

A Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

I thought you and your readers might be interested in this song, unearthed during my researches into the work of that classic old blues singer, Gatemouth Johnson, who of course had a day job with the Mississippi Water Authority. It's called the Type I/Type II Error blues, and as far as I can decipher Gatemouth's thinking:

H_0 states that the defendant is innocent,
 H_1 states that the defendant is guilty.

The hero, Reggie Hotshot (which stands for Reject H_0 when true) has been subject to a Type I error, while Axel Hoffman (which stands for Accept H_0 when false) has experienced a Type II error.

Gatemouth sings this to a standard 12-bar in G, with a little harmonica in the background. Whatever the song's merits, I think that it is safe to say that Gatemouth's attempts to combine popular song with statistical pedagogy are perhaps unique in the blues tradition.

The Type I/Type II Error Blues

They call me Reggie Hotshot,
I'll tell you straight, I'm doing time:
They say I shot the sheriff,
But they're wrong, I'm not into crime:
I know the man that 's done it,
And I'm telling you, his soul's not worth a dime.

That man was Axel Hoffman,
And as he shot, well, I had a good view,

When he came on trial, he smiled,
As a "Not guilty" verdict came right on through.
You can hear me shout from behind my bars,
"His story's false! My story's true!"

My trial was a Type I error,
I've been convicted, though I'm true as a die,
His trial was a Type II error,
They bought his story, though every word's a lie,
I've got those Type I/Type II Error Blues
And I guess you can prob'ly work out why.

So I'm having a testing time,
But I'm telling you, right on the level,
It's a Type I error I'm suffering,
While a Type II makes Axel revel,
Dear God, you've dealt me a pretty poor hand,
While he's got the luck of the Devil.

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