the historical site of movie studios, many have moved to surrounding areas. But in the 1920s it was the centre of the film industry, and was to become the new home of Cole and Linda Porter. They rented a luxurious home, complete with tennis court and swimming pool, which was to be the setting for both business and pleasure. The wonderful climate suited Cole, who would spend hours each day swimming, tanning and bantering with friends, and making business calls from his poolside telephone. Cole's reputation as a world traveller and bon vivant had preceded him to Hollywood and made a huge impression on the studio chieftains, many of whom came from humble backgrounds and had limited education. They controlled their empires with confidence and aggression and, as movies continued to captivate American audiences across the continent, so profits grew and stoked already overblown egos. But Porter was able to distance himself by virtue of his independent wealth and personality. He was adroit in his dealings with MGM personnel, including studio head, Louis B. Mayer, who was so impressed with Porter's score for *Born to Dance* that he immediately offered Porter another film contract, at double the fee. (Hemming, 1986: 158). Porter thrived in the heady atmosphere of Hollywood. The challenges of writing for a relatively new medium were refreshing and guaranteed him huge exposure to millions of viewers. *Born to Dance*, released in November 1936, with its budget of a million dollars,

made allowances for lavish production numbers. Two songs from Porter's musical score for the film were to become great hits: 'Easy to Love' and 'I've got you under my skin'. Despite the fact that the voice of the leading man, James Stewart, did little justice to the song 'Easy to Love', the fluid melody with its simple lyrics became an instant hit.

You'd be so easy to love,
 So easy to idolize, all others above,
 So sweet to waken with,
 So nice to sit down to eggs and bacon with.
 We'd be so grand at the game,
 So carefree together that it does seem a shame
 That you can't see
 Your future with me,
 'Cause you'd be, oh, so easy to love.

You'd be so easy to love,
 So easy to idolize, all others above,
 So worth the yearning for,
 So swell to keep ev'ry home fire burning for.
 Oh, how we'd bloom, how we'd thrive
 In a cottage for two, or even three, four, or five,
 So try and see
 Your future with me,
 'Cause they'd be, oh, so easy to love.

You'd be so easy to love,
 So easy to worship as an angel above,
 Just made to pray before,
 Just right to stay home and walk the baby for.
 I know I once left you cold,
 But call me your 'lamb' and take me back to the fold.
 If you'll agree,
 Why, I guarantee,
 That I'll be, oh, so easy to love.

The more familiar version of the song, as performed by countless singers, is a shortened form of the original lyric presented here.

Porter understood the importance of a song title. According to various sources, he claimed that it was the title that dictated the lyrics, and he would ensure that the title was repeated throughout the song. In 'Easy to Love', each refrain starts and ends with the words of the

title. A measure of the effectiveness of a song is its success in staying in the listener's memory, and Porter would use a strong 'hook' and build a word story around it. The words 'easy to love' are not only in the title, but also in the text, and the phrase constitutes a gesture of resolution at the end of each verse.

The other hit song from *Born to Dance*, 'I've got you under my skin', also follows the formula of repeating the title:

I've got you under my skin,
 I've got you deep in the heart of me.
 So deep in my heart, you're really a part of me,
 I've got you under my skin.

I tried so not to give in,
 I said to myself, "This affair never will go so well."
 But why should I try to resist when, darling, I know so well
 I've got you under my skin.

I'd sacrifice anything, come what might,
 For the sake of having you near,
 In spite of a warning voice that comes in the night,
 And repeats and repeats in my ear,
 "Don't you know, little fool, you never can win,
 Use your mentality,
 Wake up to reality."
 But each time I do, just the thought of you
 Makes me stop, before I begin,
 'Cause I've got you under my skin.

This carefully crafted, yet simple, song took the catch phrase 'you're starting to get under my skin' and lifted it from its general context of exasperation to a sensuous nonchalance, so typically Porter. There is a sense of addiction to a lover who is unattainable. The poignancy of this awareness is strengthened by another catch phrase, warning 'stop before you begin', which Porter reverses to 'stop, before I begin.' This deceptively simple song is matched perfectly to the melody, which supports and strengthens the meaning. Like all composers of the time, Porter was aware of the censorship laws that governed the film industry and adopted by all the studios after 1934. Porter had come to MGM with the reputation for risqué, daring songs; now he was writing melodically appealing scores with fairly tame lyrics. Any double

entendres in ‘I’ve got you under my skin’ passed as a mere expression of a singer’s infatuation.

1936 was to prove a stimulating and busy year for Cole Porter. The MGM film, *Born to Dance*, was released, and Paramount produced a new version of the Broadway show, *Anything Goes*, with leading lady Ethel Merman and Bing Crosby singing many of the original Porter numbers. MGM had selected another stage show, *Rosalie*, with the musical score by Sigmund Romberg and George Gershwin, and Porter was engaged to produce new songs for a talented cast, including Nelson Eddy, a classically trained baritone and one of Hollywood’s favourite stars. (Hemming, 1986: 160). By now Porter was known for his willingness to write or adapt material to suit performers, but he objected to changing his song ‘In the Still of the Night’ which Eddy complained was too long and difficult to sing. It was left to Louis B. Mayer to make the decision. Porter had sufficient faith in the tune to perform it in front of the studio head, who, reduced to tears over the song’s sentiments, agreed to retain it in the film. Nelson Eddy was obliged to perform the song that was destined to be another great hit.

In the still of the night,
 As I gaze from my window
 At the moon in its flight,
 My thoughts all stray to you.
 In the still of the night,
 While the world is in slumber,
 Oh, the times without number,
 Darling, when I say to you,
 “Do you love me as I love you?
 Are you my life-to-be, my dream come true?”
 Or will this dream of mine
 Fade out of sight
 Like the moon
 Growing dim
 On the rim
 Of the hill
 In the chill,
 Still
 Of the night?

Porter did not fare as well with another song from the film. In a letter written on May 9, 1946, to orchestra leader, Paul Whiteman, Cole described the background to the title song, 'Rosalie':

I was writing a picture for MGM called *Rosalie* and it was very important that the title song be good. I wrote six before I handed one in, but I was very proud of No. 6. Louis B. Mayer asked me to play the score for him and when I finished he said to me, "I like everything in the score except that song 'Rosalie'. It's too high-brow. Forget you are writing for Nelson Eddy and simply give us a good popular song." So I took 'Rosalie' No. 6. home and, in hate, wrote 'Rosalie' No. 7. Louis B. Mayer was delighted with it, but I still resented my No. 6. having been thrown out, which to me seemed so much better. Six months later when the song became a hit, I saw Irving Berlin and he congratulated me on it. I said to him, "Thanks a lot, but I wrote that song in hate and I still hate it." To which Irving replied, "Listen, kid, take my advice, never hate a song that has sold a half million copies." This is the only story I have about 'Rosalie'. (Gill, 1971: 147).

Rosalie my darling,
 Rosalie, my dream,
 Since, one night, when stars danced above,
 I'm oh, oh, so much in love
 So Rosalie have mercy,
 Rosalie don't decline,
 Won't you make my life thrilling,
 And tell me you're willing
 To be mine, Rosalie, mine.

Porter had reached a very important threshold in his career. He had now joined the ranks of the Hollywood celebrities. There had been a change of focus from the heroes of the Revolutionary period of American history, the military figures and eminent statesmen who portrayed images of courage and virtue, to the stars of the entertainment industry. There had been a cultural shift in focus with the growth in communications technology and the facility of mass dispersion of information. A vernacular culture grew, rooted largely in the entertainment industry. Matinee idols were revered by readers, avid for trivial gossip. The growth of the film industry created a celebrity culture, which was directly linked to technological advances. Photography captured intimate scenes; newspapers covered national and international news. There was an increase in literacy amongst the immigrant population. The imagination of the American people was stretched to re-define ideals of fame and success.

