

BURKE'S RHETORIC OF REORIENTATION IN HANK WILLIAMS'

HONKY-TONK PERFORMANCE

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HONKY-TONK PERFORMANCE

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## VITA

Gregory Wright Robinson was born April 25, 1984, in Adel, GA to James David Robinson and Wanda McDaniel Robinson. He was an honor graduate from Cook County High School in 2002. Gregory found his affinity for communication studies under the inspiring faculty at Valdosta State University. During this time, he was an active member of the Lambda Pi Eta communication society, and was elected its creative director. Gregory was named outstanding speech communication student for the 2006-2007 school year. After graduating summa cum laude with his Bachelor of the Arts in Speech Communication, he sought his scholarly niche at Auburn University, where he entered graduate school in December, 2006. Gregory is an amateur singer/songwriter and avid music fan.

THESIS ABSTRACT  
BURKE'S RHETORIC OF REORIENTATION IN HANK WILLIAMS'  
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Music can be a powerful form of constitutive rhetoric. Country music has garnered little attention from rhetoricians despite being a highly adaptive folk-form through the first half of the 20th century. In particular, the post-war honky-tonk subgenre addressed the cultural dislocation of many rural-to-urban migrants. During the post-war decade, Hank Williams was the most important artist in elevating the regional, honky-tonk style to national prominence. He embraced traditional style markers while extending the rural sense of community into the urban milieu.

This study employs Kenneth Burke's concepts of piety, perspective by incongruity, and recalcitrance in order to discuss Williams' honky-tonk rhetoric of reorientation as it appears in his 1949 *Health and Happiness* show radio transcriptions. In terms of his rural-to-urban peers, Williams most notably constructed romantic love as a

struggle toward this-worldly spiritual salvation. His rhetoric also symbolized marginal national sentiments about consumerism and masculinity. This study suggests that music may both preserve and challenge cultural understandings as part of an incremental rhetorical process.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*The Silence of a falling star  
Lights up a purple sky.  
And as I wonder where you are  
I'm so lonesome I could cry  
-Hank Williams*

Sometimes, the accomplishment of our goals, which we have unquestioningly pursued, seems to undermine the very reasons that we set out to achieve those goals. Self-fulfillment, love, and sense of community may be threatened when we set out to match our *selves* to our *occupations*. The motives endorsed by our culture, engrained since birth, such as self-advancement, industry, future-planning, schmoozing, and self-restraint, may complicate the matter of questioning these goals without considerable guilt, as they have become tied to our sense of the appropriate (i.e. piety).

Paradoxically, in these instances, "progress" as we have imagined it may be antithetical to the good life. The kinds of characters we must play in order to carry out the means of achievement might preclude the characteristics we hold most dear. Burke (1954) defines this paradox of social reality as "trained incapacity." When intense devotion and singular focus have failed us, we experience our training as incapacity to be happy, and we may look beyond petty vices such as apathy, pessimism, or egotism for answers. Instead, we may question the very symbolic grounds we have been given to achieve well-being.

To the extent that trained incapacity prevents the cooperation of people, we must revise our orientations, or ways of making sense of our place in the world. This transition of significance and re-weighing of words is what Burke describes as "perspective by incongruity." This liminal state entails using old symbol systems in new ways to highlight useful characteristics of the universe.

Graduate school will often bring out the best and worst in starry-eyed, would-be scholars. Communication graduate school has revealed its own paradox: in striving to be a good scholar, one might hinder his/her ability to communicate effectively with the general population. For me, sleeplessness, melancholy, fear, lack of purpose, and a host of newfound vices (i.e. "coping mechanisms") made effective communication only a peripheral concern. For a few semesters, I was haunted by the expectation that I should emerge some finished, marketable adult. I was getting farther from the good life with each step closer to my degree.

I needed a new perspective, but I could not dismantle my entire worldview (after all, there is no view from nowhere). As I moved away from the instrumental concept of human purpose, my taste in music changed. Although I had listened to "silly" country radio as a child, I had discounted the genre as an adolescent because it seemed hokey, bland, and unsophisticated. However, somewhere around my second semester in graduate school, after I exhausted glam rock and early 1980s new wave, I discovered the post-war honky-tonk singers who reigned from 1946 to 1954: Lefty Frizzell, Webb Pierce, George Jones, Ernest Tubb, and Hank Williams. This music was created by and for the perplexed rural-to-urban migrants who came in droves from their agrarian culture to encounter industrial life. The accents of honky-tonk were quite familiar to this south-Georgian, but

the music struck me being different from contemporary country; it was pessimistic, frank, and witty in dealing with interpersonal trauma. The songs had a driving, raw sound that also appealed to me.

Honky-tonk helped me salvage the virtues of my old orientation without becoming overwhelmed by the necessitous labors of the day. It is not a complete worldview and does not attempt to blatantly advance an argument as traditional rhetoricians might conceive of one. But, honky-tonk asserts dissatisfaction and displays begrudging perseverance through uncomfortable times. Much like the post-war migrants faced a fissure between rural orientations and urban ones, I recognized my graduate school years as the fissure between my youthful philosophy of *becoming* and my young-adult emphasis on *being*. Hank Williams served as a soundtrack for both of our messy in-between periods. In the realm of culture production, honky-tonk music represents what Burke would consider a critical, stubborn, or "recalcitrant" force against the dominant Cold War orientation.

In this study, I analyze Hank Williams' *Health and Happiness* radio shows as a representative artifact of the post-war honky-tonk boom. I am interested in the unique rhetoric of honky-tonk, a subgenre which is often subsumed under the conservative, regressive, or hegemonic stereotypes about country. In a time before rock music, honky-tonk offered a more myopic counter-cultural statement. Because of the symbols honky-tonk deals with and the significant challenges that the urban milieu posed for listeners, the subgenre was in a unique position. Honky-tonk can only be accounted for as a popular phenomenon by considering the elements that made it distinct from other subgenres of country: its rhetorical characteristics. I ask the following research question:

How does Hank Williams' work act rhetorically upon the orientations of his regional peers and national audience?

I use Burke's terms, *piety*, *perspective by incongruity*, and *recalcitrance*, to discuss honky-tonk rhetoric. First, I describe the commercial and industrial context of honky-tonk; Chapter One is an overview of country music history, focusing on the adaptations that took place between 1920 and 1946 that best defined honky-tonk's place in the genre. There has been a good deal of scholarly literature on country music, but most scholars have not taken a rhetorical perspective; Chapter Two is a review of extant literature on country music. Each rhetorical criticism should be situated in larger issues of rhetorical theory; in chapter three, I carve out a place for the current study in rhetorical theory that favors symbol use as the means for creating a useable reality. Chapter Three provides an overview of Burke's, *Permanence and Change*, and isolates the terms from it which best suit the current project. Chapter Four features a brief biography of Williams, stressing the instability and rural style which made him the premiere honky-tonk singer. In Chapter Five, I identify creative ways in which Williams' *Health and Happiness* shows reoriented his listeners based on the lyrics, style, and context of production. The terms *piety*, *perspective by incongruity*, and *recalcitrance* allow me to discuss the rhetorical moves within these transcriptions. The project closes with broader implications for rhetorical theory, cultural studies and the evaluation of popular music.

## II. COUNTRY MUSIC HISTORY

In order to understand the unique status of honky-tonk country in terms of the music industry and the country genre, one must consider the commercial and stylistic developments which took place from 1920 to 1953. Until the brink of World War II, the regional music form, hillbilly, had been somewhat of a commercial novelty, still finding its voice and primarily giving the advertisers and listeners what might be both pleasant and profitable. As the styles fluctuated, country artists found different elements profitable in different contexts. Radio became the place for predictable variety shows, while live contexts cultivated brasher sounds with more risqué lyrics. The forms forged in live contexts were given a boost after World War II economically stimulated the South and attuned the entire nation to the country aesthetic. After World War II, honky-tonk struck a balance between regional performance style and national notoriety (Malone, 2002).

The radio-form of country from the earliest commercial period and the Nashville sound period after the 1950s have informed a popular conception of country music as insular and ahistoric. In both eras, the music is self-reflective and supportive of listeners. It is comfort music, more or less a compromise between commercial interest and folk appeal. Both periods seem to speak of a pastoral place where common folk pray and prosper with their families, one which has never existed but has often been invoked for profit. Honky-tonk, however, spoke not of a tradition but of a historical moment. For just

a few years, mass interest was a side effect of country's rising form rather than the guiding principle of its creation.

Honky-tonk's success in spite of its markedly pessimistic tone is testament to something other than finding the right formula to sell records. Although industrial chronologies and the audience's desire for simpler times can explain other periods of country (e.g. 1930s, 1960s), honky-tonk had a more complex relationship to listeners; honky-tonk singers encountered social and domestic trauma and irresolvable tensions of the urban milieu. Honky-tonk was born of a marginalized group of rural-to-urban migrants who had missed out on the American dream through each period of industrialization, yet it appealed to the entire nation. Country never had been, and never could again be the same. After the mid-1950s, rock music seemed to make honky-tonk's angst obsolete; the country music industry regrouped with the intent to make country America's music (i.e. make it sound more like popular music). This history foregrounds stylistic developments of early country and these developments' relationships to commercial trends. I also discuss the artists who contributed significant traditions to what would flower as the honky-tonk sound.

### Country as Southern Music

Country music is rooted in a relatively rural, isolated, and religiously zealous ancestry. Churches, community frolics, and family parlors were the major performance contexts that were infused in the early country sound. The Great Revival of the early 1800s and the Holiness Pentecostal Revival of the 1870s emphasized emotional expressiveness in rural music. The conservative religious tradition also informed the themes of superior simple folks, anti-materialism, a sinful world, and heavenly



resolution. According to Malone (2002), the frolic and parlor traditions were both important for turn-of-the-century hillbilly music. Ballads were one popular form southern songs took. Ballads usually told a tragic story about a wayward protagonist, filled with lessons that complimented the rural religious ethos. They were sung in the home or by street performers, representing the "parlor" tradition. The melodies were easily memorized and often were adapted from gospel songs. The "frolic" tradition was for pure entertainment and was the type of music played at fiddle competitions or barn-dance type community events. The fiddle was essential to the frolic tradition because of its high-pitched sounds and because it was conducive to fast-paced dancing.

The stylistic tendencies of early country music came from preserved Anglo-Celtic ballads and dances and gospel hymns, but southern musicians were likely to apply these tendencies to any style of music that made entered the region via train or medicine show (Lange, 2004). Malone notes that "regardless of origin or styles, once a song was introduced into a rural community the folk esthetic began to assert its process of natural selection" (p. 9). Southern music most readily drew from Blacks, Germans, Spanish, French, and Mexicans. Songs that lacked pathetic appeal or were too complicated to be performed with minimal accompaniment were phased out. Authorship of a song was often unknown and not important (Lange, 2004). Despite comparisons to later eras of country music (Peterson, 1997; Ellison, 1995; etc.), early southerners had no self-consciousness about the purity of music as we may conceive of it (Malone, 2002). Although pre-commercial country may have been quite authentic, as in "natural," it was never "pure," as in unadulterated by outside influences. Neither the parlor nor frolic traditions had a message that confronted social tensions. Malone states that these early

songs "did not document the news of the time, but instead brought emotional release in the same way that fairy tales do" (p. 14).

### Early Commercial Hillbilly

At the turn of the century, the music performed in the Southeast, which would later become "hillbilly" and "country," was a folk amalgam of popular styles (Malone, 2002). Although New York's American Society for Composers and Publishers (ASCAP) had centralized the popular music industry in 1914, the South remained off of the commercial map. Because ASCAP and the American Federation of Musicians barred hillbilly musicians from membership with sight-reading tests, ownership and commercial self-consciousness were absent from southern music (Pecknold, 2007). ASCAP was interested only in piano-based popular music that could be sold as sheet music. Hillbilly musicians played rugged, rural venues such as fiddling contests, tent revivals, and a variety of open-air communal events. The music was thus freely circulated and altered according to the live performance context.

As Malone (2002) notes, surviving on musicianship alone was rare for pre-commercial country performers. Hillbilly was an amateur folk form. The initial commercial success of country came from radio and its effects on the publishing industry. Ellison (1995) states that the growth of country paralleled the growth of modern media. The crucial factor underlying country's success on radio was the rural-to-urban migration of southerners between 1920 and 1960. According to Ellison (1995), three-fifths of the rural population had non-farming jobs by 1930. This trend continued and intensified, pulling more southerners to cities. This migration created regional radio markets for hillbilly music in unexpected places.

Fiddle music and other southern-bred styles were put on radio simply to fill up time on the first southeastern radio station, Atlanta's WSB (Peterson, 1997). Performers played for very little money and had developed extensive repertoires for covering long events. Listener responses came in for barn-dance performers rather than isolated single-act shows (Malone, 2002; Pecknold, 1997). From 1923 to the mid-1930s, barn dances were the primary way hillbilly music was heard (Malone, 2002). Barn dances harkened to vaudeville variety shows with humor and light-hearted theme-based music. They progressed in a quick succession from fiddle, to balladeer, to rube comedy skit. The emcee was an important player in the live show and was required to be multi-talented in music, humor, advertising pitches, and directing the show. Peterson (1997) states that barn dances "evoked in the listener a nostalgic remembrance of community dances, medicine, shows, and street corner singers packaged respectfully and in a fast paced form" (p. 70).

The first "barn dance" radio show of note, the *National Barn Dance*, was aired in Chicago in 1924. Nashville's WSB soon followed with the *Grand Ole Opry* within the next year. The *Grand Ole Opry* represented a consciously rustic alternative to the more eclectic mix of music found on the Chicago station. Creator George Hay dictated the show from start to finish. Hay renamed city bands with names like "Fruit Jar Drinkers" and "Possum Hunters." Hay also dictated clothing and created press releases explaining the appeal of the "authentic" music. According to Pecknold (2007), the goal of hillbilly radio was to give the audience easily recognizable characters, cheesy humor, and familiar sounding music. Throughout the depression, barn dances served as family entertainment to reinforce rural mythology. Performers played stock characters and sang detached songs

full of vague fantasies. They also served as stable advertising opportunities for department stores, food staples, and patent medicines (i.e. "snake oils"). Network radio was not dominant until the mid-1930s, so regional barn dances catered directly to a regional audience without needing national notoriety (Pecknold, 2007).

### First Country Recordings

Radio's popularity diminished record sales in the late 1920s; between 1927 and 1932, record sales dropped to one-fortieth of what they had been in 1922 (Malone, 2002). Record executives sought ways to profit from niche markets with "old time" and "race" music, country and blues. Some adventurous recording scouts made field recordings on cheap equipment and paid musicians for their songs outright. The first known hillbilly recordings were performed by two Confederate-veteran fiddlers in 1922 (Malone, 2002).

