Narrative Paradigms, Musical Signifiers, and Form as Function in Country Music

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Within country music's songwriting practices, musical form and harmonic structure often become functional contributors to a song's story; these combinations of form and theme can be modeled as distinct narrative paradigms. This essay defines a Time-Shift narrative paradigm that relates a central trope in country music's texts to formal, structural, and poetic devices. It then presents analyses of several songs to show how the use of the narrative paradigm reinforces the core identity of country as a genre, and connects art, biography, and interpretation.

Keywords: Popular Music Analysis, Country Music, Narrative Structure, Dixie Chicks, Darrell Scott, Songwriting

In the spring of 2002, the Dixie Chicks released a new country music single, "Long Time Gone," after an extended hiatus from both touring and recording. The song proved extremely successful in the commercial music scene and injected their career with a new-found energy, capitalizing on timely trends in country music. However, the song was also laden with internal contradictions and themes that thwarted long-standing conventions in country music: the lyrics insulted country radio; the gendered roles of the characters in the song contradicted those of the performers; and the protagonist's journey derailed one of the core myths of the genre. In order to reconcile those unconventional and contradictory traits, one must contextualize the song within a complex and sophisticated songwriting tradition upon which country music has long relied. In that tradition, the form of the song and its compositional craft become functional parts of its storyline, and with that understanding of the song's form, the apparent paradoxes resolve into some of the main tropes that define the country genre.

Country music has long employed a consistent catalog of themes, topics, and references, both textual and musical, to help identify it as distinct from other popular musical genres. The textual themes have been explored by scholars and parodied by critics, as well as used by songwriters as source material for self-referential and ironic compositions. Musical themes and melodic motives have likewise been traced throughout country's history, becoming part of the language through which musicians communicate and taking on roles as musical signifiers. Yet within the craft of songwriting, a third and generally overlooked contributor to country music's identity is the formal structure, both musical and poetic, in any given song. These structural elements, consisting of the formal design of the composition, the poetic devices employed, and the melodic-harmonic rendering of those sectional divisions, determine how the textual themes are presented to the listener, and more importantly, how the listener receives, parses, and comprehends the song.

In recent decades, country songwriters have used similar compositional, literary, formal, and poetic devices in different songs to present the same types of narratives. For the astute listener, an intuitive grasp of a song's meaning arises not only from text and melody but also from the specific presentation of that story through the song's form. In these instances, the ways in which a story is told are arguably as important as the story's basic themes. The notion of these combinations of textual narratives and formal, musical designs, where the two aspects of the song reinforce each other, generates a useful analytical model and is herein identified as a "narrative paradigm."

One of the most common narrative paradigms is defined here as the "Time-Shift narrative," a combination of poetic devices, formal structures, and stylistically normative harmonic elements that together project the segmentation of and passage of time. In its most familiar deployment, a Time-Shift narrative is interwoven with one of the central tropes in country music, namely the celebration of the human life cycle from birth through death and, finally, spiritual redemption. Songs that use a Time-Shift narrative paradigm are thus related by both theme and form within an inclusive song-family, which, in turn, helps reinforce country music's distinct identity. Analyses of several representative songs that employ this narrative paradigm illustrate its role within the larger body of country repertory. Finally, application of these analytic approaches to the Dixie Chicks' recording of "Long Time Gone" offers a compelling illustration of how songwriters and artists alike employ these narrative paradigms to simultaneously affirm their "belonging" to country music and distinguish themselves as unique within that genre.

THE THEMES OF COUNTRY MUSIC

In 1974, outlaw country legend David Allan Coe enumerated and parodied the topical content of a "perfect country and western song" when he recorded Steve Goodman's composition, "You Never Even Call Me by My Name."[1] Before its final, heavily satirical verse, Coe launches into a spoken monologue: "Well, a friend of mine named Steve Goodman wrote that song. And he told me it was the perfect country and western song. I wrote him back a letter and I told him it was not the perfect country and western song because he hadn't said anything at all about mama, or trains, or trucks, or prison, or gettin' drunk. Well, he sat down and wrote another verse . . ." Coe then sings:

> Well, I was drunk the day my mama got out of prison
> And I went to pick her up in the rain
> But before I could get to the station in my pickup truck
> She got run'd over by a damned old train . . .

Fans cheer at this avowed insider's tongue-in-cheek enumeration of the supposedly required country topics, but this verse only tangentially refers to a central, underlying theme addressed in the genre—family relationships—and omits any overt reference to one of the philosophical foundations on which country music relies, specifically an Evangelical understanding of human existence. While trains and rain and pick-ups and prison are unquestionably topical signifiers of the genre, family and faith form another key strand, woven throughout country's texts.

"Country music holds no attraction for those who do not want to be reminded of where they come from, where they are, or where they are likely to be going," states communications scholar Jimmie N. Rogers, and in the context of country music, that final destination is the afterlife, conceived in a Christian format of heaven/hell (1989, 163).[2] Rogers catalogued the dominant themes in country's lyrics, and while his findings tout the overwhelming presence of songs about romantic love ("hurtin' love," "cheatin' love," "happy love"),

1 Coe's recording contains a number of intertextual references, including the backup singers' echoes of "Hello, hello," that quote the famous backup quartet behind Faron Young's recording of Willie Nelson's "Hello Walls."

2 In his argument, Rogers also cites Gritzner 1978.

his work also motivated further literary analysis of the genre.[3] Although these explorations of topics and themes divorced themselves from any examination of repertory's musical elements including song form, harmonic progression, and melodic construction, they present compelling evidence that spiritual redemption is one of the most common themes. Only a few songs confront this philosophical frame of reference directly (musing about "Hillbilly Heaven" in one form or another), but even those that focus on secular side of life do so from a similar vantage point: honky tonk music relies on the Sunday-morning remorse for one's wrong-doings and wild living to counter the devil-may-care attitude of Saturday night revelry where working-class woes are washed away with a cold beer and hot dance floor.[4] Furthermore, constant use of a church as image and metaphor underpins the genre, down to the music's figurative residence in the oft-mentioned "Mother Church" of country music, the Ryman Auditorium, home of the Grand Ole Opry radio program from 1943 until 1974.[5] Finally, southern gospel and country have long nurtured cross-pollination of repertory, performance style, and artists.

Along with its grounding in a particular theological perspective, country music and the culture in which it thrives embrace a multigenerational community, which is then reflected in the songs' texts. The characters that inhabit country songs range from infants, rebellious youth, struggling parents and hard-working adults to wise elders playing checkers on the front porch and cooking up Sunday supper, and that interaction of generations mirrors the demographics of the broad fan base who adopt this music as their own. Cultural practices such as partner dancing (two-stepping) are frequently taught from parent to child, and performed in a multi-generational setting, as are instrumental and vocal performance skills.[6] Country nightclubs feature a wider range of ages among patrons than do the nightclubs in most other styles of popular music.[7] And the only one of the four themes identified by Rogers that is not based on adult romance is, notably, the mundane aspects of daily life centered around a family's interactions, a common topic in current radio hits.[8]

Artists' careers exploit this multigenerational, family-centered focus as a means of establishing credibility in the genre: for instance, legendary performer Garth Brooks had an enormous hit with "Two of a Kind, Workin' on a Full House," which celebrated a growing family (two parents and a house full of children). When his career needed a boost, Brooks brought his then-wife Sandy on stage during a homecoming Grand Ole Opry performance to announce

3 Significant contributions to this area of study include Fillingim 2003, Ellison 1995, Rogers 1989, Ching 2001, Rogers and Williams 2000, Fox 1992, and Fox 2004.

4 "I Dream of a Hillbilly Heaven," also called "I Dreamed of a Hillbilly Heaven," by Hal Southern and Eddie Dean, has been recorded by several prominent artists since 1954, including Tex Ritter, Marty Stuart, Dolly Parton, and Bill Anderson. The roll call of country stars who reside in this imagined paradise changes from version to version. Other songs, like "If Heaven Ain't A Lot Like Dixie," recorded by Hank Williams, Jr., swear that the southern, rural idealism portrayed in many country songs is everything they hope heaven will be.

5 The auditorium's wooden pews and physical design led to its religious moniker (Ellison 1995). In the past few years, special home-coming broadcasts of the Opry and other sentimentally driven concerts have been housed in the Ryman.

6 These practices of parents teaching children to dance, and youth developing their skills in familial settings and local country music venues is discussed in Neal 2004. Similar descriptions are found in Fox 2004. The tradition of including children in family bands dates to the earliest country recording artists, including the Stonemans, and continues to the present day.

7 Personal field notes from research in nightclubs in California, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, 1993–2006.

8 A short list of representative, recent recordings that are based on this topical theme includes Lonestar, "Front Porch Looking In"; Darryl Worley, "Awful, Beautiful Life"; Phil Vassar, "Just Another Day in Paradise"; the pervasive presence of Mama in country lyrics is an old tradition, as is the prominent role of Grandpa as source of wisdom, comfort, and stability (as in The Judds' recording of "Grandpa (Tell Me 'Bout the Good Old Days)."

the impending arrival of his third daughter. His fans loved the parallels of biography and art and their commonalities with the core themes of the genre.[9]

The life cycle of birth, maturation, adulthood, aging, death, and afterlife, watched over by a Christian God is celebrated in almost all domains of country music's culture, and provides one key contribution to the construction of the Time-Shift narrative paradigm. But the integration of this narrative theme with a particular model of form, poetic structure, and harmonic structure as pertains to the realization of that form comprises a significant development in country songwriting.

SONG FORM AND THE TIME-SHIFT NARRATIVE PARADIGM

Contemporary country songs unfold in sections according to various formal norms that are widely understood and discussed in popular music analysis. As with all musical form, these models rely on both similarity and difference of text, melody, and harmony to delineate identifiable and discrete sections of a song. Within the conventions of popular songwriting, different song sections carry different rhetorical functions, and the most common formal models are essential contributors to the concept of narrative paradigms.

While musicians and theorists alike frequently use the same vocabulary for analyzing a song's form, the meaning of any given term differs (sometimes widely) from author to author. For purposes of this analysis, I have adopted terminology from trade manuals used within the community of country songwriters because those usages both reflect and influence the writers' craft.[10] Definitions are briefly rehearsed here for the basic terms of song form—verse, chorus, bridge, pre-chorus, and refrain—regarding both their musical and textual identities and their narrative function.[11]

The mere act of labeling sections of a song is little more than a rote exercise, one that is easily and frequently taught to undergraduate students of popular music. In "Form in Rock Music," for instance, John Covach lays out the procedure for an intended audience of theory students, and most manuals on songwriting included a chapter on how to identify a song's form.[12] What becomes relevant to the present analyses is not the mere label of a section as explained in those numerous sources, but rather the compositional potential that arises from the interaction of form and textual themes in a particular narrative. In his discussion of basic form and design in pop-rock music, Walter Everett proposes that "[m]uch more remains to be discovered, I think, in the design and structure of the non-expansive pop song . . ." (2000, 272). Although the connections of formal design and text-painting that Everett presents are compelling, the idea of a narrative paradigm extends further by relating the use of

9 Feiler recounts Brooks's announcement (1998, 39). "Two of a Kind, Workin' on a Full House" (by Bobby Boyd, Warren Haynes, and Dennis Robbins) appears on Brooks 1990.

10 The sources on which this approach to song form is most heavily based are Williams 1997, Williams 2005, and Perricone 2000. Williams's book (in either edition) is commonly used by songwriters working in Nashville; Perricone's book is a compilation of course notes from Berklee College of Music, where many current Nashville songwriters were educated. These texts differ most notably different from more traditional music-theoretic studies of form in their use of the term "refrain" to identify a single line of text, usually the title of the song, which can appear in either a verse or a chorus, and in the identification of pre-choruses and bridges. Perricone's book also uses the term "transitional bridge" where I use pre-chorus, and "primary bridge" where I use bridge.

11 Other sections include the intro to a song, the tag, which is the repetition of the final line or couplet of a song as a gesture of finality, the outro, which is the instrumental play-out after the final song section, and the concept that any section, albeit typically a verse, can be present as an instrumental solo. The term "outro" is adopted here as a distinct section, which, much like an intro, carries a practical performative function in radio air-play for fade-outs and talk-overs.