The growth of celebrity culture in America can, in part, be explained by the changes from a producing to a consuming society. Cars, radios and modern conveniences were available; industrialization brought more leisure hours. Personalities replaced characters. Being a star meant success, and New York and Hollywood were the markets for the entertainments that produced celebrities. These were created and promoted by theatrical agents, advertisers and fan magazines. Within society grew a subculture of fans with a common interest in knowing every aspect of a celebrity's life. These fans were adoring, and forgiving, able to overlook, even accept, outrageous behavior, including violations of the law. This social acceptance of the unacceptable remains today, as shown in the example of Michael Jackson who, despite the allegations of sexual involvement with children, is a musical icon to millions of fans around the world. Americans turned to celluloid icons as a form of entertainment. But the influence of celebrities extends beyond the traditional norms of the entertainment industry. There has always been a link in the United States between Hollywood and politics, but today celebrities are involved in religious and political causes. Internet and mobile technology allow stories to spread within seconds, often obscuring the truth. Endorsement of products by celebrities results in consumer crazes which add economic value to individuals.

Porter, with scores for shows on Broadway and films in Hollywood, was constantly in the limelight, and, despite the fact that from childhood he had been indulged, he revelled in his celebrity status, and his nickname 'King Cole'. The fact that his songs were often removed from shows because of their sexual nature only afforded him more publicity, and he seldom disappointed a public prepared to stretch the social norms. He enjoyed challenging accepted social values and moral opinions. As a master of the double entendre, Porter was able to escape Hollywood's Hays Code. Many performers did not appreciate the significance of the words they sang, nor did many members of the audience. Those that did experienced a thrill of something so sophisticated as to be scandalous and fascinating, while the shrewd understood the homosexual references. His music, highlighted by reports of his social life, gave middle-class Americans a glimpse of behaviour that they should have despised, but appeared to secretly endorse.

Porter had never been diffident about his talent; now his confidence allowed him to stretch the boundaries that had kept his marriage to Linda secure. In contrast to Porter's youthful looks and remarkable stamina, Linda, now aged fifty-four, no longer exuded the chic glamour that had been so important to their relationship. In contrast to Cole's vitality, her asthmatic

condition sapped her physical energy. She had many reservations about living in Hollywood, stoked largely by Cole's behavior. She had insisted on Cole being discreet about his choice of male lovers; now he took few precautions to avoid scandal. Hollywood was an environment where would-be actors often fell prey to established actors and agents, who promised roles in exchange for sexual favours. The 'tinsel-town' image of Hollywood was in sharp contrast to the harsh realities that faced the average American who, for the price of a ticket to a cinema, could escape into a different world. The public was fascinated by the larger-than-life stars 'created' by the studios: Clara Bow, the 'It Girl', was the screen's first sex goddess; Joan Crawford, 'Queen of MGM', was known to have a rapacious sexual appetite; Jean Harlow, the 'Blonde Bombshell', conveyed an easy sensuality on screen that was in direct contrast to the presiding moral values of piety and purity. (Bergan, 1985: 83). Sexuality on the screen was either virginal or whorish and it was predominantly the female stars who were symbols of sexualized celebrity, and therefore fodder for the media. Hollywood was perceived to be a place of loose morals and scandalous liaisons. Ironically, these scandals resulted in even larger audiences, avid to see the stars whose lives were written about by gossip columnists across America. This double standard of condemnation yet fascination persisted throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. After a series of scandals, including rape, murder, suicide, drug addiction and adultery, women's clubs and church groups called for the censorship and the boycotting of films. The resultant decline in attendance at cinemas, coupled with the growing influence and power of radio, forced the film industry to agree to the imposition of censorship. Morals clauses appeared in contracts, allowing studios to dismiss actors involved in scandal, or be fined by the Motion Picture Producers and Directors Association. Yet, as a musician who composed the scores for successful musicals, and therefore in great demand by the studio moguls, Porter remained relatively immune to the restraints imposed by censorship. He reserved his linguistically sophisticated lyrics for the more accepting audiences of Broadway, while providing Hollywood with original material which he was prepared to re-word in order to remove any potentially inflammatory meanings. But Cole's private life was a round of parties that offered sexual opportunities with scores of physically attractive young men with movie ambitions and who sought to impress Cole. All day pool parties were usually all gay affairs; Cole's poolside escapades were creating a scandal, not welcome in a colony supporting some of the biggest names in films, who kept their sexuality under wraps. The young men whom Cole befriended were well rewarded with money and presents. Linda, ever mindful of not putting herself or Cole in an embarrassing position,

cautioned Cole about the damage to his reputation and its effects on his burgeoning career. But Cole was not accustomed to restraints of any sort. His every whim had been indulged from childhood and he was not about to change his ways. Linda left Hollywood and returned to her Paris home. Cole did not receive the customary gift of a cigarette case when MGM introduced the film *Rosalie* to the public. But, by now, Cole had less need of Linda's support; he was kept busy writing for a new Broadway show, *Red, Hot and Blue*.

Despite the cast of Ethel Merman, Jimmy Durante and Bob Hope, *Red, Hot and Blue* was flawed from the outset. Critics panned the slight plot as the weakest part of the show, and were not impressed with Cole's musical score. In a newspaper article for the New York Times, entitled, 'Notes on the morning after an opening night' Cole wrote:

I was in as good a seat as the management would give me, and, flanked by Mary Pickford and Merle Oberon, was having a swell time watching the actors ... The reason for my behavior isn't that I'm confident of the play's success or that I'm totally without nerves. I'll put up my nerves against the best of them. But, for some reason, the moment the curtain rises on opening night, I say to myself "There she goes," and I've bid good-bye to my baby. (Schwartz, 1979: 166).

But, despite poor reviews, the show had a respectable run on Broadway. As Linda was not well enough to attend the opening, she was happy that Cole was flanked by her two good friends and, in support of Cole, she presented him with the usual gift of a cigarette case. In a surprise gesture, and as a token of reconciliation and gratitude, Cole gave Linda a cigarette case, studded with precious gems.

Among the songs written by Porter for *Red, Hot and Blue* was 'It's De-Lovely', which went on to become one of Porter's biggest hits.

The night is young, the skies are clear,
So if you want to go walking, dear,
It's delightful, it's delicious, it's de-lovely.
I understand the reason why
You're sentimental, 'cause so am I,
It's delightful, it's delicious, it's de-lovely.
You can tell at a glance
What a swell night this is for romance,

You can hear dear Mother Nature murmuring low
"Let yourself go."

So please be sweet, my chickadee,
 And when I kiss you, just say to me,
 “It’s delightful, it’s delicious,
 It’s delectable, it’s delirious,
 It’s dilemma, it’s delimit, it’s deluxe,
 It’s de-lovely.”

Time marches on and soon it’s plain
 You’ve won my heart and I’ve lost my brain,
 It’s delightful, it’s delicious, it’s de-lovely.
 Life seems so sweet that we decide
 It’s in the bag to get unified,
 It’s delightful, it’s delicious, it’s de-lovely.
 See the crowd in that church,
 See the proud parson plopped on his perch,
 Get the sweet beat of that organ, sealing our doom,
 ”Here goes the groom, boom!”
 How they cheer and how they smile,
 As we go galloping down that aisle,
 “It’s divine, dear, it’s diveen, dear,
 It’s de-wunderbar, it’s de victory,
 It’s de vallop, it’s de vinner, it’s de voiks,
 It’s de-lovely.”