After only minimal success, Ralph Peer, a talent scout for the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), discovered the formula for making the most money with old-time music (Peterson, 1997). First of all, he noticed that many songs being copyrighted were of disputed authorship and that truly old "old-time" music would soon be mined out of existence. The money to be made was in owning copyrights, which required finding new songs. He also realized that "fiddlin'" John Carson of Atlanta was selling records to local audiences by pitching them on his radio show, using his notoriety to make new songs popular. Peer stopped the practice of "strip mining" songs, and opted to create a relationship with his artists, the fruit of which would be a continual stream of reliable songs. He did this by paying artists a percentage of profits from record sales, which gave them an interest in making the songs popular. Peer's great successes in recording were with the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers in 1927. These were first superstars of

country, and their well-remembered images proved that hillbilly singers could be profitable long-term (Malone, 2002; Peterson, 1997).

For the purposes of this study, country artists speak more or less to the present times or to the timeless country tradition. The Carter Family, fulfilling the latter function, was the first vocal driven group who "represented an impulse toward home and stability" (Malone, p. 65). The Carter Family, A.P., Maybelle and Sara, assembled rather naturally in Virginia during the mid-1920s. They clung to the dissolving referents of rural life with songs such as "The Little Poplar Log House," "Little Village Churchyard," and "Homestead on the Farm." The three Carters sang over only an autoharp and guitar, and occasionally a fiddle. They were unique at a time when most vocals in hillbilly music were tangential to the string instruments (Ellison, 1995). Maybelle Carter also set the standard for country rhythm guitar by striking a lone bass note and then the rest of each chord. Hank Williams and others relied on this technique to guide their "sock" rhythms. From 1927 to 1941, the Carters are estimated to have recorded over three hundred sides.

The other anomalous country star, Jimmie Rodgers, answered to the "tragic troubadour" instinct in listeners (Ellison, 1995). Several things about Jimmie Rodgers made him important to the future of country. Rodgers came from a similarly vagrant background to the one about which he sang. He was born in Mississippi to a railroad foreman. His mother died when Rodgers was five. He lived with several relatives in different cities, had joined his first medicine show at age thirteen, and been divorced at age 20. He worked the railroad until 1925, looking to music as an escape from the same profession he would romanticize in song (Malone, 2002). Rodgers also suffered from Tuberculosis, and even wrote up-tempo songs such as "T.B. Blues" about his disease. He

died in 1933 as the first hillbilly artist who had generated significant enough record sales to be recognized nationally.

Rodgers' laid back performance style set the standard for country musicians. Malone (2002) notes that Rodgers "looked and acted the part of a young man-about-town out for an evening of pleasure. He would put his foot on his chair, cradle his guitar across his knee, and captivate . . . with a selection of both rakish and sentimental tunes" (p. 86). Rodgers was known to chat with musicians casually in between songs and to make remarks to them during solos such "sing them blues, boy" (p. 86). Rodgers' style was akin to a street vaudeville performer; he had a malleable style meant to humor rather than empathize interpersonally with the listener. Rodgers had two personas, "The Blue Yodeler" and "The Singing Brakeman," and depending on the photo opportunity, might be seen either wearing a suit or western-wear. He sang blues form songs with yodels as his trademark. His language was lifted from the blues, which gave him a greater range of topics; however, he neglected the gospel influence of southern music. Rodgers primarily spoke to the fantasy of escape (Malone, 2002; Ellison, 1995). The Carter Family and Rodgers represent the foundation for individual country stars after World War II.

#### Depression Era Developments

Hillbilly radio remained rather tame and streamlined in the 1930s while the barn-dance format reigned (Malone, 2002; Peterson, 1997). In the early part of the decade, scores of shows followed the *Grand Ole Opry* such as: *The Renfro Valley Barn Dance of Cincinnati*; *The Crazy Barn Dance* of North Carolina; and West Virginia's *Wheeling Jamboree*. The format was opening up to more vocal-centered acts that had close harmonies, catering to more sensitive microphones. Because of the increasing fan base

and realization of a middle class, non-rural audience, producers George Biggar of *The National Barn Dance* and Harry Stone of the *Grand Ole Opry* phased out what Biggar called the "hungry hillbilly" sound in favor of college vocal groups such as the Delmore Brothers and the Vagabonds (Tribe, 2006; Pecknold; Lange). The barn dance was still reliable advertising and comforting programming for listeners. By 1939, the format had become so accepted that the National Broadcast Corporation began to carry the *Grand Ole Opry* nationally.

Meanwhile, the alternative playing context—barnstorming—contributed to the cross-pollination of country styles that would culminate in the 1940s (Peterson, 1997). The Southeast and Southwest each offered an exemplar of the organic styles developed from regional performance contexts. Roy Acuff and Ernest Tubb emerged from the Depression as the progenitors of what was to be "country" after World War II. According to Peterson (1997), many artists performed in small towns lacking permanent venues. Entertainers would create a buzz about their temporary presence by playing free segments on local radio. Then they would play schoolhouses, barns, or wherever they were asked until the town seemed to lose interest (Lange, 2004). These itinerant performers traveled light and kept broad repertoires. Groups were often made of family members or spouses and were vocal-centric (the sung melody was core of the song rather than a string melody). They favored efficient instruments with very low and very high sounds such as stand-up basses and mandolins.

While the barn dances hired acts to be predictable and to have a generic identity, performance contexts such as schools and local radio shows were looking for range and duration of performance. While the barn dance offered security to its performers,

barnstorming was an uncertain way to make a living. Unlike radio groups, they had to be heard without a microphone and did not consciously streamline their sound for middle-class listeners. These acts were motivated to please the manifest audience and were often paid "per inquiry" by their sponsors (Peterson, 1997). Just as their radio counterparts, barnstormers played predominantly sentimental, moralistic songs that evoked old-time feelings about suffering and salvation.

Roy Acuff brought the barnstorming sound to the *Grand Ole Opry* in 1938. He indicated the potential power of traditional Appalachian band fronted by a charismatic vocalist. Like Rodgers before him, Acuff was inspired by personal tragedy. Acuff was the son of a travelling minister in the Tennessee hills. He was on track to be a professional baseball player when he suffered debilitating sunstroke. Beginning in 1929, the year of his recovery, Acuff learned to play fiddle and began performing in small medicine shows. Acuff was a huge hit on the *Grand Ole Opry*, rising to host the show in 1939. He was a consummate performer, often balancing his fiddle on his nose during musical breaks and requiring his band to tell jokes. The sheer emotional wail of his voice often drove audience members, and Acuff himself, to cry during sentimental songs such as "Wreck on the Highway" (Lange, 2004; Malone, 2002). Lange (2004) states that his voice "blended the emotionalism of an evangelist with the vociferousness of a medicine show performer" (p. 40).

While others were moving toward pop styled music and garb, Acuff preferred to look the part of a traditional Appalachian mountaineer. His band was the traditional assemblage of banjo, fiddle, bass, rhythm guitar, and mandolin, but he cut down the role of the fiddle and used the screeching sound of the dobro. Although he refused the popular



croon and gaudy, western aesthetic, Acuff was able to coexist with pop-leaning groups of the depression (Schlappi, 1997). Acuff brought the organic performance style to the only mass venue for hillbilly musicians. Emotional lyrics and uninhibited nasal wails would be incorporated into the Hank Williams sound. Williams said that, in the South, "it was Roy Acuff, then God" (Escott, 1994, p. 19).

In a parallel universe called Texas, the Great Depression was averted by an oil boom in 1931. A different and equally important rural music culture developed that emphasized volume, rhythm and less idealistic lyrics. In the East, crooned harmony singing was the counterpart to Acuff's barnstorming style. In the West, the country-pop form was called "western swing," and the rougher form was "honky-tonk." Western swing was "an amalgam of American popular, jazz, and Texas folk music . . . country's first response to the urban environment" (Lange, 2004, p. 90). Several large bands played dance halls in the Southwest, incorporating instruments such as the electric guitar, various horns, drums, and piano. These dance halls can be contrasted with the places that southeastern barnstormers played. The western swing bands were for sheer entertainment. The music was developed as a backdrop for couples' dancing. According to Lange (2004), over half of the output of western swing recorded from 1939 to 1954 dealt with upbeat subject matter.

While the western swing genre appealed to couples who wanted to dance to jazz-styled music, some rural-to-urban Texans were not going out to dance; they were simply going out to drink. Prohibition officially ended in 1933. The neon-signed roadhouses on the outskirts of towns became popular hangouts for laborers in the region. According to Malone (2002), the honky-tonk was "a social institution springing up in the chaotic

ferment of the depression, and acutely attuned to the needs of rural dwellers" (p. 153). Honky-tonks avoided higher taxes and policing by being outside of town. They were often dangerous schools for the performers who played on the small stages.

The new performance context brought with it changes in style and content. Honky-tonk lyrics began reflecting problems of ex-rural dwellers. Changes in social status, family instability, insecurity, and dissolution were acceptable topics for honky-tonk lyrics. The Puritan strain of southern music was infused with a self-pitying attitude. Bands were streamlined, and vocal melodies were made to be sung louder. Electric guitars in country were first used in honky-tonks. The "sock" rhythm was developed to make up for the absent drum beat; the guitar strings were dampened and struck to create a sharp percussive effect on down beats (Lange, 2004). Some examples of popular honky-tonk song titles from this initial wave convey the darker mood: "Driving Nails in My Coffin (Every Time I Drink a Bottle of Booze)," "The Last Letter," "Born to Lose," and "Headin' Down the Wrong Highway" (Malone, 2002). Although the architects of what would become known as honky-tonk—Al Dexter, Floyd Tillman, Ted Daffan, and Ernest Tubb—had sparse success nationally through the early 1940s, the subgenre did not cohere until after World War II (Lange, 2004).

Ernest Tubb was the most notable artist to come out of the oil boom honky-tonks and carry the sound into the 1940s. He was born into an unstable family, lived with relatives off and on and idolized Jimmie Rodgers. Although he failed at emulating Rodgers, Tubb was able to develop his own voice, thanks to tonsillitis. In 1939, he had his tonsils removed, and he had to abandon the yodel completely in favor of a simpler, less dynamic style of singing. His first recorded hit was "Walking the Floor Over You,"

in 1941. Tubb, "The Texas Troubadour," was the first successful country artist to feature the electric lead guitar, and later drums, in his music. Tubb was also successful in employing the heroic cowboy image that was circulated in Hollywood by screen cowboys, Gene Autry and Roy Rogers. Malone (2002) notes that while the cowboy's music offered nothing to hillbilly *music*, the *style* was conveniently used as an alternative to the stereotyped "hillbilly." The cowboy attire became and still is a fixture; the image gave all country music more cultural currency nationally (Tribe, 2006).

### World War II in Country History

Population and industry shifts surrounding World War II expanded country music's audience and intensified the cross-pollination among regional styles; country was spread nationally its distinct regional identity. Both of the rough contemporary styles from east Appalachia and the Southwest thrived regionally. However, crooned country-pop ballads such as those sung by Gene Autry and Eddy Arnold represented country in the national album charts (Lange, 2004). Rural areas lost 20% of their populations during the war, and these shifts took rural music abroad (Lange, 2004). Performers toured outside of their usual boundaries. The *Grand Ole Opry*, which had become the dominant barn dance, organized the *Camel Caravan* travelling show to tour military establishments across the United States. Armed Forces Radio broadcasted acetates of the live *Grand Ole Opry* show as far away as France. Malone (2002) notes that troops shared their musical preferences, often arguing the relative merits of their favored performers, such as Frank Sinatra vs. Roy Acuff. The content of country during the war served a conciliatory function for listeners. Popular songs were sentimental remembrances of loved ones such as "We'll Meet Again Sweetheart" and "Mother, I Thank You for the Bible You Gave

Me," fears of dissolving romances such as "Have I Stayed Away Too Long," and songs memorializing soldiers. The sacred tradition of the music and the sentimentality fit wartime conditions.

Two major industry disputes gave country artists an opportunity to be recorded and be received nationally. The ASCAP monopoly over American music ended in 1940. During that year, ASCAP demanded that the National Association for Broadcasters pay nearly double in radio fees to compensate for the decline in sheet music sales. The NAB responded by forming its own music licensing group called Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI). The NAB then put an embargo on all ASCAP-licensed music for ten months. In the meantime, BMI scrambled to find unsigned artists and new publishers, many of whom were country. BMI was well-established by 1942 when Roy Acuff joined ex-Tin Pan Alley songwriter Fred Rose to form Acuff-Rose publishing, licensed under BMI. Acuff-Rose became the major publishing house in the post-war era, and their biggest success was signing Hank Williams (Pecknold, 2007). In 1942, the American Federation of Musicians went on strike, arguing that jukeboxes and radio broadcasting were lessening demand for live performances. Independent labels, who recorded regional talent, signed with the musician's union before larger labels. The music available for radio was increasingly rural while the popular tunes were temporarily suppressed.

The slow trend toward recorded country rather than live radio performance came from the popularity of the jukebox. Although common in the thirties, jukeboxes became more sophisticated in the 1940s. The jukebox was a shaper of country sounds and one way the music industry discovered the true popularity of country. Jukeboxes encouraged louder, "hot recordings" that could be heard in rowdy bars, accentuating the honky-tonk

electric guitar, steady beat, and rough vocal. In 1940, jukeboxes accounted for nearly half of all record sales (Lange, p. 71). Jukebox operators in unexpected places such as Detroit, New York, and St. Louis reported the popularity of "hillbilly" in general. Malone (2002) notes that country music was the most popular style on Detroit jukeboxes. In 1942, *Billboard* magazine made its first place for country in the charts under the heading "Hillbilly and Race" (Malone, 2002). By the end of the war, country music had broadened its popularity while preserving the regionally distinct styles that comprised "hillbilly" music.

#### Post-War Honky-Tonk

It is no coincidence that the cataclysm of Pearl Harbor knocked the stabilizing Carter family off of *Life* magazine's cover (Ellison, 1995). As Malone (2002) states, "Their retirement assumed symbolic significance to many people; the war seemed to be a great watershed, marking the end of country music's golden age" (p. 65). The conditions in most of America after World War II resembled the economic, personal, and social upheavals that drove early honky-tonks in Texas (Peterson, 1997). Domestic unrest, intensified migrations, and industry trends elevated honky-tonk music to being the most popular post-war style of country. According to Lange (2004), "In the late forties and early fifties, the honky-tonk subgenre grew steadily in popularity, eventually dethroning country pop from its wartime dominance" (p. 189). Lange notes the changes in *Billboard* chart presence of the two subgenres; between 1946 and 1954 honky-tonk went from having 12 to 126 chart points while country pop fell from 119 to 99 chart points. Although such figures alone cannot account for the national proliferation of honky-tonk, they are important when considered alongside the extended reach of country radio (where

chart-toppers were typically cultivated), namely WSM's *Grand Ole Opry*. By 1947, WSM's Nashville-based, 50,000 watt clear-channel signal could be picked up across the nation. Furthermore the *Opry* was peaking in popularity, estimating a network audience of 25 million listeners for its thirty-minute NBC segment (Lange, 2004). The *Grand Ole Opry* was ranked the seventh most popular music-based radio program nationally. Hank Williams debuted on the nationally broadcasted segment in 1949, followed in subsequent years by a string of other honky-tonkers such as Lefty Frizzell, Webb Pierce, and Ray Price.