12 Citron 1985, Braheny 1988, Bolte 1984, Pattison 1991, Josefs 1996, Davis 1985, and Davis 1988 all include a section or chapter on form and terminology.

particular forms with core themes in ways that help define the country genre.

As applied in these analyses, a verse is a section of a song with a fixed melodic and harmonic identity and whose text advances the basic plot. A verse can be either harmonically open or closed; subsequent verses retain melodic, harmonic, and poetic structure, allowing for embellishments and elaborations, but employ new texts that further advance the storyline.[13] A chorus is a section of a song whose text reflects statically on the main point of the song, supported by fixed melody and harmony. A chorus is harmonically closed; most published definitions of a chorus state that subsequent instances of the chorus retain the same text and melody in combination;[14] hence, the chorus's text must continue to be relevant after the song's plot has progressed through additional verses. However, in practice, the chorus's text in contemporary country songs frequently changes from one appearance to the next, creating formal sections that are best defined through their rhetorical function of reflection and supported by musical intensification and harmonic closure, rather than any simplistic labeling of text/melody recurrence. A bridge is the third core section of a song, and is defined as a unit that provides a point of contrast both textually and musically, frequently exploring the subdominant harmonic area or other flat-side keys, and offering an alternative outlook on the storyline with a harmonically open ending (typically a half cadence). Song forms are constructed from these building blocks in various normative ways, the most common of which are verse-chorus models (with or without the presence of a bridge) and verse-verse-bridge-verse models, which are identified as a Standard Song Form model (from the Tin Pan Alley compositional tradition) and are distinguished by their lack of a distinct chorus section.[15]

Falling outside the core units of verse, chorus, and bridge, and elaborating normative song forms, a pre-chorus is a brief passage that precedes a chorus, typically a couplet set over four or eight measures of music, functioning as a musical and textual launch of the chorus. Pre-choruses are often extended pre-dominant to dominant progressions, concluding with a dramatic half cadence and harmonic interruption, leading some writers to describe the sections as "ramps" or "climbs" to represent their musical-rhetorical function.[16] In keeping with contemporary writers on popular music, the term "refrain" in these analyses refers not to a complete 32-bar chorus (a common usage of the term in texts on the Tin Pan Alley and Broadway traditions), but rather to a single line of text that contains the memorable hook of the song, usually the title, and reappears multiple times, often housed in several different sections of the song.[17]

When these song forms interact with textual, thematic, and poetic devices to enhance the telling of the story, and when the same relationships emerge in multiple songs, narrative paradigms emerge. For instance, there are a large

13 "Advancing a storyline" does not require that the song have an action-oriented plot, but rather that the song's content move to new situations, considerations, or information.

14 Everett, for instance, describes a chorus as having an "unchanging set of lyrics for each hearing" (2000, 272).

15 The Standard Song Form model, or AABA structure, was enthusiastically adopted by country songwriters in the 1950s Nashville Sound era from the tradition of Tin Pan Alley writing, where the 32-bar choruses of popular songs were composed in an AABA format. Blues models and strophic forms are not discussed here because they do not relate to the narrative paradigms that are the focus of these analyses.

16 Webb 1998 uses "lead-in' "; Davis 1985 uses "climb"; Perricone 2000 uses "transitional bridge." Among music theorists, there exists some debate over whether or not a pre-chorus can precede a bridge or be present in a song without a chorus. In the common songwriting practices of contemporary country music, those usages do not occur and therefore are not explored here.

17 Analyses of popular song from the Tin Pan Alley era, including Forte 1995, commonly use "refrain" to denote the 32-bar chorus section of the song that is the well-known part and is often performed without its accompanying verse(s).

number of songs where rapid, rhythmic declamation of text is enhanced by poetry that is saturated with internal rhymes. The result might be described as a type of patter song in the comic tradition made famous by Gilbert and Sullivan. In country music, this approach to musical and poetic form frequently sets lyrics about obsessive attraction or burgeoning infatuation, where the excited, rhyming chatter of the singer expresses the exuberant emotion of the protagonist.[18] Another narrative paradigm could be defined to represent the narrative technique of implied conversation, where the song's lyrics feature only half of the dialogue and the audience infers the rest. This narrative paradigm is particularly compelling in country music where personal connections between singer and listener are part of the music's appeal, because the listener becomes an active participant in the song through the inference of the omitted dialogue.[19] A third example of a narrative paradigm, and the one to which formal attention is directed for these analyses, is the Time-Shift paradigm.

The Time-Shift paradigm took root in country beginning in the mid-1980s as the country music industry underwent a rapid and far-reaching transformation toward more commercially aware songwriting. It features three components: first, the presence of a verse-chorus song form, with or without a bridge, and with or without a pre-chorus; second, a sequence of verses that center on the multigenerational life-cycle and attention to family in chronologically distinct episodes; and third, a reinterpretation of the chorus's text and meaning in each iteration.

In the interaction between song form and theme, the Time-Shift narrative overlays brief episodes or snap-shots from the characters' lives on successive verses of a song so that the narrative covers several different periods within the human life-cycle. Each subsequent verse's distinct episode follows the previous one chronologically: the first verse might depict childhood, the second, adulthood, and the third, either old age or the after-life. Meanwhile, the recurring chorus maintains its same reflective role throughout the song, but as the chorus's text returns after subsequent verses, that text's meaning is enhanced, inflected, or even dramatically changed by the context that the preceding verse creates. Thus, the song's structural form and story inextricably merge and reinforce the core themes, both textual and musical, of country music.

Sawyer Brown's recording of "The Walk," epitomizes this narrative paradigm in practice: the song unfolds in three verses, each followed by the same chorus (Sawyer Brown 1991). By the end of the song, three generations in a family have appropriated the same lines of text in new settings and with new meanings. The first verse depicts a little boy walking with his father down the driveway on his way to the first day of school. In the chorus, the father encourages him:

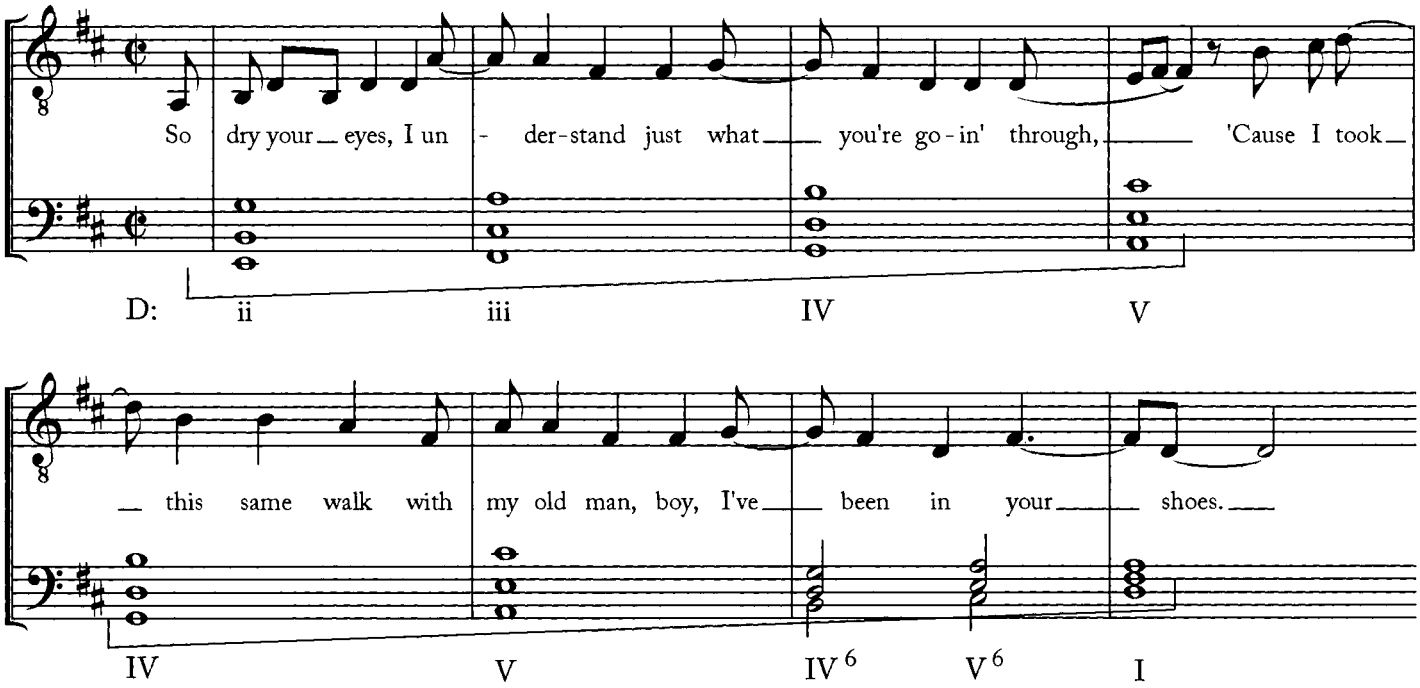
> I took this walk you're walking now, boy
> I've been in your shoes
> You can't hold back the hands of time
> It's just something you've got to do
> So dry your eyes, I understand just what you're going through
> 'Cause I took this same walk with my old man, boy
> I've been in your shoes.

Within a song whose bass line otherwise sits on the roots of the primary triads, the "walk" is set via a simple "walking" bass line that rises from $\hat{2}$ to $\hat{1}$ under the end of the chorus, with the harmonic structure, bass, and vocal line sketched in Example 1.[20] The melodic/harmonic structure, like the

18 Examples of the patter song narrative paradigm include John Michael Montgomery, "Be My Baby Tonight" (by Richard Fagan and Ed "G. E." Hill); Josh Gracin, "Nothin' to Lose" (by Marcel Chagnon and Kevin Savigar); Diamond Rio, "Unbelievable" (by Al Anderson and Jeffrey Steele); or John Michael Montgomery, "Sold! (The Grundy County Auction Incident)" (by Richard Fagan and Robb Royer), where an auctioneer's patter is the inspiration for the infatuated singer's patter.

19 Examples of the "Implied Conversation" narrative paradigm are George Strait, "The Chair" (by Hank Cochran and Dean Dillon) and Alan Jackson, "Wanted" (by Charlie Craig and Alan Jackson).

20 All transcriptions in these analyses are the author's own, both of text and of music, and were done directly from recordings. Furthermore,



EXAMPLE 1. *Bass line as the "walk" in the chorus (time 0:53), "The Walk," by Mark Miller, © Zoo II Music.*

narrative form, of this mid-tempo ballad is typical of country music's style in the early 1990s, and deserves a brief word. The vocalist's free and continuous rhythmic syncopation conveys the tone of personal, intimate communication. The use of $\hat{3}$ over dominant harmonies, also common in the style, is sometimes a ghosted tone as the singer's voice trails upward from $\hat{2}$ into silence, and sometimes an added 6th to the dominant harmony. The band, however, seldom picks up these extended chord structures, relying instead on the basic triad in a technique that further sets apart the singer's narration as heartfelt and independent of the song's governance.

In the second verse of "The Walk," time has jumped forward a dozen years, and the father walks his now teenage son down the driveway as the young man leaves home; the hook line, "I've been in your shoes," again reminds listeners of the cyclic nature of familial relationships, and the chorus adopts a tone of wry wisdom. In the third verse, time has jumped forward three more decades, and the grown son leads his father away from his home one last time because the father can no longer care for himself. As the same chorus returns, the tone of the text is inflected with a gentle resignation; the strings swell in the orchestration with the tender emotion.

they are designed to convey specific aspects of the recording and are not representative of the entire performance ensemble.