The knot is tied and so we take
 A few hours off to eat wedding-cake,
 It’s delightful, it’s delicious, it’s de-lovely.
 It feels so fine to be a bride,
 And how’s the groom? Why, he’s slightly fried,
 It’s delightful, it’s delicious, it’s de-lovely.
 To the pop of champagne,
 Off we hop in our plush little plane,
 Till a bright light through the darkness cosily calls,
 “Niag’ra Falls.”
 All’s well, my love, our day’s complete,
 And what a beautiful bridal suite,
 “It’s de-reamy, it’s de-rowsy,
 It’s de-reverie, it’s de-rhapsody,
 It’s de-regal, it-s de-royal, it’s de-Ritz,
 It’s de-lovely.”

We settle down as man and wife,
 To solve the riddle called “married life”

It's delightful, it's delicious, it's de-lovely.
 We're on the crest, we have no cares,
 We're just a couple of honey bears,
 It's delightful, it's delicious, it's de-lovely.
 All's as right as can be
 Till, one night, at my window I see
 An absurd bird with a bundle hung on his nose-
 "Get baby clo'es."
 Those eyes of yours are filled with joy
 When Nurse appears and cries, "It's a boy,"
 "He's appalling, he's appealing,
 He's a polywog, he's a paragon,
 He's a Pop-eye, he's a panic, he's a pip,
 He's de-lovely."

Our boy grows up, he's six foot three,
 He's so good-looking, he looks like me,
 It's delightful, it's delicious, it's de-lovely.
 He's such a hit, this son of ours,
 That all the dowagers send him flowers,
 It's delightful, it's delicious, it's de-lovely.
 So sublime is his press
 That in time, L.B.Mayer, no less
 Makes a night flight to New York and tells him he should
 Go Hollywood.
 Good God! Today, he gets such pay
 That Elaine Barrie's his fiancé
 "It's delightful, it's delicious,
 It's delectable, it's delirious,
 It's dilemma, it's delimit, it's deluxe, it's de-lovely"

Audiences, familiar with Porter's scores, expected at least one 'catalogue' song in a show, and, in *Red, Hot and Blue*, Porter did not disappoint. His lyrics celebrate with great good humour the tireless energy, and inevitable fertility, of Mother Nature, in a story that takes romance from a glance to matrimonial bliss.

Porter abandons his usual list of images and uses a range of adjectives starting with the prefix 'de-'. In the first refrain he limits his selection to words beginning with the prefix 'de-'; in the second refrain he extends the idea to 'de+/v', to be followed in refrain three by 'de+/r'. His word choice changes from an early simplicity into Brooklyn slang. This play on words extends through 'divine, diveen, de-wunderbar, de victory, de vallop, de vinner, de voiks' to

another set of prefixes, ‘de-reamy, de-rowsy, de-reverie, de-rhapsody, de-regal, de-royal, de-Ritz’, and finally to an explosion of alliteration, ‘appalling, appealing, polywog, paragon, Pop-eye, panic, pip’. In his final refrain, Porter cannot resist including a little social gossip and name-dropping. Currently still under contract to MGM, the reference to studio head, L.B.Mayer, was topical, as was that of actress Elaine Barrie, whose tumultuous on-off romance with Shakespearean actor, John Barrymore, was enthraling the American public. As a duet between Ethel Merman and Bob Hope, Porter’s choice of words suited the vocal and dramatic talents of both singers, who welcomed the mix of the conventional with the unexpected. ‘De-lovely’ was to become one of Porter’s biggest hits. In direct contrast to the fun and frivolity of ‘De-lovely’, was ‘Down in the Depths’, which offered Ethel Merman the opportunity to show her range of dramatic capabilities and ensured her position as Porter’s favourite singer.

With a million neon rainbows burning below me
 And a million blazing taxis raising a roar
 Here I sit, above the town
 In my pet pailletted gown
 Down in the depths of the ninetieth floor.
 While the crowds at El Morrocco punish the parquet
 And at Twenty-One, the couples clamour for more,
 I’m deserted and depressed
 In my regal eagle nest
 Down in the depths of the ninetieth floor.
 When the only one you wanted wants another
 What’s the use of swank and cash in the bank galore?
 Why, even the janitor’s wife
 Has a perfectly good love life
 And here am I
 Facing tomorrow
 Alone with my sorrow
 Down in the depths of the ninetieth floor.

Porter was so confident of Ethel Merman’s abilities that he composed songs specifically for her. Her perfect enunciation could handle phrases such as ‘regal eagle’, ‘pailletted gown’, and her careful phrasing and diction permitted the inclusion of words such as ‘punish the parquet’ and ‘couples clamour’. The lyrics offer interesting contrasts of the image of the sequined woman with the janitor’s wife; the nest on the ninetieth floor with Manhattan’s elegant

nightclubs, while the overriding emotion is one of total dejection that resulted, as explained in the verse, because 'the one I've most adored is bored with me'.

Porter's writing of 'Down in the Depths' was almost a premonition of the final years of his life, when boredom, ill-health and his diminishing ability to attract young lovers brought on bouts of severe depression, but, with the success of *Red, Hot and Blue*, Porter, in 1936, was 'Ridin' High'.

Life's great, life's grand,
Future all planned.
No more clouds in the sky,
How'm I ridin'? I'm riding' high.

CHAPTER 5

At long last love Fame and Failure

By June, 1937, Cole was commuting between Broadway and Hollywood. His relationship with Linda had not improved, and she remained in Paris. He decided that a vacation was long overdue, and invited his friends, Howard Sturges and architect Ed Tauch, to join him on a walking tour of Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia and Italy. He returned to Broadway in October, refreshed and ready to start work on a new score for a musical, *You Never Know*, starring Clifton Webb, but interrupted his work to accept an invitation to join a party of friends at the home of Countess Edith di Zoppola. As horse riding was de rigeur for the occasion, Cole, ever ready to make an impression, in spite of a warning from the groom, selected a high spirited animal, with a reputation for being difficult to handle. At a point along the bridle path, the horse suddenly reared and fell, crushing one of Porter's legs. As the animal struggled to its feet, it fell again, smashing Cole's other leg. He was rushed to hospital and placed in the care of Dr Joseph B. Connolly who, sensitive to his patient's wishes, released a carefully worded statement, which played down the seriousness of Cole's injuries. However, in a telephone conversation with Linda Porter, Dr Connolly offered the opinion that the right, and possibly the left, leg might have to be amputated. Linda requested a second opinion and returned immediately to New York to consult a highly respected bone specialist, who was prepared to delay surgery on condition there were no further complications. But Cole was advised that rehabilitation would be a lengthy process, with no guarantees for success. Cole's mother, Kate, supported Linda's belief, based on almost twenty years of living with Cole, that amputation would ruin his morale, which was intimately linked to his physical appearance. With Linda now back at his side, Porter was about to face months of intense pain and rehabilitation. Cole described his condition in a series of notes uncovered by biographer, Charles Schwartz:

I'm a toe dancer, but a toe dancer who dances only on the toes of his right foot. The music in the orchestra pit is charming and it's very pleasant hopping around and around to that gay tinkling strain. But after a while I realize that my toes are tired and, risking the reprimand of the ballet master. But I cannot do it, for my ballet-slipper has been made in such a way that I must stay always on the tips of my toes. So, long after the curtain has gone down, the music has stopped and I'm alone in the theatre, I watch

the sad shadow I make as I go on and on, doomed forever to hop around on those poor tilted toes. (Schwartz, 1979: 183).