Although many troops may have fantasized about a return to their roots after the war, the opposite proved true. Lange (2004) states that the patriarchal vision remained elusive for most men. From the 3 million women who entered the labor force during the war, about three-quarters intended to remain employed. According to Lange about half of women surveyed in 1943 doubted the fidelity of their husbands. In 1945, one in three couples divorced, representing the highest recorded rate of divorce to that point in America (Lange, 2004; Coontz, 1992). These families found that their rural context was dissolving. Agricultural production was being consolidated, coal mining was declining, and sharecropping was disappearing.

The industry increasingly favored recordings to occupy air-time. The number of independent radio stations increased five-fold between 1946 and 1951 due to Federal Communications Commission policies. Many of these stations played cheaper phonograph music almost exclusively. A spot on the *Grand Ole Opry* remained the road to stardom and security for country musicians, but a hit record that would get played on jukeboxes and radio stations was one way to get called to the *Grand Ole Opry*. Honky-

tonkers who satisfied jukebox aesthetics and listener needs thrived. The newer honky-tonk songs applied the mountain singing style of Acuff to the hot-recording sound of western music (Lange, 2004). The new breed of honky-tonk was most often about irresolvable romantic troubles. According to Lange, "lovelorn and break-up selections accounted for nearly half of their lyrical repertoire" (p. 160). Honky-tonk revolved around the emotional ramifications of love gone sour. Songs often neither pleaded for reconciliation nor offered hope but instead wallowed in self-pity. Lange states that the subgenre had to address "the mood and ambivalence of country music's male listeners" (p. 174).

Malone (2002) states that "No period would experience a happier fusion of 'traditional' sounds and commercial burgeoning than the immediate postwar era" (p. 199). Artists who were able to capitalize on the context had roadhouse performance credentials and tough life experiences. They were bred into the southern evangelical ethos but accepted that they were personally flawed. They sang of deeply personal problems in a way that was accessible to many rural-to-urban migrants. Malone notes that lyrics were less about "mountain cabins, village churchyards, and sunbonnet mothers . . . and more about the everyday concerns of urban-industrial existence" (p. 212). Post-war honky-tonk articulated a marginal subculture position, yet was profitable and was nationally received. Scholars agree that Hank Williams was the embodiment of all that was post-war honky-tonk (Malone, 2002; Malone, 1982; Lange, 2004; Peterson, 1997; Cusic, 1993). Although he was undoubtedly a fan of Ernest Tubb and Roy Acuff, his southeastern take on honky-tonk jumpstarted a distinct honky-tonk era (Lange, 2004). Lange states "Hank Williams reasserted country music's rural southern roots at a time when urban and western

influences were pulling it in a different direction" (p.168). Honky-tonk was not immune from commercial-driven alterations. In fact, Lange notes that softer sounding honky-tonkers such as Carl Smith and Faron Young began to appeal to younger audiences with a more positive outlook. Lange notes that honky-tonk became less discernable as a distinct subgenre as its instrumentation and singing styles were integrated across all styles of country.

Beginning in the mid-1950s, country music changed forever when rock music threatened its profitability (Lange, 2004). Country in general became less adaptive and more insular. The "Nashville sound" was the result of a cadre of producers, songwriters, and country-pop artists who sought to make country music palatable for a mass audience. Lange (2004) argues, "With its urban and youth orientation and de-emphasis on fiddle and steel guitars, rockabilly made the western attired, twangy honky-tonkers look foolish and passé" (p. 253). Reversing the trend of post-war honky-tonk, country moved closer to parlor pop, and replaced rough live performance credentials with controlled, homogenous studio sounds. In 1958, the Country Music Association was formed to "educate the people behind closed doors" in radio and television to show that country was profitable and respectable (Pecknold, 2007, p. 135). Pecknold states that the underlying mission of the CMA was to cast country music as "a symbol of success rather than inferiority" (p. 137). CMA and the Nashville sound producers met their goals of reinvigorating the genre by the early 1960s, but some scholars question the cost to the value of the music to the listener (Malone, 2002; Scherman, 1994). Others have justified the sound as either a shrewd commercial strategy (Jensen, 1998; Peterson, 1997) or as a natural adaptation (Rogers, 1989; Gritzner, 2004). The scholarly dialogue has been over grounds of



authenticity and its relationship to commercialism. The current study does not seek to legitimate honky-tonk as the "truest" form of country, but simply to examine its unique rhetoric. Judging from this brief history of country music, post-war honky-tonk stands out as a subgenre that was nationally popular while fore-fronting its regional identity and addressing social issues. Next, I will review the scholarly literature on country music.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Country music scholarship since the 1970s can be divided into four groups. First, content studies have looked at lyrics and themes to determine the overarching message of country. Second, several sociological studies have focused on the regional diffusion of country and its possible effects on listeners. Third, cultural studies scholars have assessed the relationship between industrial commercial forces and the changing styles of country. Finally, several interpretive and critical studies have alluded to the rhetorical function of honky-tonk country by grounding reality in symbol use.

Most scholarship has been concerned with country's popularity during the "Nashville sound" period. In the mid-1950s, Nashville, Tennessee, became the locus of production for what was once a sprawling regional music. Nashville producers streamlined the sound with studio musicians while emphasizing country's mass marketability to radio stations through public relations. Fiddles, steel guitars, and nasalized vocals were minimized and replaced by smoother sounds, lush harmonies, and a generally less aggressive style. The Nashville "countrypolitan" sound was explicitly created to widen country's audience. Jensen (1993) notes that country music became big-business during this time. Existing literature deals with the genre's survival in changing commercial contexts or with the kind of cultural support that country offers to listeners. Content analyses identify recurring themes in modern country and see the genre as a repository for cultural experiences. Cultural and sociological analyses have revealed a

flexible genre that is necessarily reworked by commercial impetus and to suit changing audience demographics.

### Content Analyses

Most content analyses agree that country lyrics are predominantly conservative and apolitical, and that they share stable themes over time. Dimaggio, Peterson, and Esco (1972) dub the country ethos "populism in retreat." Country lyrics bemoan love and living conditions, but instead of giving voice to revolutionary politics, the lyrics rationalize failure with a number of "accommodation strategies." Included among these are fatalism and perseverance, which are cast as ways to express discontent without questioning the American dream. Only 10% of the scholars' Nashville-sound sample contained a "political message." These scholars conclude that country music expresses the political opinions of the nation at large.

Rogers (1980) agrees that the message of country is stable. Three-fourths of the 1400 songs analyzed (from 1960-1987) focused on "love," and most love songs voiced a negative perspective. The songs were coded into thematic categories of "hurtin' love," "happy love," "cheatin'," and "livin'." According to Rogers, country music serves as a place of solace for the discontented. Rogers relates the creation of country to the linear communication model (i.e. source, message, channel, receiver, and feedback). Successful country music upholds an interpersonal bond with the listener, which Rogers calls a "sincerity contract." Songwriters are expected to make aspects from their own lived experience palatable to the audience. Aside from this requirement, songs are constrained by gatekeepers at every level of production and must respond to feedback from radio, jukeboxes, and live performances. Rogers notes that many contemporary stars "control

their product from beginning to end almost the same way as the oil industry does" (p. 231). Rogers concludes that country music is not escapist despite the fact that universal experiences are often described in the simplest terms. Rogers states that country describes "hurtin'" love most often because happy listeners (passive listeners) need less reinforcement. Listeners who are dealing with loss may find comfort in the commonality of their experiences.

Scholars who analyze Nashville-sound music agree that the message serves to reflect listeners' experiences. Buckley (1993) describes the themes, perspectives offered on those themes, and the country audience. The author sees themes such as unsatisfactory love, home and family, country, work, and rugged individualism as being stable over time. These themes are approached from perspectives such as those that deal with problems through emotional outpouring, fantasy, forbearance, and escape. Buckley (1993) concludes that "country does not reinforce or alter attitudes. Instead, it offers a symbolic world with which audience members may identify" (p. 198). Buckley sees the world represented by country as "fictive" and stable.

Although Buckley (1993) conceived of a neutral symbolic world, Lund (1972) believes that this symbolic world includes religious fundamentalism, racism, and right-wing ideology. In a highly selective lyrical survey, Lund finds partial support for the assumptions that country music is racist, hegemonic, and fundamentalist. Lund supports these assertions by citing underground 1920s songs, which were released before "country" had technically crystallized; Lund also cites under-the-counter racist songs, which were not representative of 1960s popular country. Even as Lund admits that

country music was not positioned to the right of popular opinion until Vietnam, Lund labels the composite lyrical message "super-patriotic."

In response to Lund, Smith and Rogers (1990) contend that country contains such a diversity of themes that "one can find examples to support almost any hypothesis by selectively searching and choosing certain titles" (p. 187). They analyzed songs about "livin'," which comprise about one-quarter of country songs, in order to revise certain political stereotypes. According to the authors' analysis, country lyrical commentary on race relations, religion, economics, and politics reveals a strictly individualist philosophy. Country music seems to distrust centralized authority, instead valuing autonomy at all costs. The only group identification in the lyrics is economic class consciousness; lyrics support the simple man working hard within an unjust system. Despite this libertarian philosophical backdrop, Smith and Rogers verify Dimaggio Peterson and Esco's (1972) claim that country music falls short of resolving the socioeconomic ills of the listener.

In another content analysis, Rogers and Smith (1993) found a similarly individualist philosophy toward organized religion in country music. Although the lyrics with religious commentary revealed skepticism toward formal messengers of religion, Rogers and Smith assert that country does still embrace the protestant individual religious experience and the common folk's ability to enact religious principles in everyday settings. The authors attribute the attitude toward organized religion to the historically consistent focus on *individual* salvation in the South.

In a second article concerned with religion in the South, Smith and Rogers (1995) examine the lyrical coexistence of the honky-tonk and Bible Belt imagery in country. The authors assert that the ritual of Saturday night has taken on a religious pattern in country

music to give southerners escape from an otherwise unsatisfying life. Whereas the poor, working class have little agency throughout the week, the honky-tonk serves as a warm haven of self-empowerment. These authors examine the symbolic significance of the honky-tonk as an escape.

### Sociological Studies

Sociological studies have also been interested in contemporary country's unprecedented popularity in the 1970s and beyond. Country music's ascendancy mirrored the vast internal migration of rural southerners to urban cities in the Midwest and far West during the first half of the twentieth century. This relationship has raised questions about the genre's diffusion and its audience's characteristics. Dimaggio, Peterson, and Esco (1972) found that, in terms of class, the audience for country music was "status inconsistent." Country fans were over-represented in semi-skilled, lower prestige jobs, and generally had lower education levels; however, in terms of income, they fared better than average and were middle class.

In a later study, Peterson and Dimaggio (1975) question the assumption that country appeals mainly to the southern working class. They address diffusion of country music in terms of the "massification hypothesis," which theorizes that old lines of cultural diffusion will be destroyed and that culture will become more homogeneous. The study supports the first part of the hypothesis; the Nashville sound phased out many regional sounds. However, the second part is not supported because a specific culture still enjoys country; the distinct genre has not disappeared even though its original migrant carriers have died. Furthermore, popular music continues to diversify. This does not fit with the idea of social classes dictating tastes, leading the authors to introduce the idea of "culture

classes" that gravitate toward music which relates to their worldviews. Country is thus losing its regional identity while keeping its generic identity. This study suggests that what is now "country" may be quite different than earlier incarnations of the genre.

Scholars argue that country has maintained its rural mindset amidst the changing sounds and audience demographics. Smith (1980) argues that country music constitutes a uniquely southern rhetoric even though it has expanded beyond its base because it voices a continued disillusionment with city life. Smith analyzed lyrics to determine geographic influences on the music. The only negative references to the South had to do with lack of work and boredom. According to country lyrics, moving to the city is a necessity and an inconvenience; in fact, none of the 110 songs analyzed praised the urban lifestyle. This analysis suggests that the country audience has not assimilated into city culture.

In contrast, Raines and Walker (2008) make the case that country music has always reflected the nation at large, not only the South. Country is not so much defined by its regionalism but by its responsiveness to experiences of the listeners. Raines and Walker relate songs to specific events. 1920s hillbilly songs such as "The John T. Scopes Trial" and "Wreck of the Old #9" recounted nationally publicized events. During the Depression, songs such as "No Hard Times" and "T.B. Blues" dealt frankly with the context. World War II signaled a sentimental and patriotic streak in country with songs such as "Filipino Baby" and "There's a Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere." After the war, country adapted to the urban milieu experienced by migrants. The music reflected alcohol abuse, extramarital affairs, existential angst, as well as the faster pace of the city.

There is a serious disconnect, however, in the kind of response country became in the 1960s. Raines and Walker (2008) note that the Nashville sound was recoil against rock and roll, a genre threat. The authors suggest that the Nashville executives were not willing to give in to the trend of rock and roll, which was drawn from the tradition of Black blues. Instead, country producers attempted to appease their conservative white buying public. The authors note that, for the first time, professional songwriters were flocking to Nashville and writing inoffensive songs explicitly for commercial release. Chet Atkins, pioneer of the Nashville sound, states "It wasn't real country, but it was pretty pop" (p. 48). The authors note there were few songs with social significance. Nashville became the equivalent of what Tin Pan Alley had been in the early 1900s. The slick production of Nashville ushered country into its greatest period of commercial prosperity.

While Raines and Walker are certain that country has successfully followed listeners, Scherman (1994) believes that the lack of social relevance of country will lead to its death. Scherman states "the crucial demographic fact of twentieth century America was the stream of rural people into cities, and country music was a product of that migration" (p. 38). The early country artists were very close to Black culture; Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family represented what might have been called "white trash." The hillbillies from the 1920s mixed styles and were amateur, itinerant performers. Scherman notes a trend toward professionalization and soft singing in the 1930s driven forward by radio. According to Scherman, country became quite respectable in the organic form of honky-tonk during the war and the immediate decade after. Despite several counter trends since 1960, the Nashville sound has made country more like



popular music to draw more fans. For Scherman, the more money country makes, the more it loses identity. Listeners may no longer have the cathartic experience of listening to country as their struggling ancestors did. This leads Scherman to believe that country has become a safe haven of background music for suburbia, much like soft rock was in the 1970s and 80s. Scherman states, "Severed from its working-class origins, country music is becoming a refuge for culturally homeless Americans everywhere" (p. 53).

Country's attitudes toward love and drinking, and the lyric's pervasive conveyance of self-pity, have alarmed several scholars to the possible behavioral effects of country music. Stack and Gundlach (1992) hypothesized that country would nurture a suicidal mood because it parallels the concerns of those at risk. The scholars found that, independent of divorce, southernness, poverty, and gun availability, more country music airtime correlated with higher white suicide rates. Connors and Alpher (1989) note that country prescribes alcohol to distance oneself from a bad situation far more often than it prescribes drinking recreationally; therefore, alcohol usage of country music fans could be intensified if they use country songs as models. The content and sociological research converges on a view of country music as being characterized by current mass appeal, which may be taken up by a variety of people for their own uses; such research suggests that country has a relatively passive function in society. In other words, the music is a function of the audience, a repository of their experiences and values.