In spite of the song's poignant effect on its fans, its sheer simplicity and clarity of form might deem it unworthy of music-theoretic comment, were it not for the ubiquity of this combined textual theme and song form in country music of the past few decades. The Time-Shift narrative, employed here where a parent guides a child through the different phases of life, appears in almost identical incarnations in Patty Loveless's recording, "How Can I Help You (To Say Goodbye)," George Strait's "The Best Day," and Conway Twitty's "That's My Job," to cite just a few.[21]

In one common variant, the Time-Shift narrative draws on the Christian conception of God as Father and of the after-life as a divine existence, thereby allowing a parent-child relationship to transfer to a divine-human relationship over the course of the song. In Ricky Van Shelton's "Keep It Between the Lines," not only does the chorus's text undergo a more pronounced change in meaning than in the previous examples, but the role of "father" transfers through two generations of a family and then adopts the theological meaning of "father" for the final verse (Shelton 1991). In the first verse, the protagonist learns to drive a car, coached by his father, who admonishes in the chorus, "Keep it between the lines." In the second verse, the protagonist has become a father himself, coloring pictures with his young son. The chorus's text allows the new father to offer the sage advice for the art project, "Keep it between the lines." The third verse completes the life cycle: the role of the advice-giving father is handed to God, and the protagonist prays:

> . . . Got down on my knees and I bowed my head
> I said, "Father, oh Father, I feel so alone
> Are you sure I can raise him with his mommy gone? . . .

The answer to his prayer is again the chorus, and as its text returns for the third time in the song, the advice for driving a car and coloring a picture gets a metaphorical interpretation as divine counsel. Not only has the Time-Shift narrative captured the multigenerational and cyclic nature of life, but it has tied that narrative to the recurring cycle of verse followed by chorus and to a larger pattern of human and divine parenthood on which the country genre has constructed its philosophical identity.

The Time-Shift narrative paradigm featuring the transference of father-son relationship to a God-human relationship contributes a significant identifying marker to the country genre. Another song that illustrates these commonalities is George Strait's "Love without End, Amen," which follows the same model (Strait 1990). The protagonist describes his relationship with his own father ("Let me tell you a secret about a father's love . . ."); he then becomes the father to his son, and finally, he closes the cycle by speaking as the son to a divine father. A trivial aspect of the musical arrangement enhances the narrative: prior to the third verse, where the text shifts to a divine-human relationship, a formulaic arranger's modulation lifts the song from D Major to E Major.[22] It is a long-standing cliché in popular music to modulate up by step or half-step prior to the last unit of a song (here a verse-chorus unit), but in this context, it also supports the subtle shift of focus to a new episode, literally in a different (heavenly) dimension. At the simplest level, the harmonic structure of the song contributes to the effective-

21 The appendix provides a representative list of Time-Shift country songs.

22 An over-used technique of musical arrangement is the insertion of an ascending, direct modulation, either by half- or whole-step, prior to the final unit of the song. These modulations are generally considered surface-level embellishments, although they occasionally relate in significant ways to the text of the song, as in the example discussed here and those explored in Everett 1997. In popular music analysis, a range of terms have been coined for the technique, including arranger's modulations (Josefs 1995, 94–97), truck driver's modulations (Everett 1997, 117–18, and especially, 151 n.18) after the metaphor of "shifting gears," and pump-up modulations (Ricci 2000, 130–32). Sayrs catalogues additional terms for the technique, including a "Barry Manilow" modulation, although of course the device is found in recordings far earlier than his (2003).

ness of the narrative paradigm, which, in turn, reinforces several basic themes of country music in a way that is instantly comprehended by the stylistically aware audience.

CYCLES OF TIME

In a Time-Shift narrative, the subtle changes that a chorus's meaning undergoes each time it returns give way to another variant in songwriting craft. Although one often finds the term "chorus" defined as a song-section that retains the same text and music in each iteration, contemporary songwriters frequently construct a chorus that reappears with the same rhetorical function and the same musical setting, but with a modified text. The result is a compositional technique that adheres to the norms of song form expected by any listener schooled in country's traditions, yet simultaneously accommodates the commercial sophistication of the 1990s' cross-over country scene. Sectional repetition and familiarity of form are essential in order for the audience to parse the song and comprehend it within the style of the genre; however, variation is likewise essential to create a sense of through-composition and present a more complete or far-reaching narrative journey. The songwriting technique of a modified or shifting chorus offers the best of both worlds. Within the realm of popular song writing, this development was radical, yet it has escaped broad recognition or discussion in any analytic literature.

This shifting-chorus approach is particularly useful in Time-Shift narratives because with it, each instance of the chorus can change not only in interpretive meaning, but also in literal meaning, thereby enhancing the song's options to re-package the same refrain in different ways. For instance, Tim McGraw's recording of "Don't Take the Girl" employs all of the narrative techniques discussed thus far, and adds the additional feature of a shifting chorus (McGraw 1994). The song is based on verse-chorus repetition yet features through-composed variety: to the listener, it remains familiar in its form but continuously changing in its text.

"Don't Take the Girl's" three verses present three distinct episodes: Johnny as little boy, heading off on a fishing trip; Johnny as teenager out on a date, and Johnny as young father witnessing the birth of his son. In each of the three choruses, Johnny begs, "Don't take the girl," first to his father who is contemplating a co-ed fishing trip, second to a mugger who is threatening harm to his date, and third in a prayer to God for his wife's health in childbirth. The musical setting stays the same in each instance, but as shown in Example 2, the text of the chorus that leads up to the hook line (refrain) changes each time to accommodate Johnny's different pleadings.

In McGraw's song, an additional layer of cyclic interplay between text, musical composition, and form is present. The life-cycle of youth through maturity and new birth forms the foundation for the storyline, while the chorus reflects on each new segment of the narrative, behaving like a chorus because of its rhetorical function. Finally, the song's ending becomes its new beginning, a structural feature that closes and completes an endless circle of life in the guise of a musical composition. The third chorus concludes with a satisfactory authentic cadence (at 3:47 in the recording), which, according to normative performance practice, would be followed either by a short repetition of the title line as a tag, or by an instrumental outro from the band. Instead, the song literally starts over. The first verse began, "Johnny's daddy was taking him fishing/when he was eight years old," and following the final chorus, the listener hears once again, "Johnny's daddy was taking him fishing/when he was eight years old," after which the song simply stops, remaining structurally open and unresolved. To the listener, the son born to the protagonist in the third verse is now an eight-year-old boy going fishing with his daddy. Musically, the song is composed as an endless loop, where each son becomes the new father, raising his son.

This circular compositional strategy, which appears relatively frequently in country music, helps a song linger in its audience's memory: the song figuratively plays on and on as

1st Chorus (addressing his father, referencing neighborhood children)
(time 0:49)

"Take Jimmy Johnson, take Tommy Thompson
Take my best friend Bo
Take anybody that you want
As long as she don't go…
…Daddy, please *don't take the girl.*"

2nd Chorus (addressing a stranger, referencing his girlfriend)
(time 2:04)

"Take my money, take my wallet
Take my credit cards…
…But please *don't take the girl.*"

3rd Chorus (addressing God, referencing his wife in childbirth)
(time 3:19)

"Take the very breath you gave me
Take the heart from my chest
I'll gladly take her place if you'll let me
Make this my last request…
…God, please *don't take the girl.*"

EXAMPLE 2. *"Don't Take the Girl," by Craig Martin and Larry W. Johnson, © SONY/ATV Tree Publishing and Warner-Tamerlane Publishing. Excerpts from three iterations of the chorus, illustrating the shifting-chorus technique and reinterpretation of the hook line.*

its story cycles around again. In most instances, the implied, endless continuation of the song corresponds to the endless continuation of heartbreak (as in Jones 1974), where the singer's abject misery finds no dissipation, or where the greater philosophical questions such as the meaning of life prompt timeless musings (as in Hill 1998). Although those usages are memorable and striking, in combination with the Time-Shift narrative and the larger life-cycle themes, this compositional strategy generates a reflexive quality within a song: one person's lifetime gives way to the next generation through new birth, a cycle that is mirrored in the literal structure of the song, which ends by becoming its own beginning.

LISTENERS' PARTICIPATION

The Time-Shift narrative appears frequently enough in contemporary country songwriting that fans not only readily comprehend the story line of these songs but also can predict the narrative journey of a song while listening to it. In its musically elegant instances, the Time-Shift paradigm lets fans anticipate and savor how the chorus will be reinterpreted by each new episode. On the other hand, when executed with little finesse, the narrative paradigm offers only a set of predictable puns, which elicit something closer to exasperation from listeners as they anticipate the ending.

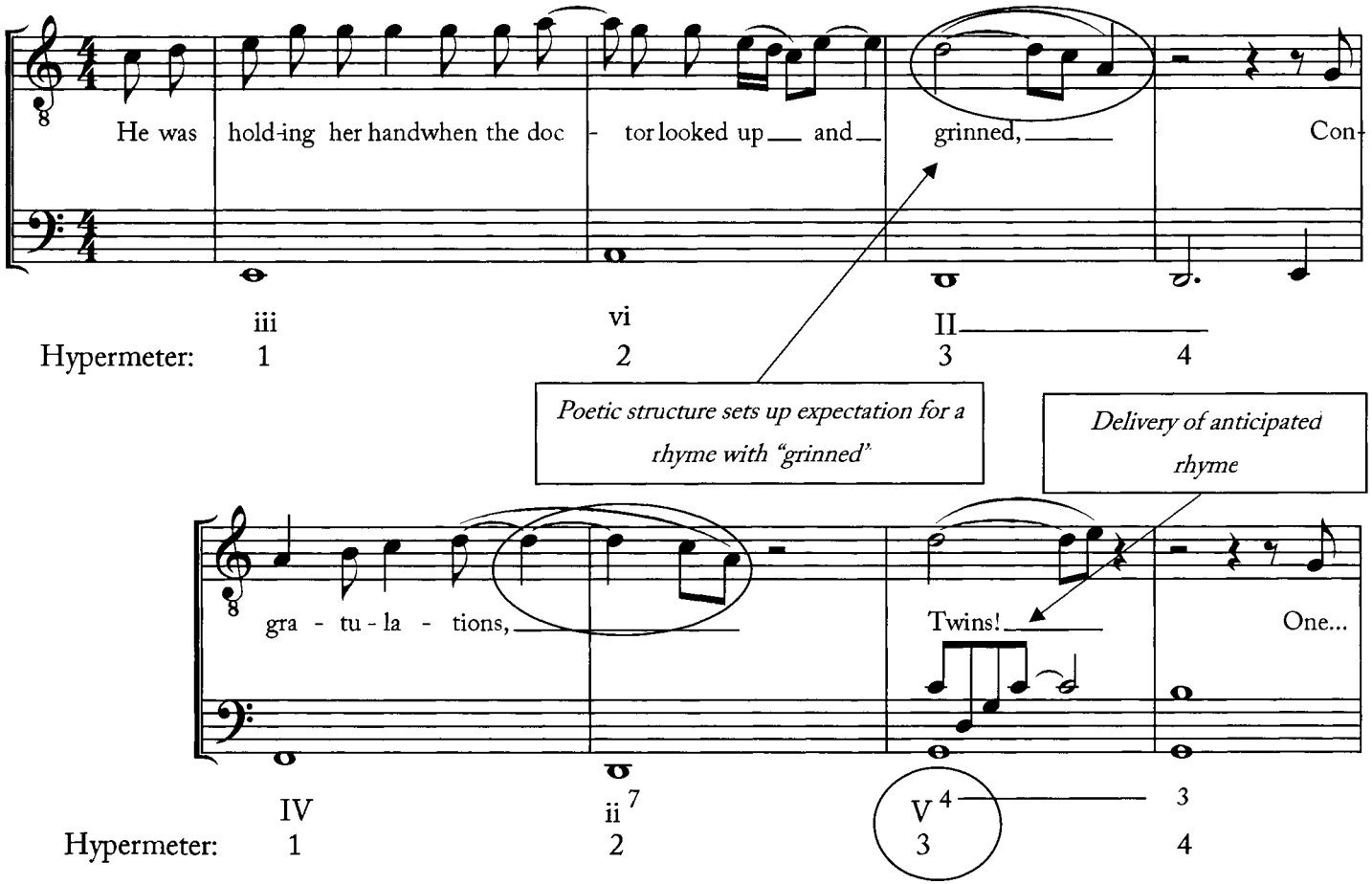
Collin Raye's hit "One Boy, One Girl" uses the Time-Shift pattern to a beautiful effect, telling the story of a young boy and girl who fall in love, and whose world seems to contain only the passion of "one boy and one girl/two hearts beating wildly" (Raye 1995). The second verse depicts their wedding day, again focusing on "one boy and one girl." The song uses an eight-bar bridge instead of a third verse to present the third episode in the narrative. In this section, the bride and groom become young parents, and here the narrative paradigm connects song form, storyline, and detailed poetic structure into a single moment of revelation that rewards the listeners' anticipation.