We have no indication that Porter was familiar with the Hans Christian Andersen story, *The Red Shoes*, which described how a peasant girl was forced to dance forever as a punishment for her vanity, but there seem certain parallels. Despite the fact that Porter was about to begin the most difficult period of his life, his determination to save his legs, nicknamed Josephine and Geraldine, and his fortitude in enduring painful therapy, earned him the respect of the hospital staff. As soon as he was able, he resumed work on the Clifton Webb musical. On his return to the Waldorf, he had the piano lifted onto blocks to accommodate his wheelchair, revising his score for *You Never Know*.

Given a rather trite story, Porter did his best to provide the usual sheen and glamour associated with his work. His song 'At Long Last Love' was a great hit, despite the lyrics being the almost predictable list of comparisons.

Is it an earthquake or simply a shock?
 Is it the good turtle soup or merely the mock?
 Is it a cocktail – this feeling of joy,
 Or is what I feel the real McCoy?
 Have I the right lunch or have I the wrong?
 Will it be Bach I hear or just a Cole Porter song?
 Is it a fancy not worth thinking of,
 Or is it at long last love?

Is it a rainbow or just a mirage??
 Will it be tender and sweet or merely massage?
 Is it a brainstorm in one of its quirks,
 Or is it the best, the crest, the works?
 Is it for all time or simply a lark?
 Is it the Lido I see or only Asbury Park?
 Should I say "Thumbs down" and give it a shove,
 Or is it at long last love?

Is it a breakdown or is it a break?
 Is it a real Porterhouse or only a steak?
 What can account for these strange pitterpats?

Could this be the dream, the cream, the cat's?
 Is it to rescue or is it to wreck?
 Is it an ache in the heart or just a pain in the neck?

Is it the ivy you touch with a glove,
Or is it at long last love?

Porter adopts the melodic pattern he used for an earlier song 'What is this thing called love?' (1929) where he uses a question as an opening line and then develops it through a series of clever rhymes. Porter enjoyed the successful formula of asking questions, with the repetition of the title in the final words of each chorus.

Porter claimed to have written the words while waiting for help after the riding accident. He had the ability to get the press to believe, and print, practically every story he told, building his image of what he wanted the world to know and accept. Already the influence of the mass media was recognized as a remarkable tool. The syndicated columnist, Lucius Beebe, openly homosexual and often referred to as 'Luscious Lucius', offered an evocative, slightly envious, picture of Porter when he wrote:

It is really the simple things of life which give pleasure to Mr Porter – half-million-dollar strings of pearls, Isotta motor cars, cases of double bottles of Grand Chambertin '87, suites at Claridge's, brief trips aboard the Bremen, a little grouse shooting. (Schwartz, 1979: 99).

The musical *You never Know* was not a great success, but the casually elegant 'At Long Last Love' was prime Porter with its clever list of questions. The lover shows a certain scepticism in querying his condition. The rhyming couplets offer a range of comparisons from the colloquial 'thumbs down' to the thundering Bach, the European sophistication of the Lido in the Champs-Élysées to the boardwalks of Asbury Park in Jersey. He drops a rare self-reference into his catalogue: 'Will it be Bach that I hear, or just a Cole Porter song?' He moves with ease from the genuine to the imitation. By now audiences expected twists and surprises in the lyrics with their popular allusions and current events. Porter kept up-to-date with current affairs and national gossip. One of the best examples of Porter providing tidbits of news is in the song 'You're the Top'. I have selected a few lines to show how topical his writing was when he chose to style his lyrics as a 'list'.

You're the top!
You're a Nathan panning

George Jean Nathan was a theatre critic for the New York Herald, known for his harsh criticism. Porter was occasionally at the receiving end of his blistering comments.

You're the top!
 You're Garbo's sal'ry

After a successful 1927 film *Flesh and the Devil*, Garbo demanded a huge salary increase. Failing to convince Louis B. Mayer she returned to Sweden; eventually Mayer agreed.

You're the top!
 You're the boy who dares
 Challenge Mrs Baer's son, Max

Max Baer was an American boxer who in 1934 won the title of Heavyweight Champion of the World.

You're the top!
 You're Mrs Astor

The Viscountess Nancy Witcher Langhorne Astor became the first woman to sit as a Member of Parliament in the British House of Commons.

Porter's examples describe current events of the 1930s in his song 'Anything Goes':

When missus Ned McLean (God bless her)
 Can get Russian reds to 'yes' her,
 Then I suppose
 Anything goes.

These words stem from a trip to Russia, shortly after the Revolution, made by Evalyn Walsh MacLean, an American heiress, whose wealth somewhat surprisingly impressed the proletariat.

When Rockefeller still can hoard enough money
 To let Max Gordon
 Produce his shows,
 Anything goes.

Max Gordon was one of New York's most successful theatre and film producers and amassed great wealth.

If Sam Goldwyn can with great conviction
 Instruct Anna Sten in diction
 Then Anna shows
 Anything goes.

Actress Anna Sten was born in the Ukraine and brought to the United States by Sam Goldwyn, who hoped she would rival Greta Garbo, but her accent was too pronounced for the American public.

When folks who still can ride in jitneys
Find out Vanderbilts and Whitneys
Lack baby-cl'oes,
Anything goes.

Porter introduces an amusing prospect that two of the wealthiest families in the United States might not be able to afford baby clothes.

Porter always provided a careful mix of allusions, to be sung with careful diction and the slang of conversational phrasing. *You never know* was not a success, but that was soon forgotten with MGM's release of the film *Rosalie*, and the opening, to great critical acclaim, of Porter's new musical, *Leave It to Me*, with Mary Martin making her Broadway debut. Porter always attended the auditions for the singing roles and had the deciding vote. In the case of Mary Martin, his decision was a triumph with her show-stopping version of Porter's 'My Heart belongs to Daddy'. Her apparent innocence, coupled with the striptease that accompanied it, had the press and the public clamouring for more.

While tearing off
A game of golf
I may make a play for the caddy,
But when I do
I don't follow through
'Cause my heart belongs to Daddy.
If I invite
A boy, some night,
To dine on my fine finnan haddie,
I just adore
His asking for more,
But my heart belongs to Daddy.
Yes, my heart belongs to Daddy,
So I simply couldn't be bad,
Yes, my heart belongs to Daddy,
Da-da,da-da-da, da-da-da, dad!
So I want to warn you, laddie,
Tho' I know you're perfectly swell,
That my heart belongs to Daddy,

‘Cause my Daddy, he treats me so well.
 He treats it and treats it,
 And then he repeats it,
 Yes, Daddy he treats it so well.

Saint Patrick’s day
 Although I may
 Be seen wearing green with a paddy,
 I’m always sharp
 When playing the harp
 ‘Cause my heart belongs to Daddy.
 Though other dames
 At football games
 May long for a strong undergraddy,
 I never dream
 Of making the team
 ‘Cause my heart belongs to Daddy.
 Yes, my heart belongs to Daddy,
 So I simply couldn’t be bad.
 Yes, my heart belongs to Daddy,
 Da-da, da-da-da, da-da-da, dad!
 So I want to warn you, laddie,
 Tho’ I simply hate to be frank,
 That I can’t be mean to Daddy
 ‘Cause my Da-da-da-daddy might spank.
 In matters artistic
 He’s not modernistic
 So Da-da-da-daddy might spank.