### Cultural Studies

Cultural studies scholars tend to agree that country music is pushed from behind, focusing not on the Nashville message, but on the industrial complex surrounding country's development and country music's efforts to define itself. These scholars answer

the question of country's authenticity by either pointing out that all eras of country are equally fabricated (Peterson, 1997), or that country has been a necessary compromise between commercialism and folksiness (Jensen, 1998; Pecknold, 2007). Ellison (1995) believes country has found a way to transcend the ills of modernity while becoming part of mass culture.

According to Peterson (1997), country may be a wholly fabricated genre that has fine-tuned its niche market over time. Peterson gives credit to industry figures for realizing the relationship between performance, radio, recording, and publishing that would be most profitable. Originally, country songs were purchased outright from songwriters to be performed by professionals; however, the increasing demand for unpublished old time material soon exhausted the supply. The "goose that lays the golden egg" approach discovered in the late 1920s encouraged singer/songwriters to take prominence. This commercial formula used the artist as a renewable resource who, if given a vested interest in his/her repertoire's success, would continue to be profitable with new songs. Peterson notes that the crucial task for country music has always been to "misremember" the past and to find out what kind of music *feels* authentic or old-time to the listener.

Peterson (1997) argues that the stylistic markers that seem natural to country today were actually carefully constructed. Peterson notes that *Grand Ole Opry* founder George Hay oversaw a fabricated rube image on his show, demanding name changes and certain outfits for performers who did not naturally meld with such roles. Regional radio in the thirties cultivated a different kind of performer, who Peterson suggests was completely at the mercy of advertisers. The *Grand Ole Opry* encouraged specific

characters while regional radio needed breadth of repertoire. In both cases, the programming was closely monitored by sponsors, and the repertoire was altered in any way that would sell products. Despite commercial demands, country has not been assimilated wholly into popular music. According to Peterson, country still has to answer to fans who have always considered themselves a distinct sub-culture in America.

Peterson posits that the "hard-core/soft-shell dialectic" has historically kept the genre alive and distinct. According to this dialectic, the sound of country goes from being more "downhome," or carrying more of its rural style markers (e.g. nasal tones, frank themes, fiddles), to being more "uptown," or softening the sound for wider appeal (e.g. crooning, violins, backup singers). Peterson bases this dialectic on observed periodical changes that were equally accepted as country. In the 1930s, soft-shell sounds such as the delicate harmonizing of the Delmore Brothers and Vagabonds thrived. Roy Acuff introduced the sound that would spawn honky-tonk in the late-1930s, the uninhibited rough-hewn mountain holler. Country would swing yet again to the crooning of Red Foley and Eddy Arnold before honky-tonk's domination. Peterson suggests that neither sound is more authentic than the other. Hard-core and soft-shell artists have equal grounding in country's traditions, although the hard-core sound has been considered less commercial and more authentic by contemporary neo-traditionalists. For Peterson, each swing is initiated by a consumer need for novelty.

Jensen (1998) carries on the authenticity conversation from the "interpretive perspective." This is in contrast to Peterson's (1997) "production of culture" perspective. The commercial success of the country music has been part profit via mass appeal and part evolving construction of a unique genre identity (to retain existing fans). Jensen

defends the specific shift from the honky-tonk to the Nashville sound by describing the contrived authenticity in each subgenre; the honky-tonk and Nashville sounds are equally driven by commercial interest. According to Jensen, industry insiders (e.g. A&R executives, producers, publishers, studio musicians) have creatively preserved the genre as seemingly distinct and authentic-sounding. Jensen believes that other scholars have downplayed this construction as being culturally insignificant or heretical, but that it has been carried out by thoughtful individuals who understand unique audience demands.

The author states that fans want to believe in the superiority of their chosen music. Jensen's contribution is to show that authenticity is as important to those who change the style for profit as it is to the audience. In other words, industry insiders have a lot of creative work to do when they change the sound. This work is not simply done to appease the listeners; those people enacting the changes are personally invested in defending the genre. Changes in country music styles must be rationalized in terms of how they are still authentic. Country's centralization was defended by the myth that rock and roll forced it to go underground in order to survive. Another supporting myth is that the sound of country had to change to remain loyal to changing listeners, who were demanding better production and a sound that could be played on mainstream radio. Jensen suggests that fans hold the original "hollers and back porches" to be the most important imagined context for country music. According to Jensen, each era of country is an equally constructed replacement for those "old-time" contexts.

Pecknold (2007) does not believe country music's strength lies in its association with pre-commercial folksiness or authenticity. Pecknold (2007) suggests that fans deserve more credit for understanding commercial culture than scholars give them.

Country music was initially popularized via radio, which, at the time, was a revolutionary medium of modernity. Advertising in early country radio was frank, and the identities of performers were known to be constructed to satisfy listeners' sensibilities. From the beginning, listeners could hear "the wheels of production" turning (Pecknold, 2007, p. 4).

Country has always opportunistically negotiated its sound among popular, industrial, and social forces. The post-war migration mobilized negative assumptions about rural southerners and their music. The perceived reactionary status of country has been as much due to the artists' exclusion from unions and licensing societies and urban bias as it has by artists themselves. The audience has followed suit with the industry in gaining reactionary self-awareness. Country's participatory fan culture has always been encouraged by regional country radio and fanzines. Pecknold (2007) suggests that, according to fan magazines, popular press, and professional discourse, country's commercial success has been embraced by fans as successful consumer democracy. For fans, country's success in the face of elitist stereotypes gives it legitimacy.

When licensing disputes and changes in radio formatting put country in the national spotlight, fans became more class-oriented rather than region-oriented. Although the contexts of the music were dissolving, the genre had crystallized by 1960 and was actively advanced by the Country Music Association. Country has traditionally kept a relatively permeable boundary between artist and audience. Fans feel like they know the artists, as is evident by the outpourings of grief for years after some stars' tragic deaths. Pecknold concludes that commercialism has been such a part of the emergence of country that it should be considered a cultural text in itself.

At the farthest end of the cultural studies spectrum is a study that brings us closer to the ahistoric conclusions of many content studies. Through a collection of anecdotal evidence, lyrics, and personal experiences, Ellison (1995) states that country music has steadily built a cultural tradition by looking at its own past. The foundation of this tradition is the gospel message of salvation. Ellison describes the triumph of country as something of a cultural anesthetic, one which leads its listeners from "hard times to heaven." In this view, each successive generation of country audiences have become more aware of themselves by reflection on past "tragic troubadours" such as Jimmie Rodgers, the Carter family, and Hank Williams (p. 28).

Ellison (1995) states that the pathos generated by the tragic troubadour tradition is tempered by the gospel roots of southern music. The country community, then, "functions as an imaginative means for transcending the negative effects of modernity" (p. xvii). Much like the content studies, Ellison makes a case for a stable country ethos. Following this assumption, Ellison suggests that parallel messages are apparent between Billy Ray Cyrus and Jimmie Rodgers and between Alan Jackson and Hank Williams.

While Ellison (1995) looks within the genre, Gritzner (2004) points to country's indexing of audience changes to legitimate the genre as truly "folk." Gritzner states that the country message is relevant because it has been so responsive to changes in the audience. Gritzner argues that country has served as a "barometer for certain aspects of popular culture" (p. 858). According to Gritzner, country is characterized by simple, direct, and universal lyrics about "a land, and the life of its people" (p. 860). The performers are likely to write their own material. The audience is the key factor in forming the music; Gritzner states that "Country is a derivative of the people to whom it

belongs" (p. 860). For those reasons, and its blending of cultural styles such as western, blues, polka, and parlor pop, Gritzner asserts that country is a populist triumph. Gritzner suggests that a "social pathology" prevents the genre from being taken seriously by academics. First of all, country's success breaks the expectation of top-down culture dissemination. Second, people are uncomfortable to confront their own cultural past in the way country does. Third, geographic stereotypes about the South degrade the music. Gritzner calls for scholars to examine country's relationship to social experiences of the audience.

A host of other cultural studies have addressed the patriarchy of country. Patriarchal assumptions are present in country's portrayal of men as active, round characters, and women as either objects of domestic stability or dangerous temptations. Chandler and Chaffant (1985) found that country contains double standards for men and women; men are expected to be primary breadwinners and are given the role of making first romantic contact. Other cultural studies also address sex roles in country music. Wilson (1998) discusses the image of Dolly Parton as significant as an image of the self-made rural woman. She argues that Parton speaks to women who might fall outside the influence of intellectual feminist traditions. Goddu (1998) discusses the gothic tendency of the blue-grass tradition, and points out its influence on contemporary hegemonic music videos. Bufwack (1998) discusses the changes and constancies in the style of female country music singers. Women have often needed to strike a compromise between their independence and hardiness on one hand and their adherence to the standards of traditional femininity on the other. Ortega (1998) gives a personal account on the significance of Johnny Cash as a lesbian icon because of his message and style. Cultural

studies scholarship has shown that country music is intimately connected to commercial forces, and that country's status as a distinct, authentic genre is important to the industry and its fans.

### Critical and Interpretive Analyses

Cultural studies have addressed country's evolution in terms of commercialism and authenticity. Other scholars have compared the country's worldview to the dominant culture of the 1950s. Post-war American culture is known as being placid and conservative. The popular notion of country as regressive and conservative comes from its comparison to rock music (i.e. the Nashville era), which gave voice to a hedonistic youth culture and challenged racial barriers with music (Blaser, 1985). Before rock and roll brashly shook the popular culture, however, honky-tonk music represented an against-the-grain, fatalistic view of reality. The post-war migration continued and intensified after World War II. During this time, destabilizing domestic changes and the continued deferral of success plagued the white working class. Honky-tonk music emerged from the live context of the tavern and voiced the conflicted assimilation of its patrons.

Honky-tonk music is an important representation of a marginalized worldview. Scholars agree that the larger context justifies examination of country in terms of its positioning against mainstream society. Blaser (1985) considers Hank Williams a representative for the marginalized migrants. The author states that country music (in general) can be used to examine aspects of American society that have been overlooked or ignored in favor of elitist artifacts (e.g. television, movies, and print). Scholarship about the 1950s has confirmed a view of the bland, innocent, and homogenized society,



which is evident in current nostalgia for the era. According to Blaser, honky-tonk music is a relevant text because it comes much closer to a grass-roots phenomenon than other cultural artifacts. In reviewing Williams' most popular songs, the author concludes that honky-tonk music defies popular notions, giving us a view from "life's other side." Honky-tonk may have actually been ahead of its time in embodying pessimism and a loss of innocence usually reserved for rock music of the 1960s. The 1950s were not "happy days" for everyone (p. 26).

Moving in focus from social context to text, Leppert and Lipsitz (1993) focus on Hank Williams himself as a text that helps us understand the marginal position of the migrant southerner in the 1950s. Williams may embody "collective fears and hopes about the body, romance, gender roles, and the family" (p. 23). This study examines these issues in terms of Williams' appearance, performance style, and lyrics. He remained close to his audience throughout his stardom because of the extent to which he identified with their problems. During the Depression through World War II, many young men were forced in to early labor or service, without living their early lives with any amount of juvenile freedom. The authors argue that Williams challenged the myth of youth as a natural state by sounding and appearing older than his age would lead one to believe.

In terms of romance and gender relations, Williams resisted the romantic optimism, closure, and transcendence frequently associated with male subjectivity; instead, Williams favored a fatalistic perspective (Leppert and Lipsitz, 1993). He sang in an emotionally plaintive style with high, nasally notes, and was gaunt; in spite of this, Williams still garnered sex appeal. Leppert and Lipsitz argue that Hank Williams never made the "Oedipal break" from his mother and always sought to reconnect with women.

This made him more openly vulnerable and dependent than patriarchal society would have sanctioned. Williams served as a magnified version of his audiences' problems, problems of adjustment, which were not given voice in most mainstream 1950s culture.

From a critical standpoint, Fox (1992) argues that honky-tonk music has subverted the notion of authenticity by its pointing out the ironies of capitalism. Fox states that honky-tonk relies on the "metanarratives" of loss and desire. The metanarrative of loss inverts people from being subjects to objects of desire to be consumed. Conversely, the metanarrative of desire decries the temporality of satisfaction and turns objects into speaking subjects. The singer turns back on tangible objects that represent desire obtained. The honky-tonk message is, in effect, one of an irrational obsession with memory and one of liminal dissatisfaction. Singers are usually positioned between what they have lost and what they need to fill a void: satisfaction is always one step ahead or behind the author. Reality is difficult to pin down in honky-tonk music because it has become a "self-consuming pile of memories" (p. 58).

From a strictly humanistic angle, honky-tonk gives the listener a way to make once private conditions public (Fox, 1993). It is self-reflexive, personal music. Typical positions of silence are given voice in country song. Many songs feature a "fool" who is presumed to be the singer him/herself. This fool is a stock loser character, which may allow the listener to view oneself in the position. Fox notes that people actually go to honky-tonks and play out this "texted position," and transcend their condition of miserable heartbrokenness by seeing it as natural. While this self-reflexivity creates an interesting sort of stasis, it is predicated on a pre-established country legacy. This self-

reflexivity may not hold for earlier periods of country. Fox is especially interesting for suggesting that symbols from song can be embodied in lived performances.

A couple of studies have dealt with generic elements of generic country style rather than engaging in textual analysis. Cusic (2004) emphasizes the forgotten vaudevillian humor tradition in country music. Cusic believes country music has humorous message that offsets its otherwise bleak content. Cusic is not discriminating about what varieties of humor country might employ. For instance, the humor of Hank Williams' "I'll Never Get Out of This World Alive" contains bitterness and resentment, which is not present in a cornball Minnie Pearl *Grand Ole Opry* segment. Franke (1997) believes that country musicians' use of cliché is not "inartistic," but that it stresses the universality of deeply private situations. Clichés may refer to stable sources of perseverance and give cathartic relief to the audience; however, it is important to realize that the clichés present in country now may not have been clichés earlier in country history

Jensen (1993) focuses on the honky-tonk as an important lived context for contemporary country music from an interpretive perspective. Jensen argues that honky-tonk music was originally popular because radio served as a conduit from live contexts to listeners. Later, radio became a filter for songs projected to be hit singles and honky-tonk would fall from favor. Although honky-tonk form is now a marginal to contemporary country recording, the venue itself is still important many fan's identities and worldviews. While Jensen (1988) does not follow up to assert the value of honky-tonk compared to other subgenres, Malone (1982) believes that honky-tonk "represents the best in a music that is losing its soul" (p. 120). Because of its focus on the particular

moment of rural to urban adjustment, Malone states that honky-tonk music is the most organic form of country.

Some interpretive scholars have looked at honky-tonk's worldview as it relates to theological patterns of understanding. Goodson (1993) states that Hank Williams was a secular preacher for the southern white working class and characterizes the philosophy contained in Williams' music as "hillbilly humanism." Hank Williams was prolific in creating gospel and secular music and exemplifies the tensions between the spiritual and material realm. His gospel songs describe happiness as hinging on the personal decision to accept Christ. Hank's themes stressing innate human dignity stem from his belief that we are all equally fated to hurt and sin in this world but still control our fates in eternity.