Example 3 provides a sketch of the melody and bass line for the bridge. Four-bar hypermeter is the norm in this song, as are vocal cadences on strong hypermetric beats. "He was holding her hand when the doctor looked up and grinned," announces the first phrase. The second phrase continues, "Congratulations . . ." At that moment, the vocal line has echoed the melodic gesture D-C-A of the previous phrase (circled on Example 3), and with that apparent melodic closure, stops. This sets up a dramatic pause in the narrative. The listener may wonder, Is the baby a boy or a girl? but here poetic and metric structures intervene by predicting either a rhyme or assonance for "grinned."[23] During this pause, the listener has time to connect the dots between the refrain's one boy, one girl, and an anticipated near-rhyme for "grinned," and the song confirms the listener's easy prediction of "twins!" A complete reinterpretation of the song's title is accomplished as the next chorus begins with the lines, "One boy and one girl," which no longer refers to the lovers but rather to the newborns of the next generation.

The complete correlation between the larger themes of country music, the celebration of multigenerational existence in the cycle of life, and the narrative paradigm that reinforces those elements helped make "One Boy, One Girl" a hit. But when the reinterpretation or punning of the hook is executed with less sophistication, the same predictability undercuts a song's success. Such was the case with Blake Shelton's recording of "All Over Me" (Shelton 2001).[24] The hook line of the chorus proclaimed, "She was all over me," and the

23 The employment of assonance or near-rhymes in country songwriting has been commonplace for decades as a means of mitigating the artificial narrative effects of too many precise rhymes. Near-rhymes allow the lyrics to straddle poetic art and vernacular speech—the effect of well-structured rhyming patterns is a core part of the metric and rhythmic identity of a song, but at the same time, the imprecise nature of those rhymes, often merely assonance, let the songs sound like informal conversational dialogue.

24 Fans of country radio will recall that the song made a respectable showing on the *Billboard* charts, reaching number 18, but it was also the third (and last) single released from his debut album and limped along mostly on the name recognition of the newfound star.



EXAMPLE 3. *"One Boy, One Girl," by Mark Alan Springer and Shaye Smith, © EMI Blackwood Music, Inc., and Zomba Songs. Bridge (time 2:48), where audience's comprehension of the narrative paradigm allows them to predict the song's reinterpretation of the title line.*

blatantly obvious potential for a dual interpretation (physical affection on the one hand and emotional dismissal on the other) left little delight for the audience's anticipation. Rather than savoring the development of the relationship from one stage to the next, the listener was resigned to the inevitable denouement.

Country fans have also responded well to Time-Shift songs that connect the song's narrative to the singer's biography. An artist's personal relationship with a song's text has long been expected within the country genre, and the singer's believable, first-person experience is part of the codes that comprise country's notion of authenticity. The Time-Shift narrative provides a particularly compelling device for sharing autobiographical stories with the listener, as illustrated by Kathy Mattea's "Where've You Been" (1989).[25] Mattea made public the song's back-story: her husband Jon Vezner composed it about the lives of his own grandparents. Two young lovers meet (verse 1), live out their lives as a devoted married couple (verse 2), and finally, endure the pangs of separation when the infirmities of old age part them. Here, the cyclic nature of the story, the eloquent evolution of the chorus's meaning after each verse, and personal telling of a family story imbued the song's hook line with the emotional poignancy of a private diary. Mattea and Vezner, too, will grow old, the listener thinks, and, as told in the song, find themselves repeating the cycle of their grandparents.

Tanya Tucker's popular recording of "Two Sparrows in a Hurricane" adheres to the same plot development—youthful love, the stresses of middle-age, and the tenderness at the end of life—with a similar emotional tone. An eloquent parallelism appears in the lyrics that enhances the cyclic nature of the narrative: the first verse describes two young lovers, "She's fifteen *and he's barely driving a car,*" while the last verse describes the couple as senior citizens, "She's eighty-three *and he's barely driving a car*" (Tucker 1992). Mattea's and Tucker's songs, both excellent examples of the Time-Shift paradigm, resonate with the core ideology of country music, presented in such a way that the song's form explicitly informs the telling of the story.

25 Vezner won numerous awards for this composition, including NSAI songwriter of the year and CMA song of the year.

VARIANTS

Within the domain of country songwriting, there are several variants of the Time-Shift narrative that preserve only certain features of the model while altering others. One variation on the paradigm transposes the basic textual elements from a Time-Shift narrative onto a Standard Song form (an AABA form without a distinct chorus). In these instances, a single refrain becomes the point of reflection that changes meaning from verse to verse. Ty Herndon's "A Man Holdin' On (To a Woman Lettin' Go)" uses this variant while also allowing ambiguity as to whether or not the characters portrayed in each successive verse are the same people (Herndon 1998).

In Herndon's recording, a series of poignant episodes appear as verses, each punctuated by the song's title. As illustrated in Example 4, without a chorus to occupy precious minutes in the song, there is time for four instead of the typical three different episodes, while the hook line, "a man holdin' on to a woman lettin' go," refers successively to a sexual encounter, a break-up, a father watching his daughter marry, and an elderly wife passing away. A short, two-line bridge, ending on a structural half cadence, appears twice, creating a complete song form of [AABA-Instrumental-ABA].[26] Predictably, an arranger's modulation lifts the song

26 On amateur websites that list song lyrics, this type of bridge is frequently mislabeled as a chorus, simply because it returns with the same music and text in tact and because some fans are confused by the idea that a contemporary, popular song might not have a chorus. Its harmonic structure, brevity, and rhetorical function within the context of the song all clearly relegate it to the role of B-section or Bridge. With regard to the complete song's form, the substitution of an instrumental section for a verse is quite common.

1st Verse:
Two young lovers with their bodies on fire
...
A man holding on to a woman letting go.

2nd Verse:
There's a man with a bottle on the other side of town
Swimming with a memory that he can't drown
...
Oh, a man holding on to a woman letting go.

Bridge

3rd Verse:
There's a daddy walking his daughter down the aisle
...
A man holding on to a woman letting go

4th Verse:
In the Hill Valley Home there's a feeble old man
And he's holding on to a fragile old hand
And the angels are coming to carry her home
Now he's a man holding on to a woman letting go

Bridge

1st Verse:
Two young lovers with their bodies on fire
...
A man holding on to a woman letting go.

EXAMPLE 4. *"A Man Holdin' On (To a Woman Lettin' Go)," by Gene Dobbins, John Ramey, and Bobby Taylor, © Sixteen Stars Music and Horipro Entertainment Group/Recoup. Four individual episodes with reinterpreted refrain.*

from D Major to E Major prior to the last verse. Finally, the song closes a narrative loop by returning to its own beginning: after the fourth verse, the first verse repeats and begins anew the cycle.

Occasionally, a novelty song relies on the reinterpretation of a chorus without the presence of chronological episodes or the emphasis on the human life-cycle. While this compositional approach runs farther afield from the Time-Shift narrative paradigm than any of the songs previously discussed, the craftsmanship in these songs is admirable for the same structural reasons as in the Time-Shift songs. The most famous instance of this reinterpretation is George Jones's rollicking recording of "The One I Loved Back Then" where the chorus describes a coveted Corvette:

> Oh she was hotter than a two-dollar pistol
> She was the fastest thing around
> Long and lean every young man's dream
> She turned every head in town
> She was built, and fun to handle, son
> I'm glad that you dropped in
> She reminds me of the one I loved back then (Jones 1974).

Listeners find great pleasure in anticipating the second appearance of the chorus, where an impish twist in the narration re-casts the same text as a description of a woman, specifically the "brunette in [his] 'vette."

SONGWRITER'S CRAFT

The Dixie Chicks' "Long Time Gone" came from the pen of Darrell Scott, twice NSAI Songwriter of the year, whose craftsmanship draws on many established narrative paradigms in country music while simultaneously parodying those same models.[27] By both using and exploiting the common narrative paradigms of country music, particularly

27 Scott won the coveted Nashville Songwriters Association International award as songwriter of the year in 2000 and 2001; he also won the ASCAP award in 2002.

through manipulation of harmonic structure and song form, Scott has created a reputation for himself as a Nashville insider with an authentic country pedigree, yet paradoxically as an outsider free to comment through his compositions on the songwriting models that delineate the genre. "Long Time Gone's" use of the Time-Shift model illustrates both aspects of his work.

Scott's deft command of harmonic-textual interaction within a larger narrative framework is readily demonstrated by a novelty song he wrote and recorded for his first country album, *Aloha from Nashville.* "Title of the Song" is a lighthearted romp through the conventions of songwriting, whose lyrics outline the formal model of a stereotypical country song (Scott 1997). The text for the first verse recursively employs the very compositional devices it satirizes:

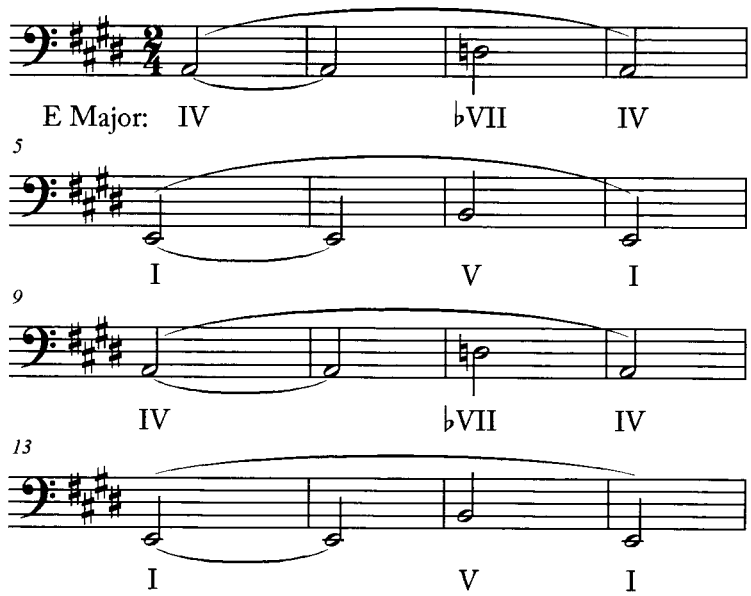
> First you get their attention, like "Hey look at me"
> Then you throw some chords around it, no more than three
> And you talk about love or love that's gone wrong
> Then you end it all off with the title of the song.

What may not be readily apparent to country listeners is the level of musical sophistication within this parody of formulaic songwriting. The humor lies barely below the song's perceptible surface: far more than three chords generate its harmonic language, and the metric and rhythmic structures of the song employ phrase expansions, overlaps, and hypermetric elisions that extend beyond the musical simplicity described in the song's text. At the same time, all the structural elements Scott uses are stock patterns in contemporary country songwriting—even in its phrase rhythm, the song is parodying the genre's conventions, which often break from the four-bar norm. Throughout the song, half-bar insertions extend phrases and manipulate cadences to control the ebb and flow of the music. For instance, Example 5 contains a sketch of the chorus's underlying prototype, a 16-bar unit with regular, symmetric harmonic rhythm and phrase structure. Example 6 is a sketch of the last half of the chorus as Scott performs it: the third line of the chorus featuring a phrase expansion with a hypermetric reinterpretation so that the first line of text cadences on a strong hypermetric pulse. The listener then expects the fourth line to follow the same expanded pattern so that the word "song" might arrive on a hypermetrically strong beat, but instead, the fourth line returns to a standard four-bar phrase structure, surprising the listener with its own regularity.