This song reassured that Porter, despite his accident, was still at the top of his form with clever, slyly suggestive words. Porter had often jokingly said that musical theatre meant writing Jewish music. In ‘My heart belongs to Daddy’, he builds a tune of minor cadences that replicate cantorial prayer. It would appear that ‘daddy’ is old, rich and Jewish. The liturgical repetition of ‘Da-da, da-da-da, da-da-da’, could have been offensive in its implications, but Martin’s delivery with wide-eyed innocence, removing her furs, came over so strongly that the parody was accepted with good humour. Her apparent innocence was in strong contrast with the song’s sexual overtones. The suggestiveness of the words ‘dine on my fine finnan haddie’ was not lost on the sophisticated New York audiences who understood the use of the pronoun ‘it’ linked to ‘treats’ and ‘repeats’. The song uses double

entendre to maximum effect. Porter seems to endorse the situation as long as the rewards are great.

Porter's score for *Leave It to Me* received rave reviews, as did the song 'Get out of Town'.

Get out of town,
 Before it's too late, my love.
 Get out of town,
 Be good to me, please.
 Why wish me harm?
 Why not retire to a farm
 And be contented to charm
 The birds off the trees?
 Just disappear,
 I care for you much too much,
 And when you are near,
 Close to me, dear,
 We touch too much.
 The thrill when we meet
 Is so bitter-sweet
 That, darling it's getting me down,
 So on your mark, get set,
 Get out of town.

Porter's image certainly was that of the man-about-town, yet he wrote a surprising number of songs that hinted at vulnerability, and an inability to cope with disappointment and heartache. Love is a mysterious attraction that can shatter composure and reverse the values of right and wrong. He seems not only to accept, but welcome, betrayal and disappointment. We must assume that his own personal experience of 'love' influenced his lyrics. His most simple lyrics display a melancholy, while his syntactical juxtapositions, internal rhymes, and comic enjambements offer a ribald, cynical glimpse at romance. Devoted to Linda until her death in 1954, his closest confidants were male friends, who were only too willing to participate in homosexual activities. Playwright Lionel Spigelglass wrote that, while homosexuality was not considered acceptable by the public at large, Porter's behavior placed him in

'the most exclusive club in New York. That's terribly important to realize, that it was a club into which (the average person) couldn't get...I mean, no ordinary certified public accountant could get in the Larry Hart, Noel Coward, George Cukor world. That was the world...That was Cole Porter... On the one hand you said, "They were homosexual –oh, my, isn't that

terrible!” On the other hand you said, “My God, the other night I was at dinner with Cole Porter!” (Frontain, 2005: 5).

Despite his attraction to men of a lower class, Porter cultivated the wealthy, those with enough money or position to place them in an elite set. His friendship with Noel Coward produced a song, written by Porter, for the 1939 play, *The Man who came to Dinner*, which starred a Noel Coward-type character. By 1930, Coward was enjoying great popularity in America, where audiences were comfortable with his risqué words that would not have escaped censorship in England. His themes ranged from ménage a trios and sexual vanity to drug abuse. His careful diction and staccato delivery presented a carefully crafted image, and it was obvious to the producers, Hart and Kaufman, that Porter would be able to emulate the style. There were interesting parallels between Porter and Coward. They both moved in the same circles, were sophisticated and stylish. Both had been influenced by Gilbert and Sullivan and wrote both words and music. They had dominating mothers and ineffectual fathers, but, while Porter preferred sex with rough truck drivers, Coward chose lovers from his own set. In writing ‘What am I to do?’ Porter signed his name as ‘Noel Porter.’

What am I to do
Toward ending this madness
This sadness,
That’s rending me through?
The flowers of yesteryear
Are haunting me
Taunting me,
Darling, for wanting you.
What am I to say
To warnings of sorrow
When morning’s tomorrow
Greets the dew?
Will I see the cosmic Ritz
Shattered and scattered to bits
What not am I to do?

The excessive sentimentality and exaggeration was a Coward trademark and, like Porter, he preferred androgynous lyrics, which allowed a man to show feminine traits, while a woman could appear masculine. Susan Sontag in *Notes on ‘Camp’* (Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 1966) suggests that theatrical, effeminate behavior is ‘camp’ and is often the characteristic of the homosexual. There is a sense of the artificial which we can attribute to many of Porter’s

lyrics. He enjoys playing with exaggeration; his allusions are larger than life, almost extravagant in their choice, yet he offers them with a sense of frivolity. If we are prepared to regard camp as playing-a-role, then Porter fits the description. He had created a persona early on in his life, which allowed him to flourish in an environment where style was greatly admired. I think it can be suggested that both Coward and Porter could take ‘love’ seriously and exaggerate it until it became frivolous. The song with its plosive consonants would replicate the Coward diction and, as a sign of appreciation, the producers presented Porter with yet another elegant cigarette case.

The final Broadway musical of 1939 was *DuBarry was a Lady*, starring one of Porter’s favourite singers, Ethel Merman. It would be an appropriately successful end to the decade as a boisterous and high-spirited extravaganza, which contrasted sharply with the ominous threat of war, after Hitler had invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Audiences were in the mood for light relief; Porter produced a score of richly different musical styles that represented the past and present. He reflected the court of Louis XV, the bump and grind of striptease shows, the ‘new’ jazz sound, the bawdy humour of ‘Katie went to Haiti.’

Katie went to Haiti
 Stopped off for a rest.
 Katie met a natie
 Katie was impressed.
 After a week in Haiti
 She started to go away,
 Then Katie met another natie
 So Katie prolonged her stay.
 After a month in Haiti
 She decided to resume her trip,
 But Katie met still another natie
 And Katie missed the ship.
 So Katie lived in Haiti
 Her life there, it was great,
 ‘Cause Katie knew her Haiti
 And practically all Haiti knew Kate.

The gutsy delivery of the inimitable Ethel Merman had audiences cheering for more. Porter appeared to enjoy writing the narrative song which chronicled the life of a character. Here he takes us along on the adventure of an American girl who visits Haiti, meets ‘natie’ after

'natie', writes a travel guide and, three choruses later, dies, at the age of eighty. Porter is delightfully vague in the suggestiveness of 'have' and 'knew'. He was of the opinion that songs told stories, and not shows. He did not aspire to being a dramatist, but was content to remain a songwriter; the script was incidental to his score. He was committed to providing his performers with songs that would make the most of their talents. The combination of Ethel Merman and Bert Lahr swearing eternal friendship in the song 'Friendship' was a highlight of the show with lines such as 'If ever you're down a well, ring my bell', 'If you ever lose your teeth and you're out to dine, borrow mine' and 'If they ever cut your throat, write a note'. As a contrast to the humorous songs, Porter returns to his list approach with fourteen questions with the simple words of 'Do I Love you?'

Do I love you, do I?
 Doesn't one and one make two?
 Do I love you, do I?
 Does July need a sky of blue?
 Would I miss you, would I,
 If you should ever go away?
 If the sun should desert the day,
 What would life be?
 Will I leave you never?
 Could the ocean leave the shore?
 Will I worship you forever?
 Isn't heaven forevermore?
 Do I love you, do I?
 Oh, my dear, it's so easy to see,
 Don't you know I do?
 Don't I show that I do?
 Just as you love me?

The refreshingly simple love sentiments are in direct contrast to the bawdy humour of other songs in the show, showing that Ethel Merman could deliver a love ballad as well as a high spirited number. The frenetic love triangle of *DuBarry was a Lady*, which moved between the court at Versailles and the Club Petite, a noisy Manhattan nightclub, enjoyed a very successful run, proving that Porter, despite his handicap, was still enjoying enormous popularity.