The relationship between human and God in the gospel songs is replaced by the relationship between men and women in the secular songs. According to Goodson (1993), women are seen as a means for worldly salvation. Hell is the unnamed punishment for those who are unable to sustain a relationship with God, but personal willpower can lead one to spiritual salvation. In his secular songs, Williams describes the punishment for dissolving relationships: misery. The key difference is that the avoidance of misery in the material world is out of one's hands; the innocent may suffer as much or more than the wicked. For Goodson, ethical behavior is not a precondition for salvation in either his religious or secular songs. So, although Williams borrows the structure of the world from the spiritual realm, he does not include God in this picture. God is left to the transcendent realm while we are left to our earthly hells. Hank Williams thus established a "communal suffering" with his audience. Goodson notes that this overarching fatalistic

orientation rejects traditional understandings of southern culture as cleanly divided between religiosity and hedonism.

Filligim (2003) classifies country music as theology because it is concerned with the ultimate universal powers. Filligim claims that country refocused on romantic love as the ultimate concern when the urban milieu rendered southern men socioeconomically impotent. Love carries the power to redeem one's soul or to destroy it. Because love can be so irrational and unjust, laments found in country question the fundamental order of the universe without necessarily suggesting any changes. Cheating songs and songs about love gone wrong give the country message a critical ability that gospel songs do not allow.

For Filligim (2003), Hank Williams is important because he "stands on both sides of the major tensions in country music"(p. 42). Williams secularized gospel songs by making the reality of the spiritual world fixed and unresponsive, but he also "sacralized" pessimism, according to Filligim. Many of his "gospel" songs actually focus on the pain of suffering of the world and do not resolve it with the promise of heaven, while many of his secular songs, especially "Luke the Drifter" recordings, attach the significance of religion to continued suffering. By employing the scheme of theology, these authors focus on the more abstract, philosophical position of honky-tonk. The current study is intended to explain the social utility of such positioning.

Jensen (1988) defends the Nashville Sound with the term "recalcitrance." Based on the work of Kenneth Burke (1954), recalcitrance may be best understood as any stubborn characteristic of the universe that forces us to adapt our selective understandings of reality. Recalcitrance requires rhetorical action to incorporate new information into an

old belief system. Jensen believes recalcitrance describes the character of country music's Nashville sound. Jensen claims that the Nashville sound represented a refusal to be incorporated into popular music, and that the unique identity of country was recalcitrant to popular music. The accomplishments of investigations of what might be called the rhetorical function of country have given us several clues for further inquiry. These studies (Leppert and Lipsitz, 1993; Fox, 1993; Goodson, 1993; Fillingim, 2003) privilege symbols as primary in our experience of reality. Such studies place the poet, or symbol user, at the vanguard of cultural understandings. They must symbolically encounter new circumstances in ways that ring true to the audience.

#### Literature Conclusion

Country music has, indeed, meant "all things to all people"(Malone, 2002, p. 168); it is at once commercial, folk, rural, urban, regionalized, centralized, original, traditional, mainstream, and marginalized. Scholars have explored the genre in several ways. Since country was escapist in early years and has become mass culture in the recent period, it may seem that country music serves a passive function in terms of engaging with listeners. Thus far, country has been explored as an anesthetic culture to console listeners and as a commercial phenomenon that is paradoxically dependent on "authenticity" for its existence. Scholars agree on the unique status of the honky-tonk subgenre as being more rooted in a physical context than other subgenres, more responsive to social problems, and as establishing many of the benchmarks for what country "should" be in the future (Lange, 2004). Even Nashville defender Joli Jensen (1993) states, "Honky-tonk is a genre of music that developed in a social institution that addressed the needs of rural dwellers exposed to urban pressures" (p. 121). It is this

statement that I will explore, not the matter of Nashville's commercialism, but of honky-tonk's unique rhetoric.

## IV. METHOD

### Critique of Literature

Existing scholarship has not aimed at understanding country as rhetoric, as being active in the realm of human influence. Although literature has addressed important issues regarding the social and cultural function of commercial country, scholars have not addressed how, in specific historical moments, country subgenres have re-negotiated the symbols that orient listeners to their environments. Country has been explored as a successful commodity, the recurring themes have been pointed out, but we are yet to understand how honky-tonk adapted the rural worldview for its encounter with the urban milieu. I investigate the post-war honky-tonk era through Hank Williams, seeing him as an active interpreter of social reality.

Content analyses such as Rogers' (1989) have described a genre with a consistent place in the lives of its listeners. Country is championed as a monolithic genre, a cultural anesthetic, or place of retreat for listeners. Ellison's (1995) stated goal is "focus on the accumulation and reinforcement through time of shared attitudes, values, tradition, gesture, rituals, and ceremonial events" (p. xvi). Rogers and Ellison neglect the context of the country messages construction, seeing the message of Hank Williams as being essentially the same as contemporary star, Alan Jackson. Just as the content analyses have not viewed country as *encountering* the world, sociological studies have seen it only



in terms of what markers of its regional origin country still has and how it has been adopted largely by new regional groups.

Cultural Studies scholars have viewed the genre as being a product of industrial forces and audience tastes; these scholars have devoted little attention to the relationship between artist and social context. Cultural studies have subsumed the country message within commercial strategy. For instance, Peterson (1997) describes country as a unified genre with certain mechanical seasons without noting the social contexts. Although this dialectic does show the stylistic fluctuations as being profitable, I explain the different conditions and implications of the particular momentum swing to "hard core" that was honky-tonk. Peterson argues that Hank Williams was successful by recombining existing elements of country style in a way that maximized his perceived authenticity. Peterson de-emphasizes the rhetorical aspect of Williams' work.

I argue that his reconstitution of elements was significant in a way other than invoking authenticity as a commercial strategy, and that this reconstitution was a creative endeavor that engaged a cultural exigence. With Pecknold's (2007) recent conclusion that commercialism is *embraced* as a cultural text by country's audience, scholars may move on to considering other aspects of country's role in cultural adaptation. Since the Nashville sound was studied in all cases, one can be certain that the back-looking, self-reflexive tendency of the genre was not as pronounced in the post-war period. Neither was there such a compulsion to *seem* authentic. On the other hand, I study the artist as an intermediary between a troubling context and an audience with which he/she identifies.

Two scholars have used the term *rhetoric* in passing. Smith (1980) equates *rhetoric* with *cultural residue*, the resilience of regional influences in changing times.

Smith (1980) describes country as a “southern rhetoric” simply because the themes contain statements that indicate discontent with southern relocation and nostalgic longing for lost pastures. Since these themes are not contextually relevant past 1960 (in terms of the southern migration), they come off as stylistic markers of country—residue rather than rhetorical action. Rhetoric does not exist in a vacuum. Similarly, Smith and Rogers (1990) equate the libertarian philosophy that they abstract from country lyrics to rhetoric merely because it describes the genre’s political disposition. If scholars only look for what music says relative to an absolute continuum of political philosophy, we may discount the function of country rhetoric. Smith and Rogers (1990; 1993; 1995) consistently argue that country has not been outspoken in terms of this absolute continuum.

Style and poetic syntheses are primary concerns in explaining honky-tonk as rhetoric. Scholars in the interpretive and critical realm have discussed some aspects of honky-tonk "style" and suggested several ways to think about the internal composition of the music. They have described the techniques of honky-tonk without considering its utility. Furthermore, these studies were not grounded in a specific context and have not isolated specific artifacts. The studies have focused on country holistically as a genre rather than analyzing a text *from* the genre in terms of its specific context. Almost all of the previous studies are similar in that they have considered symbols as having a passive function in regards to human experiences of reality. Symbols have been seen as storehouses of information, residual signs of economic circumstance, but not as determining the nature of reality.

## Research Question

Several scholars have agreed that post-war boom of honky-tonk was a unique period in the history of the genre (Malone, 1982; Jensen, 1993; Scherman, 1994; Raines & Walker, 2007; Leppert & Lipsitz, 1993; Blaser, 1985). The honky-tonk era was a liminal period for country music and its audience. Lange (2004) states, "Country music represented more than just a historical document of the times; it represented a vehicle for survival, on both an individual and collective scale"(p. ix). The sounds and messages were dealing with a very real social upheaval, and the genre had not gained the self-awareness that it would after the 1950s; however, scholars have not used rhetorical concepts to name the perceived "authenticity" of the honky-tonk era.

Considering the neglect of those aspects of honky-tonk, I ask the following research question: How does Hank Williams' work act rhetorically upon the orientations of his regional peers and national audience? In answering this question I hope to see how a culture can adapt to function in new situations without losing important parts of its unique identity. I also explain how one piece of rhetoric may serve different audiences in different ways: in this case, how an artifact may be useful for sub-cultural identity and mass identification. My contribution will be to show that honky-tonk has not only reflected change but has also facilitated change as an agent favoring certain interpretations over others.

## Description of Artifact

The period from 1949 to 1952 saw Hank William's at his most profitable yet downtrodden. He had seven number one hits in between those years (Cusic, 1993). I analyze the *Health and Happiness* shows (Escott, 1993), an artifact indicative of Hank's

performing prime. These shows are from first of those four years of stardom, before the exhaustion of constant touring and substance abuse had taken its toll but after Williams had paid his dues to the circuit of honky-tonks and the *Louisiana Hayride*. Placed at this point, these shows embody his past and exemplify the elements that made him successful until his death. Hank's first syndicated radio series, the *Health and Happiness* shows, bear explicit marks of commercialism, rural ethos, domestic tension, and individual creativity that distinguishes Hank Williams as the epitomizer of honky-tonk. Escott (1993) states, "this is as close as it comes to being there" (p. 18).

The eight, fifteen-minute *Health and Happiness* shows were cut on two successive Sundays in the fall of 1949, approximately four months after Hank's arrival in Nashville (Escott, 1993). His first hit, "Lovesick Blues," was still in the charts. Escott (1994) notes that Hank's reputation scared away many possible sponsors, but Dudley LeBlanc, patent medicine creator and populist politician (he ran for governor of Louisiana in 1944), had heard Hank's radio show in Shreveport and was quite impressed with his appeal. The shows were the brainchild of WSM advertising manager Matt Hedrick. Hedrick shrewdly made sure that Hank never said the name of the medicine so that the shows could be used for other sponsors. After each song, Hank made an all purpose advertising pitch that never referred directly to the product but only implored the audience to hear what their "friends" had to say. Unlike the barnstorming era relationship, in which advertisers dictated songs meticulously, LeBlanc had no influence on the material performed (Ellison, 1995; Peterson, 1997). This artifact may be seen as an organic performance in spite of its commercial backdrop; in other words, its immediate commercial nature did not dictate the musical content.

The eight episodes contain forty-nine songs. The total run time of the collection is ninety-six minutes. The opening and closing songs of each episode are the same in all eight. Hank also plays the hits "Lovesick Blues" and "Wedding Bells" twice each in the collection. This leaves thirty-three songs in the collection. Ellison (1995) states, "Each show presents one gospel number, one instrumental, and two songs either written by Hank or adapted by him from pop or other sources" (p. 72). Ellison (1995) states that the program was an important opportunity for Hank to build a lasting fan following by playing unknown original compositions. Aside from the theme songs at the beginning and end of each episode, ten of the thirty-three songs included in this collection were Williams' own compositions. According to Ellison, "Those ten songs provide a clear indicator of the central theme in Williams' songwriting: domestic turmoil" (p. 72). Of these ten, four deal with "domestic situations of romantic love where partners complain about, defy, or warn one another, or express their loneliness, and three are songs of broken hearts" (p. 72). 70% of the total depict romantic trauma; the other 30% include two songs of gospel salvation and one train song. According to Ellison's (1995) classification scheme, 30% of Hank's own songs were selected from his witty repertory.

According to Escott (1994), the *Health and Happiness* shows were the first recorded evidence of Williams' latest Drifting Cowboys band. Although the new incarnation of the band had only been together three months, they had already molded to Williams' demands as a performer. Escott (1994) describes his rigid preferences: Hank hated pickers who were too busy. When he was singing he didn't want the impact of his vocals undermined by cute fills, and he wanted the solos as simple and direct as his singing. He would spin around and glare at any musician who got too close to jazz for his

liking. "I know a lot of good guitar players," he once said, "who've educated themselves right out of a job (p. 118).

Escott claims that these shows are an energetic effort by a new singer with something to prove. Escott notes the irony of the title *Health and Happiness*, since "Hank never had much of either" (p. 117). He goes on to note that Williams "sang every song with frightening conviction that was strangely at odds with his molassified patter between songs"(p. 117). According to Escott (1994), the shows also give us evidence of what Hank and Audrey were like together as performers. Scholars may compare this domestic performance to what we know about their turbulent relationship off-air. Audrey appears in one song on each of the first four shows. She was absent when the last four shows were recorded (Escott, 1994). In terms of historical context, style, commercial backdrop, content, and the inclusion of Audrey, the *Health and Happiness* shows are an appropriate artifact for exploring Hank Williams' honky-tonk rhetoric.

#### Rhetorical Theory

Now that I have distinguished honky-tonk as being inadequately described as a social phenomenon and explained the context of the *Health and Happiness* shows, I will elaborate on a rhetorical perspective appropriate for approaching this particular artifact. According to Brummett (2000), the multitude of definitions for rhetoric all revolve around the notion of symbolic influence in human affairs. Different thinkers have placed various emphases on certain types and functions of influence. Ancient sophists, such as Gorgias, stressed rhetoric as a process for delivering effective speeches for self-advancement. Aristotle conceived of rhetoric as the discovery of all available means of persuasion, and focused on the outcome of rhetoric as knowledge of the truth. Kenneth

Burke, the most well known twentieth-century rhetorician, viewed rhetoric most broadly as identification. According to Burke, rhetoric was grounded in social cooperation, and was a symbolic strategy of inducement.

According to Brummett (2000), all rhetorical theory offers some conception of discourse, the nature of knowledge in relation to rhetoric, the type of power wielded by rhetors, and favors certain types of media for delivering rhetoric. In addition, theorists give different weightings to the symbols employed, context of the artifact, or strategies involved in rhetoric. The particular dimensions of rhetoric emphasized depend largely on a scholar's interests. Since the most striking difference between honky-tonk and other subgenres is contextual, I employ a conception of rhetoric which favors the situation as the formative impetus for rhetoric. Since other scholars have conceived of a passive country genre, which merely reinforces existing realities, my rhetorical perspective will view symbols as a mode of action. Finally, since other scholars have seen the artists as products of an industry, I will conceive of them as *rhetors*, wielders of influence obliged to solve particular problems of the situation. I place rhetorical situation, audience, and rhetor as the definitive elements of a piece of rhetoric.