Although Scott's phrase rhythm in this chorus deviates from a square, 16-bar prototype, the pattern he uses is, in fact, extremely common in country music.[28] Similarly, the neighboring ♭VII harmony that prolongs the subdominant harmony in the first and third phrases, sketched in Example 7, is also part of the typical harmonic language of the style. If this song were not clearly situated in the country genre, one might puzzle over the potential relationships between A Major and E Major in the chorus, with few indications from that musical excerpt alone as to which is tonic. However, the introduction, verses, and extended outro all confirm a tonal center of E Major. That perception is reinforced by the strong propensity of country music to provide tonal closure at the end of a chorus, a tendency not shared in all styles of rock or other genres. Furthermore, in country music, the two most common uses of ♭VII are as a plagal extension (as here), and as a dominant expansion or substitute (found in this song's bridge), so the interpretation shown in Example 7 fits the style.[29]

28 The "strong-beat cadence structures" described here are discussed in detail in Neal 2000, 125–128, and the analyses that follow in that article illustrate several common hypermetric patterns and phrase constructions that match the one in Darrell Scott's recording.

29 Everett 2004 outlines a wider range of uses for ♭VII in rock music, but the two broad categories here account for the most common uses of the harmony in commercial country music, neither of which disrupt the underlying functionality of the style. Occasionally, country songs use one key for a verse, then modulate directly to the subdominant for the chorus (a verse in F Major, for instance, moves to a chorus in B♭ Major), such as Shania Twain's recording of "Up!" on *Up!* These, however, are

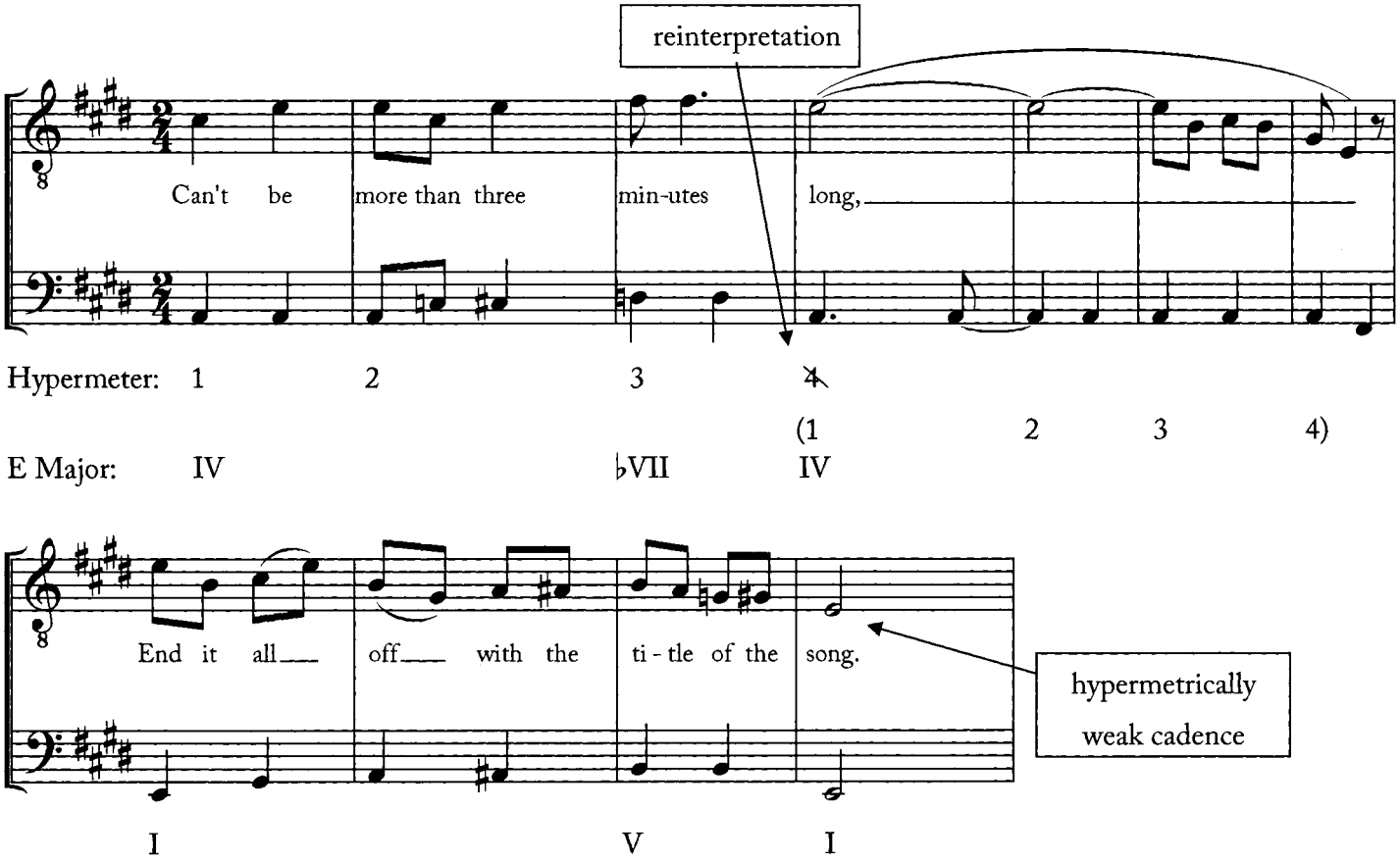


EXAMPLE 5. *Prototypical 16-bar chorus structure for Scott's "Title of the Song" (by Darrell Scott, © EMI April Music, Inc., and House of Bram), featuring four bar phrases, four bar hypermeasures, and a consistent harmonic rhythm.*

Example 8 is a transcription of the melody and harmonic structure of the bridge, which, after the verse-chorus-verse-chorus sections of "Title of the Song," presents a concise definition of its own role, "This here's the bridge . . ." By placing the entire song in the key of E Major, Scott set up a remarkably clever pun between text and harmony at the end of the bridge: as he recites the alphabet, "From A to B to C to D to E," he simultaneously jokes about connecting generic "point A" to "point B," while dictating the harmonic progression, IV to V to ♭VI to ♭VII, and a return to I (mm. 15–20), or chords whose roots are A, B, C, D, and E. The ascent through V–♭VI–♭VII as a dominant expansion is another common harmonic progression in this general style of songwriting, yet one more layer of stylistic references.

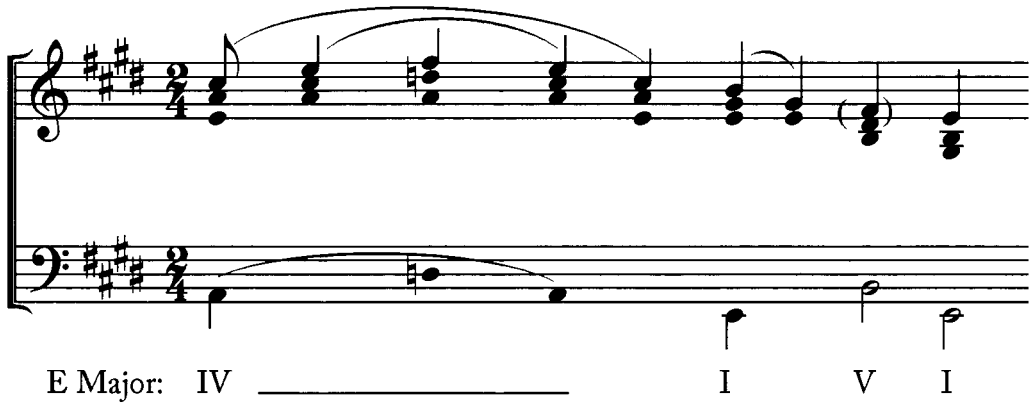
Throughout the bridge, drums, guitar, and bass mark the beginnings of hypermetric downbeats with strong accents, and the end of hypermetric units with characteristic upbeat patterns. Most compelling of all in this particular style are the harmonic changes, which emphasize the hypermetric structure. The graphic layout of Example 8 in hypermetric units (dotted lines) reflects these patterns. Most notably, in the fourth phrase, m 16 (circled on Example 8) is reinterpreted convincingly as a hypermetrically strong beat by the drums' and guitar's rhythmic gestures of preparation, by the arrival of the dominant, and by the singer's accentuation of

the exceptions and not representative of the core harmonic language of country music.



EXAMPLE 6. *"Title of the Song." Third and fourth lines of the chorus (time 0:28).*

the arrival. That bar initiates a new hypermeasure and harmonic ascent toward tonic. The apparent arrival of a half cadence (V, in m. 16) would typically signal the end of a bridge. However, the hypermetric reinterpretation and subsequent linear progression over eight measures (mm. 16–23) draw out the bridge's length to an unexpected 23 bars and return it to tonic, literally connecting B to E as the lyrics describe. Following the last phrase of the bridge, Scott responds to the song's climactic ascent in both harmony and drama by quipping, "Bring 'er down boys, bring 'er down," as the band dissipates the energy from the bridge and launches the third verse. In other words, the entire musical work operates as a country song about being a country song, textually, melodically, harmonically, and metrically.



EXAMPLE 7. *"Title of the Song." Harmonic structure, third and fourth lines of the chorus.*

"Title of the Song" is laced with musical quotations, most notably the fiddle player's borrowings from "Orange Blossom Special." During the play-off at the end of the song, the musicians' audible studio patter features an unrehearsed rendition of the traditional "Wabash Cannonball," made famous by both The Carter Family and Roy Acuff. Scott explained the entire song to me as follows:

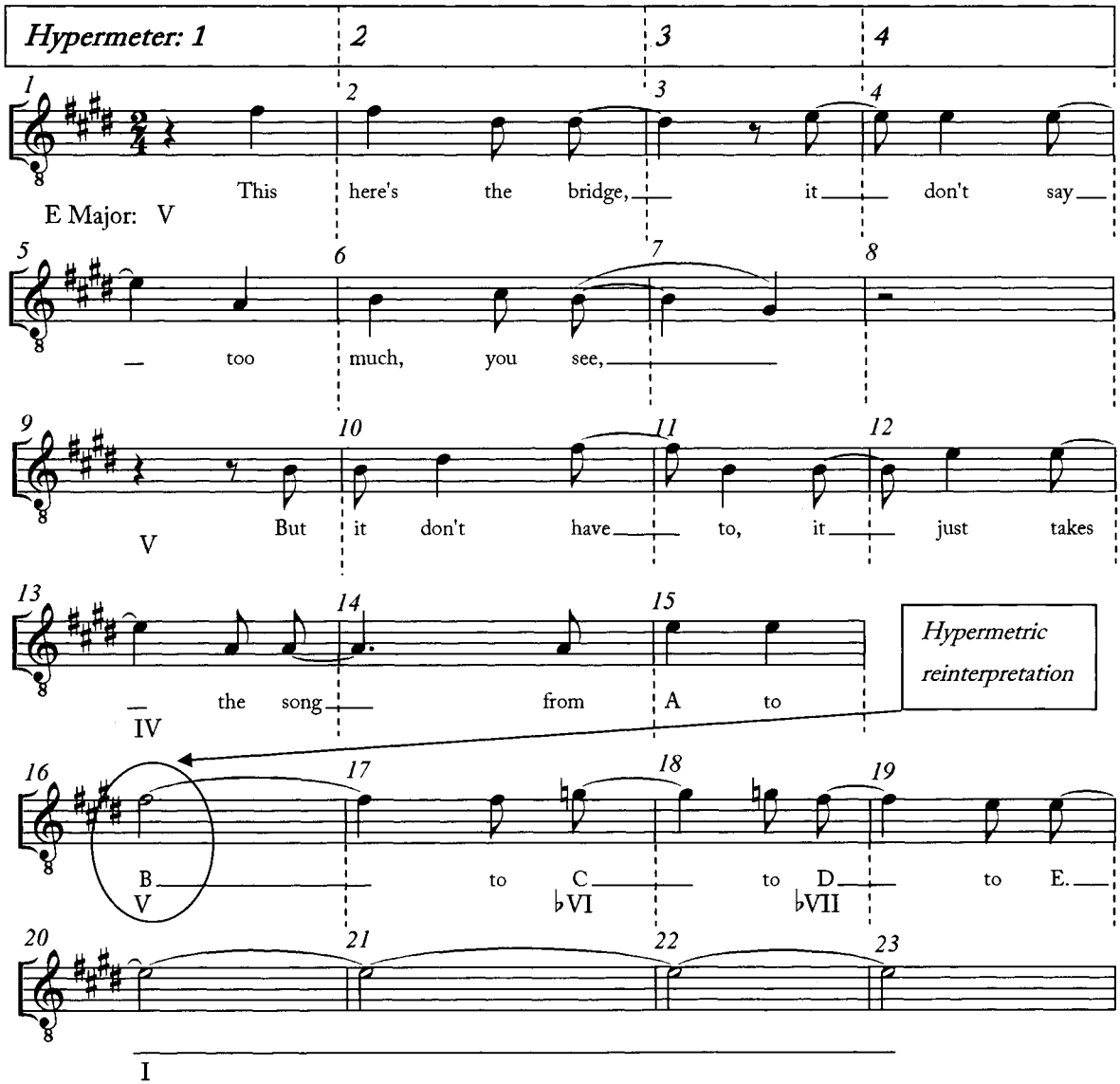
> ["Title of the Song" was] kind of telling the truth, . . . but kind of having fun with it. Totally just out of nowhere, [producer] Verlon Thompson . . . starts singing "Wabash Cannonball." And of course, I know it . . . or think I do. And we start, and you can hear that we're just fooling our way through it until we start laughing . . . I'm an *insider*, sort of. I have my pedigree of country music, you know. I guess it wouldn't matter if I didn't . . . (Scott 2003).[30]