Porter had the opportunity to compose for another of his favourite singers, Fred Astaire, who starred in the MGM film, *Broadway Melody of 1940*. This was the fourth in a series of films featuring Astaire and Eleanor Powell. Although the plot was insipid, a new Porter song, 'I Concentrate on You' was to become one of his most popular tunes. Porter dispenses with the opening verse and presents his melody in less characteristic form.

Whenever skies look grey to me
 And trouble begins to brew
 Whenever the winter winds become too strong,
 I concentrate on you.
 When Fortune cries "Nay! Nay!" to me
 And people declare "You're through,"
 Whenever the Blues become my only song
 I concentrate on you.
 On your smile so sweet, so tender,
 When at first my kiss you decline,
 On the light in your eyes, when you surrender,
 And once again our arms intertwine.
 And so when wise men say to me
 That Love's young dream never comes true,
 To prove that even wise men can be wrong,
 I concentrate on you,
 I concentrate
 And concentrate
 On you.

In 'I Concentrate on You' Porter provides rhymes that operate on different levels in the song. He repeats the word 'me' in 'Whenever skies look grey to me'; 'When Fortune cries Nay! Nay! To me'; 'And so when wise men say to me'. Then he moves on to sounds similar to 'brew': 'And trouble begins to brew'; 'I concentrate on you'; 'And people declare you're through'; 'That young love's dream never comes true.' We also have the words that rhyme with 'strong': 'Whenever the winter winds become too strong'; 'Whenever the blues become my only song'; 'To prove that even wise men can be wrong'. We have internal rhyming patterns of 'skies look grey'; 'cries Nay! Nay!' and 'wise men say'. 'Tender' is coupled with 'surrender' and 'decline' with 'intertwine'. It is important to remember that Porter was writing a romantic ballad that would accompany the dancing duet of Astaire and Powell, backed by the lush sounds of the MGM orchestra. But perhaps the highlight of the film was the Astaire-Powell tap dance performed to Porter's 'Begin the Beguine', which was first

performed in 1935 and had become a great hit through an arrangement by clarinetist Artie Shaw. The song was revised (as many Porter songs were) and became the high point of *Broadway Melody of 1940*.

The early 1940s brought about film versions of three of Porter's Broadway shows; *Panama Hattie* (MGM, 1942), *DuBarry is a Lady* (MGM, 1943) and *Let's Face It* (Paramount, 1943), but none of them bore much resemblance to the original stage musicals, and Porter's scores were reduced in order to include songs by other composers. The Broadway production of *Let's Face It*, which opened in 1941, had been Porter's longest running show, largely due to the performance of Danny Kaye who displayed his virtuosity in singing, at great speed, lines such as:

Let's talk of Lamarr, that Hedy so fair,
 Why does she let Joan Bennett wear all her old hair?
 If you know Garbo, then tell me this news,
 Is it a fact the Navy's launched all her old shoes?
 Let's check on the veracity of Barrymore's bibacity
 And why his drink capacity should get so much publicity
 Let's even have a huddle over Ha'vard univassity
 But let's not talk about love.

Porter did not underestimate his audiences whom he expected to understand references which often included current gossip. But with censorship laws currently dictating content, the saucy story was toned down for the film version, and only two of Porter's original songs were retained.

In 1942 Porter returned to Hollywood to write a score for Columbia Pictures, *Something to Shout About*. Porter considered the film, including his score, mediocre, restrained as he was by the Hollywood Production Code. But the song, 'You'd be so nice to come home to' appealed to American viewers, separated from their loved ones by the war.

You'd be so nice to come home to,
 You'd be so nice by the fire,
 While the breeze on high
 Sang a lullaby,
 You'd be all that I
 Could desire.
 Under star's chilled by the winter,
 Under an August moon, burning above,

You'd be so nice,
 You'd be Paradise
 To come home to and love.

Throughout both world wars, music was an effective way of inspiring fervor and patriotism. Composers adopted new themes with which to earn money from a public eager to respond to wartime sentiments. Much of the music that emerged at that time greatly influenced social and political attitudes. Porter's contemporaries were producing songs and scores that reflected the times, yet Porter seemed able to distance himself, emotionally and musically.

Porter's next Broadway production, *Something for the Boys*, which opened in 1943, featured Ethel Merman, but, despite praise for the star, reviewers found the score lacklustre; it appeared that Porter's writing was on the decline. The 1944 show, *Mexican Hayride*, did nothing to dispel their opinion. We can only assume that Porter's waning popularity brought about the start of the depression that was to plague him until his death. He received a psychological boost when *Seven Lively Arts* opened in December, 1944. Apart from Porter's songs, producer Billy Rose had commissioned Igor Stravinsky to compose a ballet suite for dancers, Alicia Markova and Anton Dolin. Rose had a matter-of-fact approach to business and, feeling that Stravinsky's score was rather too highbrow, sent this telegram:

YOUR MUSIC GREAT SUCCESS STOP COULD BE SENSATIONAL SUCCESS
 IF YOU WOULD AUTHORIZE ROBERT RUSSELL BENNETT RETOUCH
 ORCHESTRATION STOP BENNETT ORCHESTRATES EVEN THE WORKS OF
 COLE PORTER.

Stravinsky promptly replied:

SATISFIED WITH GREAT SUCCESS

(Schwartz, 1979: 217).

The only Porter number to survive the extravaganza was a simple, repeated-note melody.

Ev'ry time we say goodbye
 I die a little,
 Ev'ry time we say goodbye
 I wonder why a little.
 Why the gods above me
 Who must be in the know
 Think so little of me

They allow you to go.
 When you're near there's such an air
 Of Spring about it
 I can hear a lark somewhere
 Begin to sing about it,
 There's no love song finer
 But how strange
 The change
 From major to minor
 Ev'ry time we say goodbye.
 Ev'ry single time we say goodbye.

The flop of *Seven Lively Arts* was followed by another flawed show, *Around the World*, written and directed by Orson Welles, well known for his film, stage and radio appearances. Welles had adapted the novel of Jules Verne, 'Around the World in Eighty Days' ('Le tour de monde en quatre-vingt jours') which offered wonderful material that could be translated onto stage. But the show was another box-office failure. In the New York Times of June 1, 1946, critic Lewis Nichols wrote that the show was 'only fitfully amusing' and noted the production 'has spared no expense in gadgets and effects. There are movies of the flicker era, a miniature train crossing a bridge, desperate men clinging to the rails of pounding ships at sea. In other words, *Around the World* has the making for an hilarious evening. It does not come off because it lacks unity. There are too many styles fighting among themselves. Finally Cole Porter has written an inferior score, the songs being on the usual musical comedy subjects and delivered without zest, brought to the show by its mainstay.' But Porter, in anticipation of the poor reviews, had departed for California before the opening.

In 1946 Warner Bros. produced a biopic, *Night and Day*, based on Cole Porter's life. The original suggestion came from Porter's friend, fellow composer, Irving Berlin, who felt that Porter's battle to overcome his handicap would serve as inspiration to disabled war veterans. Porter approved of the casting of Cary Grant in the lead, despite the fact the men had little in common. With the songs in a chronological muddle, the script goes to considerable length to avoid details of Porter's private life, depicting him as a World War 1 hero, wounded by an explosion. While *Night and Day* was a great success amongst film-goers, biographer Charles Schwartz writes: 'When the film began to be shown on television, Cole would watch it at every opportunity so that he could have a good time laughing at the many plot absurdities.'