Bryant (1953) defines rhetoric as "the rationale of informative and suasory discourse" (p. 405). Bryant sees rhetoric as a method rather than a particular subject, an "animating principle" that adapts a group's understandings. Bryant argues that rhetoric may characterize any subject as long as it deals in what is uncertain in human affairs: primarily, weightings of values and attitudes. Because of this, the author states that rhetoric is most pronounced in the operative aspects of society (cooperative public

endeavors). Bryant states, "Rhetoric, as distinct from the learnings which it uses, is dynamic; it is concerned with movement. It *does* rather than *is*" (p. 412).

Bryant (1953) also notes that scholars should expand their notions of rhetorical occasions by including advertising, salesmanship, propaganda, and commercial services as rhetoric; Bryant notes, "In this day of the press, radio, and television perhaps their rhetoric is that most continuously and ubiquitously at work on the public" (p. 411).

Bryant states that new considerations of what performances constitute rhetoric are giving its study more credence in explaining social and cultural phenomena. Bryant sees the older "literary-historical-political" notion of rhetoric as being reinvigorated by the socio-cultural emphases (p. 422). Typically, in traditional criticism, only formal speeches by public policy figures were considered as rhetoric. New directions allow one to consider recordings, such as the current study's radio transcriptions, as rhetorical artifacts.

Bitzer (1968) clarifies the pragmatic nature of rhetoric and moves away from traditional ways of analyzing rhetoric. Bitzer notes that other scholars have been concerned with the structure of discourse and its relationship to the speaker, often at the expense of the situation. According to Bitzer, "not the rhetor, not persuasive intent, but the situation is the source and ground of rhetorical activity" (p. 62). Only by understanding the necessities behind rhetoric can we judge its effectiveness. Bitzer states that there are three elements to the rhetorical situation: exigence, audience, and constraints. Bitzer defines an exigence as a particular actual or potential issue that must be dealt with. The exigence in a rhetorical situation must be at least partially resolvable by discourse. A capable and active audience is also necessary for a piece of rhetoric to exist. The audience must be necessary for solving the exigence, and they must be driven



to act upon it in a certain way. Finally, constraints are forces that modify the rhetoric and the behaviors that it entails, the knowledge that it conveys, and the attitudes that it employs. Constraints can be seen as limitations or possibilities in the forms of beliefs, attitudes, motives, and traditions. Bitzer's emphasis on the situation encourages scholars to view rhetoric's success only in terms of its unique purposes, which are generated by the exigence, its audience, and constraints. In my study, the ruling exigence is the post-war migration of rural southerners to cities. For this study, rhetoric is a practical mode of altering reality and coordinating action to solve the unsolvable problems of existence.

I should not let an emphasis on what Bitzer (1968) describes as an "objective" impetus, that is the situation, discount the primacy of symbols in apprehending the world and changing human encounters with it. Rhetoric is a creative endeavor and, as Bryant (1953) states, is always concerned with appearances. Brummett (2000) discusses relativistic approaches of rhetoric; ones that emphasize the fluid nature of symbolic reality. According to Brummett and other "consensus theorists," to whom Burke can be seen akin, "Human reality always has a symbolic and meaningful substance," and "the reality which is grounded in meaning is also formed and changed rhetorically" (p.425). Meaning is contained in symbols, so rhetoric deals with our most basic experiences of reality. In other words, rhetoric builds consensus on reality and is, therefore, epistemic (a way of knowing). Burke, like consensus theorists, sees one's symbolic orientation as presupposing a host of motives, attitudes, and ways of engaging with reality. While subscribing to the symbolic construction of reality, Burke is nonetheless heavily invested in the notion of rhetoric as practical action—the notion of symbols as grounded in material cooperation (i.e. economic structures). Honky-tonk is rhetorical because it is adaptive (or

it *does* rather than *is*), responds to a specific exigence and, both employs and alters the symbolic resources of its listeners.

### Burkean Methodology

The points of emphasis above can be seen in the work of Kenneth Burke. According to Brummett (2000), Kenneth Burke was the most influential rhetorical theorist of the twentieth century. The theme that runs throughout the breadth of his work is that reality is grounded symbolically. Burke was concerned with what rhetoric could do for the functioning of society on the most fundamental levels of meaning formation. Brummett states that rhetorical theory before Burke's time had been aimed at explaining aesthetic experiences in isolation in order to understand the internal workings of the text. Burke, however, thought critically about the rhetoric of everyday symbol usage in books, film, and television, suggesting that we actively put to the use the symbols that we consume; in other words, "they help us to confront real-life problems" (Brummett, p. 743).

### *Burke for Country Music*

The current study will put to use Burke's *Permanence and Change* (1954), which addresses how rhetoric must adapt orientations to exigencies, making them once again serviceable. According to Brummett (2000), this work suggested that faulty language usage led to the Great Depression, and that only new ways of communicating would extricate the nation from it. Burke's work is especially relevant because it addresses social upheaval and challenges to the symbolic order of things. The work of honky-tonk is to adapt the traditions of a rural regional music to new contexts. Southern culture has been traditionally isolated and has taken a distinct form because of the rural-agrarian

lifestyle. From the Civil War until World War II, the South economically lagged behind the industrialized areas of the United States. This lag intensified southern cultural insularity and profoundly shaped the values of its inhabitants.

Burke (1954) deals primarily with the "many differences of *perspective* that go with a world of much occupational diversity" (p.lvi). According to Burke, the southern perspective reflects an "agrarian psychosis." Burke addresses the dilemma of the agrarian psychosis in the following passage:

Today it is bastardized, or at least weakened, by its necessary acquiescence to the economic policies dictated by the great centers of population and finance.

Taxation, interest, and the money crop have made impractical the barter mentality which once distinguished the agrarians; they are now simply the weakest, least effectual, most outlying members of the purchase economy (p. 41).

Although Burke could not have known that World War II would accelerate the dissolution of the agrarian orientation, he provides terms to understand its changes.

Sociological scholars in the 1970s noted that the southern region had changed markedly, becoming more industrial and urbanized. This growth was catalyzed by government expenditures on military installments in the South during the war. According to Goldfield (1987), the federal government spent one-third of the national military budget on facilities in the South. The South was popular for training troops because of its warm climate. Southern city populations increased by one-third during the 1940s. In 1945, Mobile, Alabama was the fastest growing city in the country, with a 61% population growth. Meanwhile, farming in the South did not decrease, rather it increased, but the amount of average acreage farmed increased dramatically; this reflected the

mechanization of commercial farming. By 1945, nearly one in three farms had electricity as opposed to one in six just five years earlier.

Although the southern evangelical religious tradition had served to justify the status quo of poverty and isolation, Roland (1975) notes that "Southern Religion, like the rest of southern life felt the effects of postwar change, as those forces that challenged traditional political, economic, and social practices, also challenged the conservative regional theology with its relative indifference to schemes for earthly betterment" (p. 119). After many decades of rejecting ideals of social progress and human perfectibility, southern culture was given the opportunity to catch up to the rest of the country economically yet was unequipped to make sense of its "opportunities." Roland states that neither the Civil War nor Reconstruction threatened the core of traditional southern society as much as the changes after World War II. Roland argues, "Southern society after World War Two underwent the most severe stress of its entire history" (p. 168). Since country music came to prominence nationally in the same time period that southern economies did, it is a valuable way to examine the how cultural tension was managed. Roland states that "the rise of country music after World War Two was probably an unparalleled phenomenon in American cultural affairs" (p. 165).

The southern orientation was threatened by a historically-defined rhetorical situation. The emphasis of certain values, patterns of domestic life, and economic interaction had to be managed symbolically. Lange (2004) states, "Country music of the World War II era captured the mindset of a group of people confronted with monumental changes in their lives at the hands of modernizing forces" (p. xi). Lange states that country music from 1939-1954 represented responses to "sociocultural tumults

experienced by its listeners" (p. 1). Burke's work is concerned with such necessary changes to outdated orientations.

### *Permanence and Change*

Burke wrote *Permanence and Change* (1954) to address the existential confusion created by the Great Depression. The Depression spurred discussions about the usefulness of the ruling economic system (a type of orientation) by revealing its shortcomings in meeting its espoused purposes (economic prosperity, scientific progress, etc.). According to Burke, humans approach reality in a way that is serviceable to our interests; we develop an "orientation." An orientation is built on signs that classify experience. Burke sees language, the stuff of orientations, as having a dual function as "the common basis for feeling" and "the common implement of action" (p. 176). Burke states that an orientation is a "sense of relationships developed by the contingencies of experience" (p. 18). An orientation serves as a "general view of reality" and is the human basis for experiencing the world, predicting the behavior of others, and making sense of events (p. 18).

Orientations make certain motives and metaphors seem natural to the extent that patterns of stimuli recur and to the extent that the orientation is useful in dealing with them. Burke (1954) states, "motives are shorthand terms for situations" (p. 29). Motives are humanity's way of socializing behaviors to seem reasonable when we encounter stimuli that call for differing responses. Burke suggests we may go to work instead of running away to elope when we act out of "duty" instead of "love." In times of upheaval, motives do not seem as common-sense because orientations have failed to account for the complexity of certain conflicts of existence.

If they persist, orientations culminate in overarching "rationalizations" of humanity's purposes. Burke identifies three such orders of rationalization: magic, religion, and science. Magic stresses control of natural forces, religion stresses the control of human forces, and science stresses the control of technological forces. Burke notes the similarity between magic and science in that "both magic and positive science assume a uniformity or regularity of natural process, and attempt to harness these processes by discovery of the appropriate formulae" (p. 59). Burke notes that the religious rationalization differs in that it sees the universe as incomplete, driven by an arbitrary will. Whereas the magical and scientific rationalizations emphasize dominance over a fixed universe, the religious orientation emphasizes inducement of the arbitrary power that determines fate. Each rationalization carries implicit metaphors for humankind. The current drives for progress, efficiency, and the quest to find ever more discriminating, affectively neutral ways to classify reality are symptomatic of the scientific rationalization, which offers that we are machines.

Orientations (sub-units of the larger rationalizations) remain in place not only because they are serviceable to our interests, but also because they are inherently stubborn. A firmly entrenched orientation defines the very tests for "success" which are valid, tautologically justifying itself. Burke (1954) asks, "How many people today are rotting in either useless toil or in dismal worklessness because of certain technological successes?" (p. 101). Orientations are also extended by analogical reasoning and our sense of piety. According to Burke, analogy is the underlying form of argument in civilization; we understand new situations in terms of their likeness to old symbolic patterns. Analogical extension often has confused the "essence" of a stimulus with a

group's particular abstraction of it. Piety, which I will discuss more in the following section, is also an explanation for the persistence of orientations. According to Burke, piety is "the yearning to conform to the source of one's being" (p. 69). Piety "rounds out" reality to fit one's sense of the appropriate (p. 69). We organize things in relations to our definitive interests in the world. Piety directs affective responses toward things as fitting or unfitting, good or bad. Although the term has connotations of religion, Burke considers secular piety as present in the most devout Christian and depraved drug-user alike.

Because of these tendencies, orientations often become outdated long before they are corrected, all the more so when a certain rationalization has become monolithic and pre-occupational. Burke (1954) defines the state of affairs when a rationalization has hindered the well-being of humanity in two ways, trained incapacity and occupational psychosis. Burke borrows the term "trained incapacity" from Veblen. It describes how certain abstractions or discriminations we make to accomplish our ends may undermine those ends when contexts change. According to Veblen, trained incapacity is "the state of affairs whereby one's very abilities function as blindness" (Burke, 1954, p. 7). A fish that learns to distinguish bait from real food by its appearance may starve itself if the only food remaining in the ecosystem looks just like the bait. Similarly, chickens that associate certain bell pitches with "feeding time" may assemble just as readily when the same pitch calls them forth for "slaughter time." Every rationalization reveals its own trained incapacities. In the capitalist orientation, virtues of hard work, perseverance, and specialization may place us in such a miserable occupation that happiness is impossible; in fact, the prescriptions for happiness may lead us farther and farther away from it even as we cling more and more to our training.

Occupational psychosis is another related negative quality of extended orientations. Burke (1954) uses psychosis to simply mean "pronounced character of the mind" (p. 40). According to Burke, humans tend to carry the patterns of our primary occupations into other areas of life for the sake of understanding and simplified management. An occupational pattern becomes a psychosis when the pattern becomes an interest in itself, ethicized as something which is deserving of self-sacrifice. Burke claims that every occupation can become a psychosis and that each rationalization has an overarching psychosis. Our scientific rationalization manifests the "technological psychosis" in that anything useful for manipulating the natural world is ethicized as good. According to Burke, the technological psychosis is present in experimentalism, the laboratory method, creative skepticism, and organized doubt. According to Burke, its doctrine of use as a primary concern has "established the *secular* as a point of reference by which to consider questions of valuation" (p. 45). In the capitalist system, we often consider miserable, monotonous work as intrinsically good because of the welfare it represents.

To encapsulate these problems of an orientation, Burke (1954) states, "ways of seeing are ways of not seeing" (p.49). Paradoxically, only a new orientation can rectify an old one, and it must do so in terms of the old orientation (the same language). Burke's solution to the technological psychosis, or his "philosophic corrective," is called the "poetic" solution. It is an all-affirming rather than limiting mode of cooperation. The poetic solution would reinstate inducement as the means of controlling human forces, like the religious rationalization, rather than domination and competition (i.e. capitalism). In Burke's view, capitalism impedes the sociability of material cooperation and creates an



increasingly fragmented, inhumane world. Burke seeks to replace the ideal of progress, which constantly defers the good life, admitting a mismanaged present, with the ideal of a "norm." The ideal of the norm means "that at the bottom the aims and genius of man have remained fundamentally the same, that temporal events may cause him to stray far from his sources but that he repeatedly struggles to restore under new particularities, the same basic patterns of the 'good life'" (p. 163).

Burke (1954) assessed the prospects of changing a rationalization (overarching orientation); this study focuses on adaptations to the rural-southern orientation (encapsulated in country music) as it meets with the scientific rationalization (the urban milieu). The same method of establishing new linkages was necessary. Furthermore, the persistence of some motives from the old orientation is treated as a critique of the scientific rationalization, an affront to its serviceability. With post-war honky-tonk, the genre was between a stable, rural-folk sound and stable, Nashville-commercial sound. Meanwhile, the rural audience was also between country and city; the good life remained elusive despite economic prospects. I employ the notion of perspective by incongruity, grounded in piety, to answer the first part of the research question (how did Williams act upon his rural audience's orientation?).

#### *Piety and Perspective by Incongruity*

I am primarily concerned with the middle part of Burke's text, which discusses the method and state of affairs called "perspective by incongruity." Burke (1954) defines perspective by incongruity as being at once a "shattering or fragmentation" of old meanings and "the merging of categories once felt to be mutually exclusive" (p. 69).

According to Burke, perspective by incongruity constitutes a conversion attempt (i.e. rhetoric):

Any new way of putting the characters of events together is an attempt to convert people regardless of whether it go by the name of religion, psychotherapy, or science. It is impious by our definition, insofar as it attaches the linkages already established. It attempts, by rationalization, to alter the nature of our responses (p. 86).