Scott's self-identification as an "insider" acknowledges how steeped his music is in the traditions of country's past, repertory learned from his family's Kentucky roots, the years he spent as a teenager playing in his dad's honky tonk band in San Bernadino, California, and his careful study of the forms, narrative patterns, and structures that comprise country's musical language.[31] Indeed, he used the same songwriting techniques that are parodied in "Title of the Song" to write chart-topping hits for commercial country artists including Garth Brooks, Travis Tritt, and Sara Evans. But it is Scott's mastery of country's most common narrative paradigms that allows him to compose songs which are simultaneously entirely germane to the country genre and radically outside its conventions. In Scott's compositions, form becomes a functioning and intertextual part of the narrative, served by all of the musical elements:

> [At Tufts University,] the poet in residence was a guy named Philip Levine. He won the Pulitzer for poetry in 1995 . . . And so, studying with him and taking classes, that's what really turned my songwriting around. There's definitely [a difference between] my songwriting before school and after it. Because I no longer was chasing what sounded like country radio stuff, those sorts of predictable forms, although *I'm sure I still work in those forms that we'd all recognize, as verses, choruses, turnarounds, instrumentals, outros* . . . But largely, I'd say it was the lyrics that changed, where I found my own voice as a poet . . . And so suddenly I

30 In this and all subsequent interview quotations, emphasis is added to reflect the vocal inflections of the speaker.

31 Biographical details are drawn primarily from Scott 2004.



EXAMPLE 8. *"Title of the Song." Bridge structure (time 1:17) in with harmonic pun "A-B-C-D-E." Measure numbers refer only to the bridge.*

had songs that *instead of just a verse or chorus or a line* that sounded like, "That's really me;" I'd see entire songs (Scott 2004).

How Scott simultaneously worked within the typical formal structures of country and avoided "chasing . . . those sorts of predictable forms" is best illustrated through analysis of his composition, "Long Time Gone," which is constructed around a Time-Shift narrative paradigm.

LONG TIME GONE

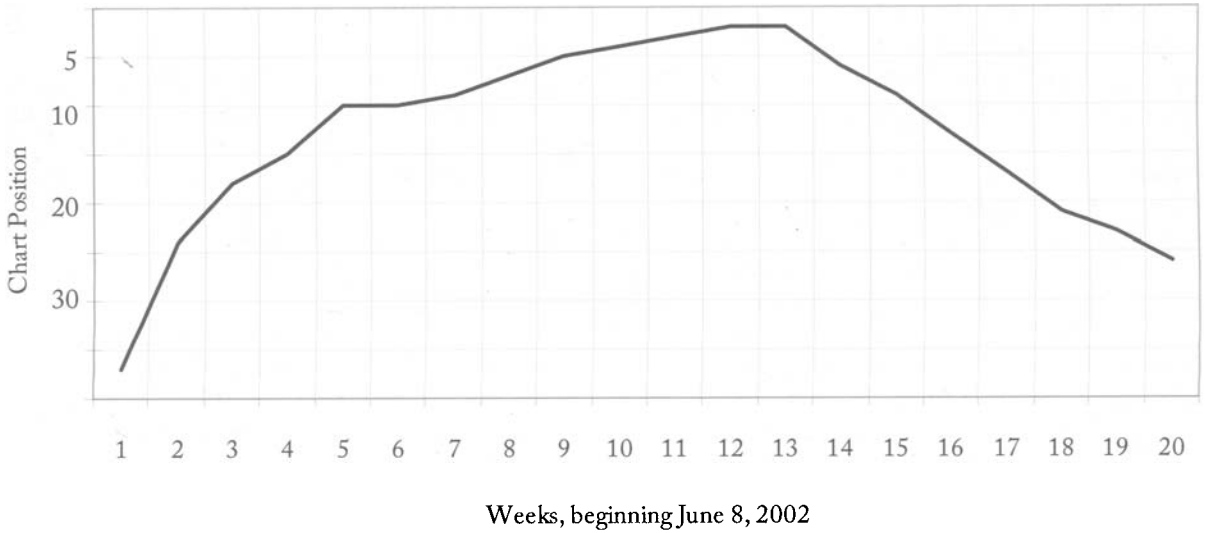
In 2002, when the Dixie Chicks finally ended their long absence from the recording studio, they released Scott's "Long Time Gone" to a flurry of media attention (Dixie Chicks 2002). As their album *Home's* first single, the song wove together a collection of apparent contradictions that won over the hearts of fans. It debuted on the *Billboard* "Hot Country Singles" chart June 8, 2002 and began an uncharacteristically rapid ascent. Example 9 graphs its residence on the chart, notable in an era when most songs lurk on the charts for months before cracking the Top 10. Part of the song's appeal was the Time-Shift narrative that recounts an essentially sacred journey in country music mythology. The tale follows an artist from rural beginnings to Nashville's seductive music scene and then back home where the roots of tradition grow deep.[32] The rural setting and deeply valued traditions of country music are an audible part of the song's basic groove and sonic fabric. An acoustic introduction brings in an infectious motive picked on a banjo, which is echoed by a fiddle as the rest of the band enters. A danceable Cajun groove rolls along under the entire song, with prominent roles for the string players throughout.[33]

In what Scott has called the song's "journey motif," the song follows the child of a former small-time tobacco farmer who observes the now-empty fields with resignation. The first episode paints a portrait of the family's simple and tired lives in that small town. In the second verse (second episode), the protagonist falls for Delia, pianist at the local church, but decides to chase bigger dreams as a country singer. He bravely sets out on a pilgrimage to Nashville (in the song's bridge), where the lure of the bright lights, call of the music, and celebrated mythical promise of stardom materialize only as false hopes and failure. The hard-scrabble existence of the struggling singer provokes a sarcastic dismissal of his dream, and he hocks his guitar and heads home. There (verse 3), he comes full circle to find contentment with Delia, watching "the children and the garden grow" and attending church every Sunday for his spiritual well-being. Validation of the couple's rural existence is completed when the singer and Delia listen to the radio and realize that the commercial country music that had seduced him to leave home in the first place was merely a soulless, hollow shell of its former incarnation.

The song's primary paradox appears in the last verse where the song levels bold accusations that commercial country radio has forgotten its roots and sold its soul, an irony overlooked by fans who sang along loudly, apparently ignoring the fact that they had learned the song from country radio. Another internal contradiction in the recording emerged when lead singer Natalie Maines kept the song's original text intact. Scott had written the lyrics with an implicitly male protagonist and cast his love interest as a woman. The audience heard Maines's female voice singing a male text, which disconnected the singer from the protagonist. Until the release of this album, it was extremely rare in mainstream country music for a singer to perform a song

32 Crain 2002 provides an account of the legal, personal, and corporate events that surrounded the making of *Home*.

33 The presence of strong Cajun influences in country music dates from the 1940s and is most notable in musical styles that developed in or near Louisiana, particularly for artists who played on KWKH's Lousiana Hayride, Shreveport's barndance (which began in 1948). Plenty of country hits in the 1980s and 90s featured those musical references, including "Down at the Twist and Shout," "Louisiana Saturday Night," and "Callin' Baton Rouge."



EXAMPLE 9. *"Long Time Gone," by Darrell Scott, © Chuck Wagon Gourmet Music and Famous Music, LLC. Billboard "Hot Country Singles" chart movement during its 20 weeks on the chart, from June 8, 2002 to October 19, 2002.*

voiced in the opposite gender because within the predominantly heterosexual mainstream country music fan scene, such a performance made it impossible to imagine the first-person believability of the singer's story.[34] Oddly, fans of this song either accommodated the relationship described in the song as mere friendship, or ignored the situation altogether.

The song's form, harmonic structure, and hypermetric structure are sketched in Example 10. The song is notated and charted here in a modified version of the Nashville Number System (NNS), employing Roman Numerals for harmonies instead of the NNS standard of Arabic Numerals. Each Roman Numeral represents one measure of music, except when bracketed; bracketed Roman Numerals represent multiple chords in one measure. Each line represents a single hypermeasure. Where phrase overlaps are marked, the circled chords merge to become a single measure of music. Pivot chords show two Roman Numerals for a single chord

34 Neither audiences nor critics picked up on the potential for a lesbian interpretation of the song's romance; in keeping with the most frequent tropes in contemporary commercial country music, the heterosexual interpretation of the romance persisted in the song's reception. There exists a thriving gay and lesbian country music scene, but it resides outside the domain of commercial radio and the mainstream Nashville industry. Perhaps the best-known example of a male artist singing a female song is Lyle Lovett's cover of Tammy Wynette's "Stand By Your Man" (by Wynette and Billy Sherrill), on *Lyle Lovett and His Large Band*. However, in that case, Lovett's version was obviously both a cover and a tribute—it kept the musical accompaniment identical to Wynette's recording—to a song so well known by the country fan community that no one could mistake it for Lovett's own. Also, "Stand By Your Man" never explicitly adopts the first-person voice ("I") as a woman. Instead, the woman is always "you" in the song, which allows Lovett to sing it as a sympathetic commentator.

and musical measure (i.e., the Bridge is 12 measures long). Chords marked as ♭VI and ♭VII are major triads built on lowered ♭$\hat{6}$ and ♭$\hat{7}$, while II♯ is a major triad built on $\hat{2}$.

The song employs a shifting chorus, so although the hook line "long time gone" appears twice in each chorus section, the rest of that section's text is modified from one iteration to the next. With its Time-Shift narrative paradigm, the song's hook line changes in interpretive meaning following each verse: "long time gone" describes the faded existence of the tobacco farm's heyday, the protagonist's physical and spiritual departure from the small town's church and the communal embrace it signifies, and finally a lament for the long-gone era of country music and the nostalgic idealism that repertory represents. The most famous excerpt in the song appears in the third verse, where an undisguised dig at commercial country radio puns the names of three country music icons, Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash, and Hank Williams:

> We listen to the radio to hear what's cookin'
> But the music ain't got no soul
> Now they sound tired, but they don't sound Haggard
> They got money but they don't have Cash
> They got Junior but they don't have Hank . . . (Dixie Chicks 2002).