(Schwartz, 1979: 223). Porter had been making up stories about himself for so many years that little wonder the film was flawed. A second biopic, *De-Lovely*, released by MGM in 2004, starring Kevin Kline as Porter, was far more credible. It spans the period between Cole meeting Linda Lee Thomas in 1918 until just before his death in 1964 and includes thirty of his songs. It shows Porter as being both gay and in love with his wife, but Porter's emotional needs are not explored. However the film is a tribute to his musical genius.

Another MGM film, *The Pirate*, had all the elements for success. It combined the talents of director Vincente Minelli, stars Judy Garland and Gene Kelly, and a clever Porter score. It should have had box-office appeal, but certain scenes were cut by studio head, Louis B. Mayer, as being too erotic and sophisticated for the average film-goer. A dance number by Gene Kelly was removed because it showed him dancing with two Black dancers, the Nicholas Brothers. Producer, Arthur Freed, described *The Pirate* as being 'twenty years ahead of its time.' (Hemming, 1985:171).

Dogged by failure, Porter was apprehensive about providing his next score, based on Shakespeare's, *The Taming of the Shrew*. Cole's initial resistance was based on his opinion that the story was too esoteric; his style would not be suitable; the script did nothing to excite him. Prior to 1940, Porter had written shows with apparent disregard for the book. But writer, Bella Spewack, had written an ingenious script about the private lives of four theatre performers, who take on different personalities when on stage. Spewack considered the story of *The Taming of the Shrew* was rather like an old Yiddish custom that prevented a younger sister marrying before the older one. It was a theme that had been successful on Broadway before and, as Porter had often described his music as 'Jewish,' he decided to write a score that would bring a taste of Shakespeare to the American public. This play-within-a-play format brought together the worlds of sixteenth century Padua with twentieth century America, as the four lead actors resolve their marital difficulties, helped by the characters they portray. Porter's score captures the spirit of *The Taming of the Shrew*, in a range that seemed Shakespearean. He wrote a ballad purely in the subjunctive: 'Were thine thy special face'; used Elizabethan conversion: 'Where is the life that late I led?'; speciality numbers were not merely funny, they were literate. He produced a unified score that followed the story-line, re-creating *The Taming of the Shrew*, with clever links to the bard. 'I've Come to Wive it Wealthily in Padua' was spoken by Petruchio in the original play:

I come to wive it wealthily in Padua,
If wealthily then happily in Padua.

The Taming of the Shrew: Act.1, sc. 2, l. 74-75

‘Were Thine That Special Face’ was inspired by Bianca’s words:

Believe me, sister, of all the men alive,
I never yet beheld that special face
Which I could fancy more than any other.

The Taming of the Shrew: Act. 2, Sc. 1, l. 10-12

Porter’s agility with words produced these malapropisms in ‘Brush Up your Shakespeare’:

Just proclaim a few lines from “Othella”
And they’ll think you’re a helluva fella,
If your blonde won’t respond when you flatter ‘er
Tell her what Tony told Cleopatterer,
If she fights when her clothes you are mussing,
What are clothes? “Much Ado About Nussing.”

Kiss me Kate opened on December, 30, 1948 to rave reviews, with Tony Awards for the best musical production, the best book and the best musical score of the 1948-49 season. Productions of the show continued year after year; it is still in demand, in different countries, by both professional and amateur groups.

In his book, *Broadway Musicals*, Martin Gottfried suggests that with *Kiss Me Kate*, Porter had provided a ‘musical milieu’ that brings a ‘unifying style’, rather than an unrelated series of songs. (Gottfried, 1984: 215).

Because of this integration, despite the brilliance of the score, the only song to become hit was ‘So in Love’ which hinted at masochism.

So taunt me and hurt me
Deceive me, desert me

Perhaps Porter’s knowledge of the Shakespearean play, *A Midsummer’s Night Dream*, when Helena begs Demetrius, was the inspiration.

The more you beat me, I will fawn on you.
 Use me but as your spaniel – spurn me, strike me
 Neglect me, lose me

A Midsummer's Night Dream: Act 2, sc 1, l. 204-206

With the success of *Kiss Me Kate* came requests from advertisers for Porter to endorse their products. Cole's smile helped the sales of Rheingold beer and Camel cigarettes, despite the fact that he preferred whiskey and the expensive cigarette brand of Murad and Helmars. The money and publicity he received more than compensated for bending the truth, a typical Porter trait.

Kiss me Kate was to be the first of Porter's 'book' shows, followed by *Out of This World* (1950), *Can-Can* (1953) and *Silk Stockings* (1955). In *Can-Can*, Porter returns to his formula of listing in one of the most popular songs from the show which went on to be filmed by Twentieth Century-Fox in 1960.

'It's all Right with Me' provides an inventory of negatives which go beneath the surface of the lover:

It's the wrong time and the wrong place
 Though the face is charming, it's the wrong face

The song takes us from the anguish of 'It's not her face' to the admission 'but such a charming face' to the title phrase 'that it's all right with me.' The tone varies from the mundane 'You can't know how happy I am that we met' to the detached 'I'm strangely attracted to you'. Porter's understated lyrics recall his great list songs of the 1930s.

Silk Stockings was to be Porter's final Broadway show. The previous year Linda's health deteriorated to the extent that she retired to her bedroom at the Waldorf, where she died from emphysema, aged seventy. Ironically, Porter received another cigarette case to commemorate the opening night of *Silk Stockings* from close friends, as a gesture in memory of Linda. Cole used some of Linda's diamonds to adorn the last case in his collection to coincide with the release of the film, *High Society*, which was based on *The Philadelphia Story*, starring Katherine Hepburn. For this new version, Cole produced a brand new score, brilliantly handled by Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra, who teamed up for the first time. A sentimental ballad, 'True Love', was to become Porter's biggest movie song hit.

I give to you and you give to me,
True love, true love,
So on and on it will always be,
True love, true love.
For you and I
Have a guardian angel on high
With nothing to do
But to give to you and to give to me
Love forever true.

It is interesting to note that after the brilliant witticisms, complicated melodic scores with tantalizing lyrics, 'True Love' was Porter's first song to sell more than a million records.

In January, 1958, Porter was admitted to hospital with stomach pains and an ulcerated right leg. While the stomach ulcer responded to treatment, the leg was amputated. For Porter, who had always been a vain man, fastidious in his appearance, this was a tremendous shock. He could not cope with an artificial leg and lost interest in food. He was hospitalized a number of times with pneumonia, and suffering from malnutrition and depression. In 1964 he returned to hospital with a bladder infection, severe anemia and a fracture of the right hip. In October, a kidney stone was removed. Throughout his long illness, Porter had attempted to maintain a busy social life both in New York and California, but his heavy drinking often resulted in morbid silences and eventually guests were unwilling to accept invitations. On October 15, 1964, Cole Porter died in a Santa Monica Hospital. He was buried in Peru, in the Mount Hope cemetery, between the graves of Linda and his father.