Burke suggests that Freudian psychoanalysis is one example of perspective by incongruity. By offering a comprehensive, impious, scheme of sexual motives, Freud was able to make even the most irrational behavior seem reasonable. According to Burke, "Freud reformulated the old doctrine of original sin to cure people whom progress, in some form or another, was driving into hysteria" (p. 127). In cases of perspective by incongruity, the work of the rhetor is to convert upward or downward certain concerns considered negligible or paramount. The clinical normalcy with which very sacred personal topics were approached with psychoanalytic techniques converted the patients' perceived neuroses downward; it became normal to be abnormal.

To understand perspective by incongruity also requires attention to "piety." As a liminal state between old and new orientations, perspective by incongruity represents the creative expansion of an orientation to understand the world. Burke states that any time we attempt to forge understandings we violate a sense of piety. Introducing incongruous, or impious, information into the system causes discomfort. Piety, a "system builder," strives to align symbols in a way that seems appropriate (p. 74). In this sense, even the teachings of Christianity could be seen as impious when they considered prostitution as a sin; after all, pagan cultures had long practiced *sacred* prostitution. Perspective by

incongruity manages piety when it uses old symbols in new ways: rhetors preserve some aspects of piety in order to be comprehensible. Jack (2004) states that pieties parallel Bitzer's notion of "constraints" in a rhetorical situation. Burke (1954) states that "one can cure a psychosis only by appealing to some aspect of the psychosis. The cure must bear notable affinities with the disease" (p. 126). In Freud's case, sexuality was already a heightened concern in society, so he used it as his cure. Honky-tonk, like psychoanalysis, may be seen as a way to make a troubling world temporarily comprehensible through a familiar set of motives applied in unfamiliar ways.

Other scholars have found perspective by incongruity, grounded in piety, to be a workable explanation for traditional types of rhetoric. Jasinski (2001) states that critics have most commonly adapted perspective by incongruity as "an *inventional resource* exploited in the process of advocacy" (p. 434). According to Foss (1979), perspective by incongruity "[enables] the communicator to control the situations which he or she faces" (p. 7). Foss analyzed two artifacts which gave feminist critiques of Catholicism. Ti-Grace Atkinson, founding member of the New York National Organization for Women, faced a hostile crowd at Catholic University in Washington D.C. In her speech, Atkinson compared the Catholic Church to the Ku Klux Klan, offered the notion of a mentally disordered church doctrine, and used business terminology to describe the church's mode of functioning. In a second artifact, Mary Daly's essay highlighted contradictions between Catholic and feminist ideologies. She questioned the Virgin Mary as a healthy ideal for femininity. In both artifacts, Foss notes that the splitting apart of old linkages opens the audience to new possibilities.

Prosisie (1999) states, "Rhetorical agency, in response to an orientation gone wrong, offers a new way to think about a situation" (p. 378). Prosisie discusses how General George Butler's rhetoric opened the debate of nuclear disarmament for non-experts to take part in. Before retirement, Butler had authority over half of the United States' arsenal of nuclear weapons. He shocked the National Press Club by calling for the abolishment of nuclear weapons. Butler challenged the nuclear culture of expertise. Butler attributed the public's lack of involvement to a blind faith in the utility of nuclear stockpiling. According to Prosisie, "Butler's transcendence of his past uniquely qualifies him to speak as a true expert" (p. 380).

Goltz (2007) explains how Burke's perspective by incongruity may serve the ends of queer theory. Gay men have been placed in a "tragic frame," serving as the social victim for heteronormative society. Goltz, using personal experience, speaks of the self-destructive tendencies gay men may succumb to because of the mainstream concept of perfection—marriage, having children, generational sharing, and heterosexuality. Gay-male culture is centered on "youthism." This comes from the notion that as a gay man ages, he is forced to sacrifice many ideals. Only by splitting apart old associations with terms such as "Gay prayer" can we escape the social sacrificing of gays. According to Goltz, perspective by incongruity can serve as a comic corrective for the binaries created by the current tragic frame.

Whedbee (2001) explains how Norman Thomas, protestant minister and leader of the Socialist party during the second quarter of the twentieth century, employed perspective by incongruity to encourage Americans to strive for "peace" rather than "victory." Whedbee analyzes a 1943 radio speech to discuss how Thomas implicated the

audience as moral agents in the war. Whedbee first discusses piety and impiety as essential terms for understanding perspective by incongruity. Impious linkages are conversion attempts in that they question orientations with new perspectives. Whedbee states, "New linkages of vocabulary generate new orientations and a sense of 'becoming' as opposed to stable 'being'" (p. 48). As an impious linkage, perspective by incongruity creates an identity crisis in the audience. According to Whedbee, "an audience is not 'persuaded' to accept a particular belief or policy as such, but instead, support for a belief or policy is inherent to a particular subject position" (p. 49).

Thomas gave his speech just as the momentum had turned toward Allied victory. The rhetoric of unconditional surrender had enveloped Allied consciousness, stressing a dualistic, good vs. evil, all-or-nothing attitude toward war. Vengeance and victory had become acceptable motives in mainstream America. Whedbee (2001) notes that the arguments and style of the address are nothing too impressive. Whedbee states that Thomas's arguments are "unconvincing and naïve." (p.52). Whedbee uses perspective by incongruity to investigate the interesting images and unexpected word combinations throughout the artifact.

Thomas juxtaposed the public view of victory as glorious and heroic with the privatized realities of personal loss and general destruction. Thomas suggested that civilians had taken the role of "spectators" watching a game with two teams competing for victory. If the audience was to accept their roles of spectators while acknowledging that soldiers were "messengers of death and destruction" they would become what they believe their enemies to be, either sadistic or dehumanized. Thomas thus dismantled the temple built around the god-term "victory" by suggesting a parallel between the Civil

War and World War II. According to Whedbee, this interpretation encouraged the audience to see that we are always at war with ourselves, and the only objective should be a peace that justifies sacrifice.

Finally, Rosteck and Leff (1989) thoroughly address the significance of piety in assessing perspective by incongruity. They state that the combination of piety and perspective by incongruity establishes rhetorical action as both constitutive and subversive. They see Burke as emphasizing the coordinating function of rhetoric in three ways. First, elements within a text must be aligned consistently to sustain beliefs. Second, a text must compete intertextually to undermine rival positions. Third, a text must align its internal structure with the situated events that it addresses. The authors state, "All three functions work together as the text sustains authority, struggles against the authority of other texts, and strives to render an authoritative account of some region of public experience" (p. 332).

Rosteck and Leff (1989) evaluate Voltairine Cleyre's speech "The Fruit of Sacrifice" on the basis of its propriety (adherence to piety) rather than fixed criteria such as style, immediate effect, or argument structure. Cleyre, a prominent anarchist, was speaking to commemorate the death of fellow anarchists convicted in the Chicago Haymarket incident. In portraying the convicted as martyrs, Cleyre encountered some difficulties because of anarchist pieties. First of all, her overblown style was incongruous with the materialism of the anarchist worldview. Secondly, the idea of martyrdom favors the spiritual over the material and places the welfare of the soul over that of the body. These impieties were bound together in performance, and Cleyre's task was to vindicate both of these aspects to be successful.

According to Rosteck and Leff (1989), Cleyre enacted a scientific re-appraisal of the body-soul relationship. Cleyre defined the body as something that disappears but cannot be destroyed. The soul too, she said, must be comprised of material elements. According to the authors, Cleyre effectively reversed the traditional theological perspective on martyrdom, which assimilates the material into the spiritual. Instead, Cleyre chose to see the spiritual in terms of the material. Nonetheless, the result was a continued presence and a warranted sacrifice on the part of the anarchists. Cleyre characterized the soul elements as common to all in a chemical form. Rosteck and Leff state that Cleyre rescued the occasion and purpose of commemorating martyrs: "the martyrs ennobled and bettered themselves, while they also materially improved the common fund of 'soul elements' available to the human race" (p. 336). Her poesy could be justified under the same assumption about spiritual material. Rosteck and Leff do not discount traditional rhetorical analysis, but state, "its deficiency is the inability to connect relevant general categories of analysis with the symbolic action indigenous to the text itself;" furthermore, they state that it "fails to comprehend the horizons that define the effort at rhetorical synthesis" (p. 337).

Using piety and perspective by incongruity, the authors were able to approach the text as a field of action. Cleyre aligned the style of the text with the message contained, defused the intertextual rivalry between spiritualism and materialism, and aligned the speech with the context of "materialist piety." Rosteck and Leff conclude that "radical discourse becomes radical as it reconstructs rather than adjusts itself to the standards of propriety accepted by the audience" (p. 338). Adherence to piety, then, allows an old orientation to extend itself via perspective by incongruity.

After reviewing other scholars' usages of the term, it seems that perspective by incongruity would be especially pronounced in post-war honky-tonk. Country scholars have alluded to the piety of authenticity that has been so important to the genre (Jensen, 1993; Peterson, 1997; Ellison, 1995; Rogers, 1989). Country requires grounding in its familiar generic markers, but, in honky-tonk, these markers must also accommodate the urban milieu. When identifying perspective by incongruity, I point out instances in song, banter, and production context that both secure and advance the piety of rural southerners.

### *Recalcitrance*

Rhetoric must give more plausible explanations of human motives when an orientation seems to fall short. To give the current study a critical edge and answer the second part of the research question (How does Williams act upon the national audience's orientation?), I incorporate Burke's term "recalcitrance." According to Burke (1954), recalcitrance is the "essential corrective of the poetic metaphor" (p. 168). Although his "metabiological" conception of reality denies a "real world" opposed to a symbolic world, Burke notes that the pre-symbolic universe can be sliced in a number of ways, like a cheese; each way we choose to slice the universe accounts for some things and leaves out others. Recalcitrance may be considered what gets left out or is increasingly neglected by an orientation insofar as it impinges on society's smooth functioning. Burke notes that, as poets, humans announce that the world is a certain way and act to make it so. Recalcitrance is any force that revises these "pseudo-statements" into workable constructions of reality. As mentioned in the earlier discussion of rhetoric, Bryant (1953) notes that rhetoric gives temporary solutions to perennial problems. In terms of the



principle of the "norm," Burke suggests that we must constantly seek new ways to account for recalcitrance when contexts changes. Burke states that the technological psychosis does not answer to recalcitrance; "the exclusively mechanistic metaphor is objectionable not because it is directly counter to the poetic, but because it leaves too much out of account....It is truncated, as the poetic metaphor, *buttressed by the concept of recalcitrance*, is not" (p. 261).

Although few scholars have used the term recalcitrance, Crable (1998) stresses its importance for the critical judgment of artifacts. Crable states that Burke's position hinges on the interplay between symbolic and nonsymbolic aspects of existence. Crable states, "we are neither animal-like bodies, nor disembodied language users" (p.308). According to Burke, humans are neither fully constrained by material necessity nor free to write the world as we see fit; but we are defined foremost by our symbol usage. Even recalcitrance is only revealed by symbolization and is, therefore, available through infinite constructions.

According to Crable (1998), despite Burke's critics, Burke does account for ideology but does not see it as something to be removed by criticism; rather ideology is something to be judged for how well it facilitates cooperation. Crable suggests that, for Burke, "ideology is not a tissue of lies and mystifications that unconsciously works to reproduce a mode of production, but the symbol-systems and orientations that are grounded in our metabiology (p.313)." Ideologies or "orientations" may be seen as competing on the basis of Brummett's (1982) discussion of "consensus" as to how well they resolve dilemmas of cooperation. Because of the notion of recalcitrance, Burke avoids radical perspectivism; an orientation, above all, must meet tests of serviceability.

In Burke's view, an orientation that contributes to depression, lack of reproductive impetus, and an increasingly narrow range of communal activity cannot be sustained forever. Crable concludes that Burke offers a "truly rhetorical criticism." Humans must argue for certain orientations as superior to others on the basis of recalcitrance rather than simply describing or demystifying false consciousness (p. 313).

I analyze the motives which persist in honky-tonk that represent a symbolic account for recalcitrance that the urban worldview does not offer. The perspective by incongruity offered by honky-tonk may be seen as successful, not as establishing a new workable or stable orientation, but in accounting for what the technological psychosis leaves out. Jasinski (2001) states, "Burke's primary interest was in the recalcitrance of various social orders—the beliefs, values, traditions, practices and institutions that structure existence" (p. 480). The commercial success of honky-tonk, with its simple message and lyrical focus, shows consensus on inadequacies of the dominant rationalization.

Several scholars have noted that honky-tonk represents a marginalized worldview (Blaser, 1985; Leppert and Lipsitz, 1993; Malone, 1982). Blaser (1985) states that honky-tonk values "often suggest the kind of rebellion against bourgeois morality that supposedly became a part of popular music only with the emergence of folk music and the birth of rock and roll" (p. 23). For the current study, recalcitrance is addressed to the extent that Williams' *Health and Happiness* shows counter broader notions of "the good life" apparent in post-war American culture; according to Burke (1954), the dominant scientific rationalization offers prescriptions such as mechanical efficiency, self-control, financial prosperity, impersonal economic interaction, and a constant concern with

progress. This study assesses the rhetoric of post-war honky-tonk through Hank Williams' *Health and Happiness* shows. The terms I use to answer the research question are piety, perspective by incongruity and recalcitrance.

## V. HANK WILLIAMS: HONKY-TONK

Hank Williams represented the peak of honky-tonk country music. Malone (1982) considers Williams the most distinctive stylist of the post-war honky-tonk boom because he straddled tensions that had produced subgenre and because he represented a commercial high-water mark to that point. Williams did this on his own terms, drawing from his lived experiences as a poor child with a single mother, a tragically flawed adult, jilted lover, and as a roadhouse performer. According to Lange (2004), he proved that honky-tonk could adapt to city life without assimilating into urban culture. Unlike other country musicians, Williams never downplayed the rural style markers and themes that made honky-tonk distinct.

### Childhood

Hank was born King Hiram Williams on September 17, 1923 in the small town of West Mount Olive, Alabama. Hank had one sister, Irene, who was born the previous year. Hank was born prematurely with an odd bump on his back that was later diagnosed as *spina bifida*, a degenerative birth defect. His parents knew early that Williams was not built for the typical logging, railroad, or farm job (Escott, 1994). Not only was he a feeble child, but he also grew up during the Depression without a father. Hank's father, Lon, had sustained a head injury when he was smashed with a bottle by a fellow soldier during World War I. The injuries plagued Lon for the next twenty years. He left for a Veterans Association hospital in 1930 after he suffered paralysis from a tumor that had formed.

Lillie Williams, Hank's mother, bore most of the responsibility for her family from the beginning of Hank's life, and she would still be taking care of him at the end of it. She was six feet tall and had an intimidating, no-nonsense temperament. According to Flippo (1984), Lillie actually carried out Hank's delivery unassisted. Lillie did whatever she could to support the family, from growing and selling strawberries to working in a cannery and opening a series of boarding houses. Hank's relationship with his mother changed little over the years. His future romantic relationships followed a similar structure: Williams was always staying out too late or slacking at work and being scolded. He both needed and resented constant supervision.