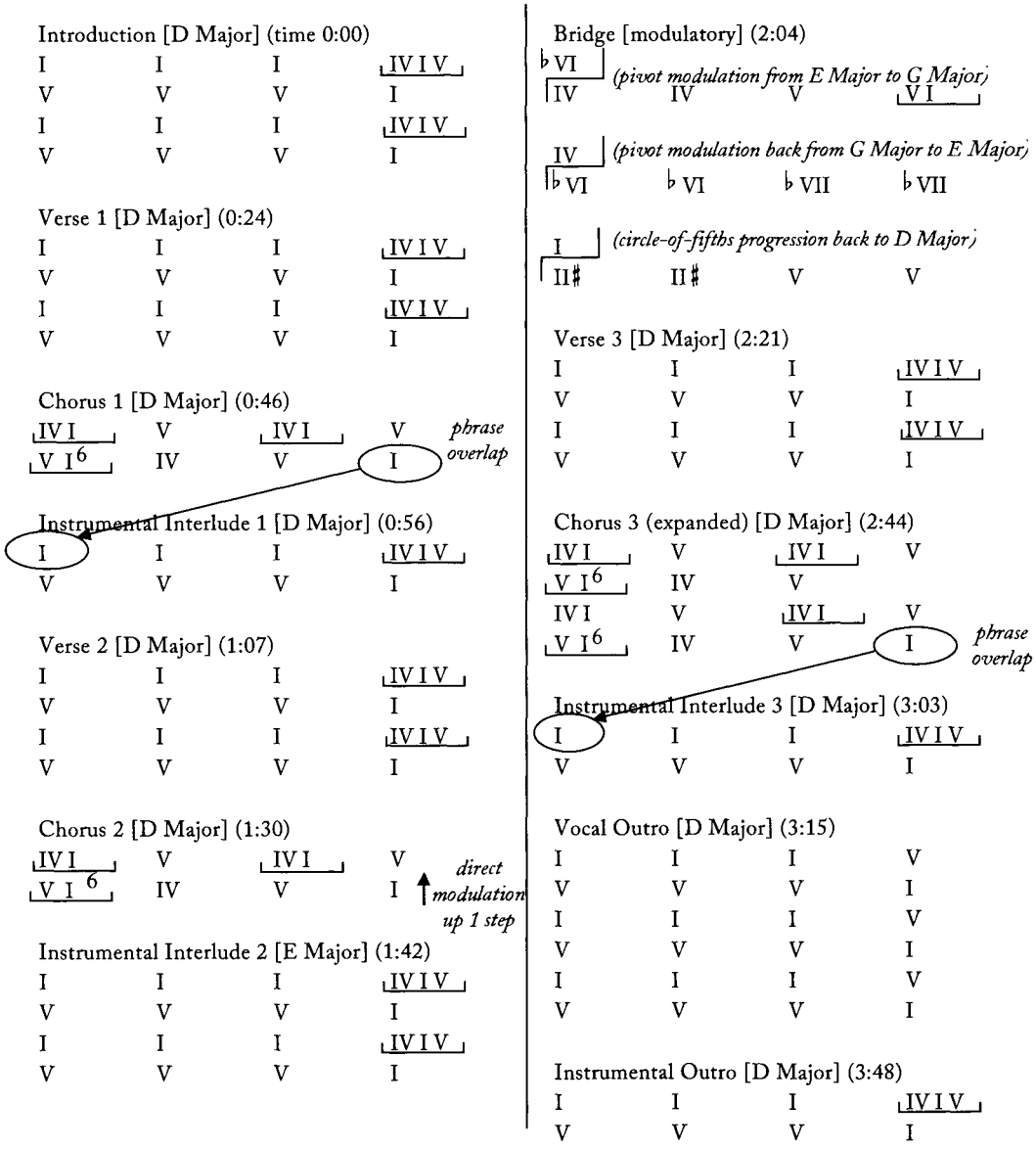
An ongoing tradition in country music allows musicians to criticize the radio and commercial industry as a rhetorical means of asserting authenticity, but this is a particularly harsh instance of biting the hand that feeds.[35]

The cyclic nature of the story, one of the key aspects of the Time-Shift narrative, is present in the protagonist's journey from rural childhood to adulthood, to Nashville chasing elusive dreams, then back home to the same small town where he grew up to raise his own children. The transformation of the protagonist's perspective occurs with his abandonment of the commercial/urban Nashville dream and recognition of a pastoral ideal. Yet it is the musical telling of this narrative that shapes this composition into a potent representation of country's underlying themes.

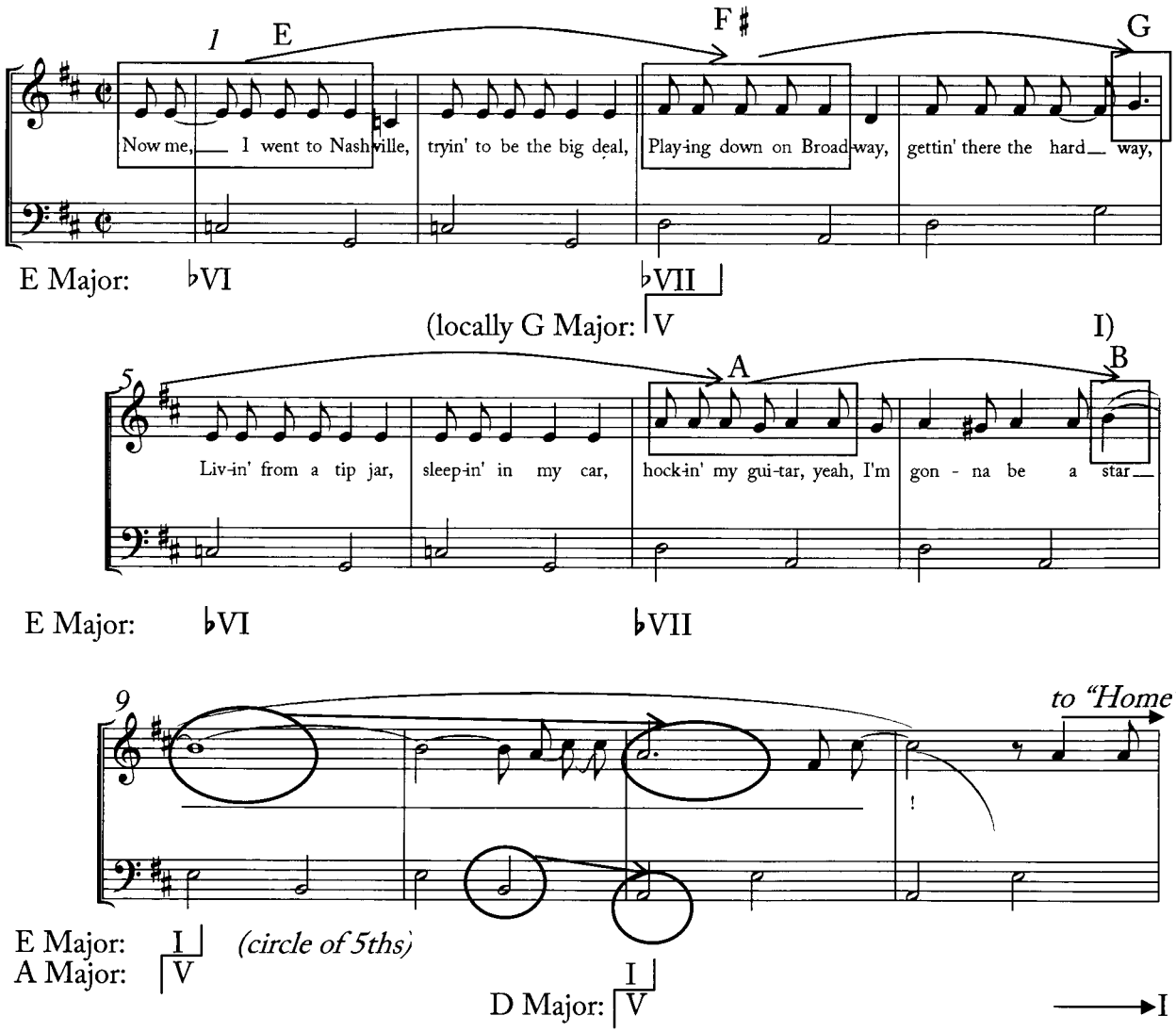
The harmonic vocabulary of the song (Example 10) evokes the tonal simplicity and musical nostalgia of country's past. At the conclusion of the second chorus, the song undergoes a direct modulation from D Major up to E Major as the fiddle takes a solo. This arranger's modulation is executed quickly, without disrupting the harmonic stability of the song, and its only local structural impact on the song is that the expected phrase overlap between the end of the chorus and the subsequent instrumental interlude does not (and cannot) occur—the final chord of the chorus is D Major, whereas the first chord of the interlude is E Major.

Now anchored in E Major, the song moves into the bridge, sketched in Example 11. As the protagonist heads to distant, urban Nashville, the bridge begins on C Major, ♭VI in context, whose third-relation to tonic (E Major) makes it sound remote, different, and, exotic within the tonal context of country music's typical harmonic vocabulary. A long-range melodic ascent (boxed on Example 11) portrays the singer's struggle to rise through the ranks in the commercial industry. First, the vocal melody proceeds by linear motion from E4 to F♯4, arriving temporarily on G4. The melody then regroups and continues through A4 to a climatic arrival on B4 (rhythmically anticipating m. 9's downbeat). The harmonic support and bass line for this melody begin an ascent in parallel tenths with the melody, from C Major, through D Major (mm. 1–4), at which point, the first phrase harmonically takes an escape route by tonicizing G Major (m. 4). At this moment, the progression begins again, and the context for C Major is ambiguous: either ♭VI of E, or IV of G. The second phrase continues the melodic ascent, and this time the

35 Among the more famous examples of this rhetorical practice is the song "Murder on Music Row," which commercially successful country stars Alan Jackson and George Strait covered. Originally written and performed by bluegrass band Larry Cordle and Lonesome Standard Time, the song accuses Nashville's commercial industry, represented by 16th Avenue, the street on which the core businesses reside known as "Music Row," of killing country music, "cut[ting] out its heart and soul." The song was awarded "Vocal Event of the Year" in 2000 by the Country Music Association, a representative organization of the very industry lambasted in the song.



EXAMPLE 10. *"Long Time Gone." Form, harmonic analysis, and phrase rhythm.*



EXAMPLE 11. *"Long Time Gone." Modulations and melodic structure of bridge (time 2:04). Measure numbers refer only to the bridge.*

parallel motion between melody and bass persist, arriving in m. 9 on a bright, triumphant arrival on E Major. In retrospect, this progression is convincingly understood as ♭VI–♭VII–I, the same progression that Scott used in "Title of the Song" (Example 8). The effect of the whole-step progression is equally as bold if heard in G Major (IV–V–VI♯), but the hint of G♯ in the vocal line (m. 8) sways the listener toward E Major as tonic. At the moment of arrival on E Major, the singer grasps at stardom, only to find the journey has left him broke and broken-spirited.

The singer's cynicism and utter rejection of Nashville as a commercial sham is depicted in both the melodic and the harmonic structure. The vocalist climaxes melodically on B4 (Example 11, m. 9), tries to continue upward (vocal ornamentation in m. 10), then falls to A4 in parallel octaves with the bass (circled on Example 11). The perceived tonic arrival on E Major in m. 9 proves fleeting, and quickly gives way to a circle-of-fifths progression that leads to A Major, which is then re-contextualized as V of D Major. Thus, the bridge concludes on a half cadence in the piece's original key. As the protagonist returns to his rural roots, the third verse returns to a stable D Major, where the rest of the song resides.

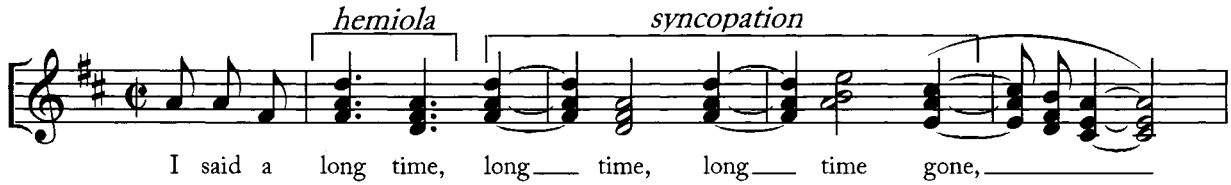
Of course, Nashville, or E Major, was never really a satisfying home along this journey. All the struggles of life on the city's Lower Broadway and efforts toward commercial success led to an apparent climactic arrival in E Major (bridge m. 9), but within the larger tonal context of the singer's journey, Nashville was merely pre-dominant preparation (E Major) for the dominant-tonic return home to D Major and Delia for the Time-Shift narrative's final episode.[36] The entire E-Major section of the song was a structural expansion of II, just as the journey to Nashville set up the protagonist's transformation and desire to return home. With the singer safely nestled on a rural front porch, cold, heartless commercial country could only invade through the limited reaches of the radio. After the structural closure of the last chorus, the "real music-making" takes place at home in the form of an extended coda, which comprises an instrumental interlude, vocal outro, and instrumental outro, all securely back in D Major.[37] This extended coda occupies 1:07, more than one-fourth of the song's total duration.