CONCLUSION

The music of Cole Porter epitomized what is known as the Golden era of American light music. Cole Porter's name conjured up images of sophistication and elegance, while his songs placed him at the forefront of American composers for the musical theatre. His witty, risqué lyrics reflected an insouciance that defied the conventions of the time, yet remained tantalizingly acceptable. In order to understand his musical genius, it is necessary to examine those factors that both influenced and nurtured his talent.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, America was poised for a musical renaissance. Operettas had paved the way for vaudeville and musical theatre, which required original material for American audiences seeking entertainment and diversion after the grim war years. The lyrical formula of the ballad with its strophic storytelling gave way to 'love' songs. Ragtime, jazz and the 'blues' paved the way for swing, creating a musical environment that encouraged innovation and experimentation. The increase in the production and sale of pianos meant a growing demand for sheet music, which provided an opportunity for the music publishers of Tin Pan Alley to mass market their songs by standardizing the melodic formula, the rationale being that one successful song would sound very much like another. The rigidity of the musical score could have stifled creativity, but Porter's use of idiosyncratic speech patterns, coupled with his clever rhymes, brought a freshness to songs that could have been banal and sentimental. The introduction of the phonograph, followed by the gramophone, revolutionised the production of records and brought music into American homes. The advent of radio ensured a ready market for composers, offering widespread and continuous exposure. The founding of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers protected the rights of composers, authors and producers, ensuring that, before songs were performed, fees needed to be paid to the Society. Porter was to become the most performed member of the ASCAP, which meant the most performed songwriter of his time.

In the film industry, the early talking pictures were dominated by singing and dancing. Film audiences and film studios, who were eager for new songs, ensured steady and generous income for composers willing to move to Hollywood. The effects of World War 1 and the Depression were offset by the lavish production of extravagant musicals in which composers, lyricists and performers determined the tunes, the shows, the dances – the very 'sound' of

American popular culture of the day. Together with George Gershwin, Jerome Kern and Irving Berlin, Porter was to dominate the music scene.

From childhood Porter was nurtured and protected by his mother who recognized his talent and encouraged his early attempts at composition. It was Kate who determined that Cole should enter Worcester Academy, which offered a sound training in the classics. In this all-male environment, the diminutive but precocious Porter was allowed to concentrate on composing. Kate continued to offer financial support and, in defiance of her father's wishes that Porter should study law, he enrolled at Yale College, where, as a member of all the social clubs, he could compose scores for his first musical comedies. It was during these college years that Porter was to forge friendships with Monty Woolley and Leonard Hanna, both from wealthy and influential families, and openly gay. In later years Porter's wide circle of friends would include a large number of homosexuals and lesbians, but the young Porter appeared to adopt a sexual neutrality that would be challenged when he met and married, in Paris, a wealthy socialite, Linda Lee Thomas, eight years his senior and considered one of the great beauties of the age. Linda was to share Kate's ambitions for Porter and provide an environment in which Porter, the musician, could flourish. In addition, marriage to Linda guaranteed a respectability Porter believed was expected of a composer who wrote about romantic love. During the course of my research it became evident that a number of women were to support and encourage Cole's talent. Elizabeth "Bessie" Marbury launched his career on Broadway as early as 1916, and she would continue to produce a number of successful shows, featuring Porter's lyrics. Her relationship with Elsie de Wolfe has been well documented, and both of them were to assist Porter in fulfilling his ambitions, financially and emotionally. Porter's alliance with Elsa Maxwell was socially invaluable, and their friendship continued throughout his life. This enclave of lesbian friends encourages my supposition that Porter drew inspiration from his homosexuality, as reflected in his lyrics. I suggest that the emotional and physical support that Porter received from this intimate circle of friends took him to the lyrical heights that have made his songs so memorable.

Porter was indifferent to the moral values of the time. In Paris, he pursued pleasure with singular determination, but American society was influenced by a strong Puritanical streak which imposed restrictions regarding religious beliefs, values and even forms of entertainment. Porter's lyrics were in direct contrast to the social norms and mores; ironically, the non-conformist Porter found these restrictions encouraged his creativity, and

resulted in lyrics so cleverly crafted as to be accepted by the public, while appreciated by his intimate circle of friends who understood the sexual innuendoes and double entendres. With the help of Linda, Porter maintained a heterosexual façade, but many of his most popular songs were inspired by male lovers. Indifferent to political and moral ideologies, he handled the current idiom so adroitly as to evade the strict censorship laws and captivate American audiences.

Writers of the time and fellow composers were providing social commentary on a range of issues; Porter focused on current gossip and events. The 1927 musical, *Showboat*, with score by Jerome Kern and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, was the first musical that dealt with adult themes and integrated lyrics into the story, with issues such as miscegenation and the harsh life of blacks in the south. Porter continued to provide musical interludes to shows, with no attempt to enhance the story. His songs, however, ensured that the show would be successful, despite an often trite script. But after the 1930s Porter's compositions blended with the script, offering commentary and musical highlights. It is not in the scope of this dissertation to examine those lyrics, but I contend it would be an interesting, and possibly revealing, study to identify, whether, if confined to a more rigid structure, Porter continued to maintain his personal brand of songwriting.

As a trained musician who was both widely read and travelled, Porter brought a hint of the erotic and exotic to a public longing to escape from social restrictions and the deprivations of the Great Depression. His lyrics hinted at the unconventional behavior that mimicked his own life. There is the interesting contradiction of the contrast between the seedy bars where Porter would procure lovers, and the palatial homes where he was surrounded by wealthy and influential friends. His lapses into ennui and depression were offset by his enormous appetite for fun. There is a sense of the man in the music in the correlation of personality and composition. The mocking, sardonic tone of many of his songs was, in essence, a reflection of a creative genius often at odds with himself and the world. A close analysis of Porter's lyrics often suggests a man struggling to emerge from the constricting moral atmosphere of the 1930s. While his most successful songs indicate a cool indifference to what was then considered accepted behavior, some lyrics reveal a poignant, even tormented, glimpse of a man who longed for acceptance on a personal, as well as professional, level. He manipulated his lyrics to present a sophisticated detachment, with the occasional undercurrent of impatience at the restrictions that society imposed on his creativity.

The last song, 'Wouldn't it be fun', that Porter composed for the 1958 television musical, *Aladdin*, is resonant of the early Porter, with lyrics that offer a succinct, even merry, comment on a credo that was in direct contrast to his own:

Wouldn't it be fun not to be famous,
Wouldn't it be fun not to be rich!
Wouldn't it be pleasant
To be a simple peasant
And spend a happy day digging a ditch!
Wouldn't it be fun not to be known as an important VIP,
Wouldn't it be fun to be nearly anyone
Except me, mighty me!

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SELECTED LOVE LYRICS OF THE 1930s

<i>Paris</i> , October 8, 1928.	Let's Misbehave
<i>Wake Up and Dream</i> , March 27, 1929.	What is this thing called love? Let's do it, let's fall in love
<i>Fifty Million Frenchmen</i> , November 17, 1929.	A toast to Volstead You do something to me
<i>The New Yorkers</i> , December 8, 1930.	Love for Sale
<i>Gay Divorce</i> , November 29, 1932.	Night and Day
<i>Nymph Errant</i> , October 6, 1933.	Experiment The Physician
<i>Anything Goes</i> , November 21, 1934.	I get a kick out of you You're the Top Anything Goes
<i>Jubilee</i> , October 12, 1935.	Begin the Beguine Just one of those things
<i>Born to Dance</i> , (film) November, 1936.	Easy to Love I've got you under my skin.
<i>Red, Hot and Blue!</i> October 29, 1936.	It's De-Lovely
<i>Rosalie</i> , (film) December, 1937.	In the still of the night Rosalie
<i>Leave it to me</i> , November 9, 1938.	Get out of Town My heart belongs to Daddy
<i>DuBarry was a Lady</i> , December 6, 1939.	Katie went to Haiti Do I love you?
<i>Broadway Melody of 1940</i> , (film) February, 1940	I concentrate on you