The extended coda represents a musical jam session, located in the idealized "home" space of the song after the protagonist has returned to his roots and dismissed commercial country as inauthentic. Within the country narrative, the front-porch musical jam is in touch with its soul and represents traditionalism in country. Yet, paradoxically, it is this span of music that contains the song's most adventurous cultural-stylistic references. In their characteristic three-part harmony, the Dixie Chicks repeat the title line during the coda's vocal outro and set up a brief hemiola, followed by an extended syncopated passage, shown in Example 12. In a move uncharacteristic of contemporary country, the accompanying band temporarily abandons its groove and plays the rhythmic pattern in unison with the singers. For the first time in the song, the underlying metric structure is not articulated by the band, leaving the listener more aware of and subject to the pull of the syncopated accents. Scott's own description of the extended syncopated passage in a homorhythmic texture connects it to sources far outside country music:

> I remember in college at Tufts, we had a West African drum ensemble and a West African dance ensemble, and I would play cowbell for

36 Lower Broadway, mentioned in Scott's song, refers to the street and neighborhood in downtown Nashville that runs along the bottom of the hill and is the historical home of dive bars, famous night clubs (Tootsie's Orchid Lounge), guitar shops, and Ernest Tubb's record shop. The Ryman Auditorium is a few blocks north, while the Greyhound bus station disgorges musical hopefuls a short walk away.

37 The "Vocal Outro" is constructed here from vocal repetition of the last line of the song. In "Long Time Gone," Maines sings it over and over, creating a complete 24-bar section of the song (see Example 10). The term "Tag" could also be used, although Scott describes the section as an outro (quoted in this analysis), so outro is used here for consistency.



EXAMPLE 12. *"Long Time Gone." Vocal harmony in the outro, part of the extended coda (time 3:15), with hemiola and homorhythmic syncopation.*

their rehearsals just because the [rhythmic patterns] were really mind-blowing to me.

At the end [of "Long Time Gone,"], there's a refrain where the meter actually sounds like it shifts, to a Western ear. It sounds like it's shifted by a quarter note. And that's purely African.

I've [played] that song with that lick, with that outro figure, and it will absolutely throw the band: you can guarantee it's going to happen! And the only way they can get through it is to either totally feel it, or to sit down and count it. Because within two measures, [the song] will turn most people upside-down . . . I love that! It's a way of [sneaking] something in there that you don't even know is in there. And you like it, and it's a hit, and something got in there that normally may not come [into country music]. And, you know, there may not be anyone else who even notices that, but I do (Scott 2003; 2004).[38]

Regardless of whether Scott's recollections of his West African drumming patterns are rhythmically accurate, the presence of this stylistically atypical rhythmic passage deserves reflection. To the listener, the narrative journey has completed its cycle, and the song has come to rest musically in the rural simplicity of its origins. At the same moment, however, the Cajun groove is displaced by a readily perceptible and dramatic metric dissonance that belies country's traditions. For both Darrell Scott and the Dixie Chicks, the explicitly country identity and cyclic closure offered by the Time-Shift narrative paradigm are undermined by musical borrowings outside the stylistic norm. Scott remains both the insider and the outsider, commenting on country music through his songs themselves and their narrative models. The Dixie Chicks likewise offer up a smash hit to country radio while decrying the commercialized inauthenticity of that very scene and subverting it through the inner layers of their music.

38 These excerpts are from two separate interviews where Scott discussed the same song and passage.

EPILOGUE

Following the widespread success of the Dixie Chicks' first two commercial country albums, *Wide Open Spaces* and *Fly,* both of which were highly polished and heavily produced instances of late 1990s country, *Home* was a noticeable change in style. In interviews, the Dixie Chicks often referred to the more acoustic and bluegrass-influenced *Home* as a personal representation of their musical journey out of the confines of the industry's restrictive business practices and back to the nurturing rural environment of Texas. "Long Time Gone" told that story, and the album's final track, "Top of the World" by Patty Griffin, reflected the same themes.

Prior to the album's 2002 release, the Dixie Chicks had literally moved back to Texas, re-focused their attention on family, marriage, and children, and turned their music-making to songs and styles that had initially inspired them. The acoustic flavor of *Home* followed in the wake of the bluegrass revival sparked by the Coen Brothers' film, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, and for the Dixie Chicks, was a

timely declaration of the country roots that picked up on a larger trend in country music. Of course, at the same time they were making this bluegrass-infused album of songs they loved, they were also suing Sony Music for underreporting sales, and reconfiguring all their business contracts toward more favorable commercial agreements. *Home* was released on their own label (Open Wide Records), and it effectively announced the success of their business negotiations. Like the album's first single, the autobiographical narrative of the band was both tied to the traditionalism of country music and thoroughly enmeshed in commercial strategies. The inside liner notes of the album contain a photograph of a roadside sign like those outside a West Texas diner, declaring, "We are changing the way we do business." The potential duality of the statement echoes the musical content of "Long Time Gone."[39]

One of the most compelling features of the Time-Shift narrative paradigm is its ability to bridge the gap between songwriting and autobiographical story-telling. The lifecycle tropes, the quest for spiritual redemption, and the returning presence of a chorus that evolves in meaning provided the ideal vehicle for the Dixie Chicks to share their own story. Their subsequent album, *Taking the Long Way*, continued the practice of merging art and biography in lyrics. "I've been a *long time gone* now" . . . "since the *top of the world* came crashing down," they sing on the new album, which quotes titles and texts from *Home* four years later as a way of describing the heated political controversies that hounded their careers in the intervening few years (Dixie Chicks 2006).[40] In spite of the distinction between protagonist and performer created in "Long Time Gone" by the gendered lyrics, the text and narrative became a signifier for the Dixie Chicks' own lives through the narrative journey recounted in the Time-Shift paradigm.

Within the analysis of popular music in general and country music in particular, the formalized concept of a narrative paradigm, which integrates aspects of song form and structure with textual themes and story lines, becomes a powerful analytic tool. The Time-Shift narrative paradigm is only one of many in contemporary country songwriting that can be modeled and used for analysis; collectively, those paradigms define both the core themes and the basic compositional craft of the genre. Fans are intuitively aware of how these narrative paradigms function, as are songwriters, whose manipulation of those expected models is a potent tool for connecting with and commenting on country's traditions. Cultural and literary analyses of country music abound, but how country songs tell their stories, specifically in the domains of song form and musical structure, are equally necessary to understand the ongoing evolution of the genre.

39 Crain 2002 provides an account of both the album and the lawsuit.

40 See also Crain 2002 and Tyrangiel 2006. In 2003, Natalie Maines made a statement from a concert stage in England that set off a fire-storm of political controversy. The Dixie Chicks' songs were banned from several country radio stations, concert boycotts were (unsuccessfully) organized, and public accusations regarding patriotism and politics flew from fellow artists and journalists alike.

APPENDIX

Representative songs of the "Time-Shift" narrative paradigm and common variants in contemporary country. This list adopts an inclusive approach to the definition of "country" and focuses on the 1990s, although some earlier and later songs are also included.

ARTIST	SONG (WRITER[S])	*ALBUM* CATALOG (YEAR)
Akins, Rhett	She Said Yes (Rhett Akins and Joe Doyle)	*Thousand Memories* Decca 11098 (1995)
Anderson, John	I Wish I Could've Been There (John Anderson and Kent Robbins)	*Solid Ground* BNA 66232 (1993)
Carson, Jeff	Butterfly Kisses (Bob Carlisle and Randy Thomas)	*Butterfly Kisses* Curb 77859 (1997)
Carson, Jeff	Real Life (I Never Was the Same Again) (Jim Janosky and Neil Thrasher)	*Real Life* Curb 77937 (2001)
Chesney, Kenny	I Lost It (Jimmy Olander and Neil Thrasher)	*Greatest Hits* BNA 67976 (2000)
Chesnutt, Mark	She Was (Neil Coty and J. Melton)	*Mark Chesnutt* Sony 86540 (2000)
Dixie Chicks	Long Tme Gone (Darrell Scott)	*Home* Columbia 86840 (2002)
Evans, Sara	You'll Always Be My Baby (Sara Evans, Tony Martin, Tom Shapiro)	*Real Fine Place* RCA 69486 (2005)
Herndon, Ty	A Man Holdin' On (To a Woman Letting Go) (Gene Dobbins, John Ramey, Bobby Taylor)	*Big Hopes* Epic 68167 (1998)
Jackson, Alan	Drive (For Daddy Gene) (Alan Jackson)	*Drive* Arista 67039 (2002)
Jackson, Alan	Livin' On Love (Alan Jackson)	*Who I Am* Arista 18759 (1994)
Lawrence, Tracy	Time Marches On (Bobby Braddock)	*Time Marches On* Atlantic 82866 (1996)
Loveless, Patty	How Can I Help You (To Say Goodbye) (Burton Banks Collins and Karen Taylor)	*Only What I Feel* Epic 53236 (1993)
Mattea, Kathy	Where've You Been (Jon Vezner and Don Henry)	*Willow in the Wind* Mercury 836950 (1989)
McEntire, Reba	I Wouldn't Go That Far (Bruce Burch, Dana McVicker, Vip Vipperman)	*For My Broken Heart* MCA 104000 (1991)
McEntire, Reba	What Do You Say (Michael Dulaney and Neil Thrasher)	*So Good Together* MCA 170119 (1998)

McGraw, Tim	Don't Take the Girl (Larry Johnson and Craig Martin)	*Not a Moment Too Soon* Curb 77659 (1994)
McGraw, Tim	One of These Days (Marcus Hummon, Monty Powell, Kip Raines)	*Everywhere* Curb 77886 (1997)
Nickel Creek	The Hand Song (Sean Watkins and David Puckett)	*Nickel Creek* Sugar Hill 3909 (2000)
Raye, Collin	Ain't Nobody Gonna Take That From Me (Rivers Rutherford, Sam Tate, Annie Tate)	*Can't Back Down* Epic 85794 (2001)
Raye, Collin	Love, Me (Max T. Barnes and Skip Ewing)	*All I Can Be* Epic 47468 (1990)
Raye, Collin	One Boy, One Girl (Shaye Smith and Mark Springer)	*I Think About You* Epic 67033 (1995)
Sawyer Brown	The Walk (Mark Miller)	*Buick* Liberty C2-94260 (1991)
Shelton, Blake	All Over Me (Earl Thomas Conley, Mike Pyle, and Blake Shelton)	*Blake Shelton* Warner Brothers 24731 (2001)
Shelton, Ricky Van	Keep It Between the Lines (Kathy Louvin and Russell Smith)	*Backroads* Columbia 46855 (1991)
Strait, George	Love Without End, Amen (Aaron Barker)	*Livin' It Up* MCA 6415 (1990)
Strait, George	The Best Day (Carson Chamberlain and Dean Dillon)	*Latest, Greatest, Straitest Hits* MCA 170100 (2000)
Tennison, Chalee	Go Back (Jeremy Campbell and Donny Hackett)	*This Woman's Heart* Asylum 47820 (2001)
Tritt, Travis	Modern Day Bonnie and Clyde (Walt Aldridge and James Leblanc)	*Down the Road I Go* Columbia 62165 (1990)
Twitty, Conway	Don't Cry Joni (Conway Twitty)	*High Priest of Country Music* MCA 2144 (1975)
Tucker, Tanya	Two Sparrows in a Hurricane (Mark Springer)	*Can't Run from Yourself* Liberty C2-98987 (1992)
Twitty, Conway	That's My Job (Gary Burr)	*Borderline* MCA 5969 (1987)
Wariner, Steve	I'm Already Taken (Terry Ryan and Steve Wariner)	*Two Teardrops* Capitol 96139 (1999)
White, Bryan	Rebecca Lynn (Skip Ewing and San Sampson)	*Bryan White* Elektra 61642 (1994)

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