Before becoming a musician, young Hiram was a shoe-shine boy, peanut salesman, and general flunky for his mother. Hank's mother was his first exposure to music. Lillie played the organ in her church and often had Hank sit in her lap and sing along (Hemphill, 2005). Williams received his first guitar at age eight; his musical influences would have been limited to what he heard in church and whatever other music passed through his mother's boarding house (they did not have a radio). He was enrolled in "shape note" singing school for a short time in order to learn basic harmonies. Hank spent most of his spare time between music and western movies. He was known by neighbors as "two gun Pete" for his cowboy outfits (Flippo, 1984).

When Williams was ten, he was exchanged for one year with a cousin of his from Fountain, Alabama, a very rural area (Hemphill, 2005). His time with the McNeil family was the quintessential backwoods experience; the family lived in actual boxcar on-site with a logging company. Hank discovered alcohol around this time. He and his cousin would find the elders' stashes of moonshine at social events. Koon (1983) notes that there

was a tradition in the rural South of drinking surreptitiously to “prepare” for social events, but not getting drunk in front of others (p. 9). Hank carried this surreptitious drinking tendency with him as he botched and missed countless performances over his professional life.

Somewhere between Lillie's next couple of moves, Hank met his most important childhood companion, a street musician named Rufus “Tee-Tot” Payne. Payne tended to carry a potent blend of whiskey and tea around with him—hence the nickname. Williams learned blues music hanging around Tee-Tot in between selling peanuts and shining shoes. Hank later said, “All the music training I ever had was from him” (Escott, 1994, p. 11). This training supplemented his early church experience and taught Hank to relate to a crowd. At this point, Hank may have been encouraged as much by his inability to excel at athletics, school (he dropped out in ninth grade), and manual labor as his love of music to become a performer (Escott, 1994).

#### Rising Star of Montgomery

In 1937, Lillie moved the family to Montgomery. Hank won a talent show that year with his original song, “WPA blues.” Lillie, who had disapproved of Hank's time with Tee-Tot, now consented to his professional ambitions and bought him a new guitar for Christmas. She helped him make posters advertising “one and a half hours of good clean comedy, songs, and music” (Escott, 1994, p. 26). Hiram also started calling himself *Hank*. By placing himself in close proximity to Montgomery's WFSB radio studio for long enough, Hank started getting regular appearances on radio. He formed the first version of his band, The Drifting Cowboys, in Montgomery. They played rowdy honky-tonks, often without a microphone. In one of the roadhouses, Hank had a chunk of his

eyebrow bitten off (Koon, 1983). At another, he smashed a guitar over a patron's head (Hemphill, 2005). Don Helms, Williams' steel guitarist, recalled that the first thing Williams did for new band members was pass out black-jacks (leather-covered metal hand weapons) so that they would have protection in the rough venues they played (Escott, 1994). Lillie, as Hank's manager, housed members of the band at her boarding house and deducted it from their earnings. She was also known to be a competent bouncer during shows (Escott, 1994).

Despite Lillie's guidance, Hank's drinking interfered with his career for the first of many times in 1942. He was temporarily fired from his shows on WFSA for drunkenness. After his band members got drafted, he backed away from music temporarily. Williams travelled to Mobile and worked the booming shipyards, but he was soon scrounging for small gigs again (Koon, 1983). During a medicine show tour in the summer of 1943, he met Audrey Mae Sheppard. She had a child and an estranged husband who was off at war. Koon (1983) suggests Audrey, who had entertainment ambitions herself, likely saw Hank as a promising way out of obscurity.

Audrey divorced her husband and married Hank outside of a Texaco station December 15, 1944. Hank and Audrey were married only fifty days after Audrey's formal divorce from her husband (which made the marriage illegal, technically) (Koon, 1983). They lived in Mobile for a short while before moving in with Lillie. Audrey immediately took the duties of managing Hank's band and even instated herself as part of his band. The two women in Hank's life clashed; both of them attempted to dictate his next move and reap the benefits. Hank once told his mother, "No wonder you and Audrey don't get along . . . because one of you's afraid the other one's gonna beat me to my pocket when

I get drunk” (Escott, 1994, p. 38). Hank and Audrey had a notoriously turbulent relationship; Audrey regularly retreated to her mother's home in south Alabama. In one interview, Hank referred to her as his “war department” (Koon p. 26).

Cusic (1993) notes that Williams would have never had been disciplined (or sober) enough to become successful without being pushed by Audrey. Although she is often characterized as overbearing, she covered shows when Hank did not make them, negotiated with record companies, and did diplomatic work in the country community on Hank's and behalf. Early in their marriage, Audrey admitted Hank to his first of many sanatoriums to "dry out." Early in 1946, they got a new spot on WFSA in the early morning. Williams became popular enough that WFSA acquiesced to his demand that they not hire another hillbilly performer.

#### Early Recordings

In 1946, Hank went to Nashville to meet with Fred Rose, a former Tin Pan Alley songwriter and important country publishing executive. Rose was not necessarily looking for an entertainer but wanted someone to write songs for rising star Molly O’Day. However, he was so impressed by Hank's sincere singing style that he helped Williams obtain a recording contract with Sterling Records of New York. His first session in February, 1947 took place in Nashville’s WSM Castle studios. Hank sang all original compositions; three of the four were religious compositions (Cusic, 1993).

Being a recorded artist did little to change Hank’s weekly routine. He still played schoolhouses three nights a week during the school year and was otherwise playing the kind of venues that experienced routine violence and gunfire. At one place that he frequented, the stage was wrapped in chicken-wire to protect the performers (Escott,



1994, p. 55). In keeping with the wild, honky-tonk atmosphere, Hank exhibited bizarre drinking behavior. One of his guitarists recalled an episode in which Hank was lying in a road drunk with a crowd gathered around him in early 1947 (Escott, 1994, p. 56). Cusic (1993) notes that a nude Williams was once arrested for chasing a nude woman wrestler down a Louisiana hotel's hall. To make Hank's drinking more volatile, he also had an obsession for collecting handguns and getting into fights (which he usually lost) (Escott 1994; Cusic, 1993).

Unlike most performers, who went straight for radio spots, Hank's wild reputation in the small country music industry dictated that "he would have to reverse the paradigm by getting some hits that would convince a bigger station to take a chance on him" (Escott, p. 58). Records were the key to success for him. In April, 1947, Hank signed a contract with MGM. His first significant recording with MGM was "Move it on Over," a blues-flavored, novelty song. During the same session, Hank borrowed a classic melody to put with his upbeat gospel song, "I Saw the Light." "Move It on Over" was his first song to chart on *Billboard*.

At this point in his career, Hank was popular enough to play larger cities than Montgomery, but he was too unreliable to be hired to perform anywhere else. Hank lost his gig and his band at a juke joint when he habitually failed to show up on time. Escott (1994) considers this one of several "trough" periods in his life. Audrey retreated home with her daughter sometime in early 1948. Fred Rose sent an admonishing letter to him in March of that year in which he wrote, "When you get ready to straighten out, let me know and maybe we can pick up where we left off, but for the present I am fed up with

all your foolishness”(Escott, p. 72). In April, Hank sold back his first house. In May, Audrey divorced him due to his “violent and ungovernable temper,” and drinking (p. 73).

Williams guaranteed his sobriety, and Fred Rose saved him from completely losing his momentum by getting Hank a spot on the newly formed *Louisiana Hayride*. The show's producer, Horace Logan, described it as “a more competitive version of the *Grand Ole Opry*” (Escott, 1994, p. 78). By the time he moved to Shreveport, he and Audrey had reconciled; Hank's prospects were improving with his short-lived sobriety. His first night on the *Louisiana Hayride* was a challenge to Hank's crowd pleasing ability. When someone consoled him for having to follow an established duo, Hank replied "I'll eat 'em alive" (Escott, p. 80). Williams biographers note his habit of goading other performers in ways such as offering them new songs of his to antagonize them (Escott, 1994; Flippo, 1984; Koon; 1983). Hank was soon the most popular act in Shreveport. Hank supplemented his income with a morning radio show advertising pancake syrup.

The *Louisiana Hayride* stint marked a relatively placid time in Williams' life in terms of his alcoholism and marriage. He had moved out from under his mother's wing, and Audrey was pregnant. In fact, life was so stable that Hank was struggling for new song material. The next time he recorded, in December, 1948, he had very few songs that pleased Fred Rose's discerning ear, least of which was a stale, old Tin Pan Alley tune called “Lovesick Blues.” Originally, it was one of the least "Hank" sounding songs he could have chosen. The song had chord changes that confused the band and a screwed up structure from years of modification by street singers. Rose hated the song and even left the room while Hank convinced the band that it would work. It may have been the yodels

and uncouth, out-of-meter vocals that made the song compelling to others, but all studio members involved absolutely hated the song. Escott (1994) states that “no amount of punditry, conventional wisdom, or market research could have predicted its success” (p.89). When “Lovesick Blues” was released, in February, 1949, it sold 48,000 copies in seventeen days. It reached number one on *Billboard* by May, where it stayed for sixteen weeks. This was Hank’s biggest break and was the beginning of his national notoriety. In April, Hank landed a touring spot with some of the biggest stars in country including Ernest Tubb, Red Foley, and Minnie Pearl, from the *Grand Ole Opry*. On May 26, his son, Randall “Bocephus” Hank Jr., was born.

### The Big Time

According to Lange (2004), "The conservative *Grand Ole Opry* avoided Williams like the plague" (p. 169). Williams' promoter had to promise the management of the *Grand Ole Opry* a year of sobriety from Hank before they would even consider putting him onstage. They hated the idea of hiring Williams but hated more the prospect of allowing the Shreveport station to become the dominant city for country music. On June 11, 1949, Hank had his first *Grand Ole Opry* performance on the non-network portion of the show. The *Grand Ole Opry* made Hank a superstar overnight. He and Audrey bought a home in Nashville in September and left Shreveport.

The period immediately following Hank's stint at the *Hayride* was his most prolific; Hank had seven number-one songs over the next four years (Blaser, 1985). During his next recording sessions in October, 1949, Williams made the important decision to “stand or fall on his own songs” (Flipppo, 1984, p. 111). Williams recorded what is considered by scholars and music historians as his most poetic song, “I’m So

Lonesome I Could Cry.” The song was originally intended to be a maudlin recitation. Hank was not only recording often, he was also taking radio work in the mornings during the week, touring honky-tonks at night, and starring on the *Grand Ole Opry* on weekends. During a large tour of army bases with Roy Acuff, Red Foley, and other big names, Hank proved his broad appeal (Koon, 1983). Some shows were on the west coast, where western swing was still the popular style. Koon notes, “that a five piece hard country band could carry a show for two thousand patrons who were accustomed to the swing orchestras is remarkable testimony to the skill and popularity of Hank and his band” (p. 32).

Despite his promises and intentions, Hank proved to be unstable as ever. He was checked in to the Madison sanatorium numerous times. In a Baltimore civic center, where he was supposed to play for a week, an intoxicated Williams repeated the same phrase for several consecutive nights: “Here I am in Baltimore. I ain’t never been in Baltimore. If I come back it’ll be twice I been here” (Escott, p. 120). In keeping with his vacillations between productivity and self-destruction, Hank recorded his next number one hit, "Long Gone Lonesome Blues" in early 1950; however, two weeks after those sessions Hank had been kicked out of his own house and was put in jail for setting a hotel room ablaze after falling asleep with a lit cigarette. During the next few months, Hank fired his promoter and had two memorably ruinous gigs. One ended with him being dragged onstage drunk and chastised by a town mayor. The other, in Ontario, ended with Williams being escorted by Mounties to protect from him the angry crowd after he had fallen offstage drunk.

Williams' music often served as a barometer for his personal life. Hank would sell more records as his life seemed to fall apart. The song that gave Williams crossover potential was conceived sometime in the fall of 1950 and was a prime example. A close friend, Pappy McCormick, recalled to Escott (1994) that Audrey had an abortion in September and was suffering an infection from it. Hank had not known about the surgery but arrived at the hospital from being on the road with gifts for her. As he leaned to kiss her, Audrey said, "You sorry son of a bitch . . . It was you that caused me to suffer this!" Hank turned to the governess and said Audrey sure had a "cold, cold, heart" (Escott 1994, p. 138; Koon, 1983). Escott (1994) notes, "If they were getting along Hank would call her onstage at the *Grand Ole Opry* for a duet; if they were on the outs she would stand backstage and pout . . . There, in a microcosm, was their relationship" (p. 130). In neither case was their relationship solved. When Hank did pay tribute to Audrey's performance ambitions the results were never positive. In 1950, Hank recorded several duets with her that received terrible ratings in *Billboard*. Williams begged Fred Rose to let Audrey record several religious songs, which were never released (Escott, 1994). According to Escott, Audrey may have rightfully resented the burden of being married to an alcoholic super-star, but she was also unrealistic about her singing talent.

Besides not being able to deal effectively with his domestic and professional responsibilities, Williams was also not an educated investor. No amount of financial success could have ensured long-term security for his family. A child of the depression, Hank was not accustomed to having enough money to save. Koon (1983) states that Williams once took a large volume of cash out of the bank to spread it on his living room floor and roll around in it. He and Audrey made a particularly bad string of bad financial

decisions early in 1951. Hank bought a ranch and opened western-wear store, and Audrey expanded their two bedroom house into six bedrooms, as well as decorating it lavishly. Hank spent frivolously on land and hobbies while Audrey was interested in buying what was necessary to be accepted in high society (Koon, 1983).

Hank Williams embodied the tensions between the folk and popular music, as well as the ambivalence rural southerners had toward city success. In 1951, Tony Bennett had a huge hit with “Cold, Cold Heart.” Although Hank was known to boastfully play songs of his by other artists on jukeboxes, he had mixed feelings about the phenomena, saying “these pop bands will play our hillbilly songs when they cain’t eat no other way” (Escott, 1994, p. 145). Just as Bennett's cover charted, Hank joined Le Blanc’s, *Hadacol Caravan*. The caravan was the last stand for the struggling snake oil salesman, Dudley LeBlanc. It was “the last great medicine show,” one of the original contexts for country music (Hemphill, 2005). Hank had symbolic run-ins with Bob Hope and Milton Berle on the tour. Berle was mocking a hillbilly performer one night when Hank threatened to break a guitar over his head (Flippo, 1984). When asked why he refused to do a show with Berle in 1952, Hank said, “The last time I worked with him there like to have been a killing” (Escott, p. 176). Later in the tour, Hank was put on as an opener for Hope. He worked especially hard that night, and the applause muted Hope’s introduction. Hope was furious with management and told them never to put him behind Williams again. Later in the tour, Hope did caricatures of country singers, wearing a huge hat and singing make-believe maudlin songs (Koon, 1983).

## Dark Days

His two years on the road, filled with sleep deprivation, pressure, and alcohol, had taken a toll on Williams' body and mind (Escott, 1994). He had done five recording sessions just in the past year, yielding such hits as "I Can't Help It (If I'm Still in Love with You)" and "Hey Good Lookin'." Hank was able to tour without other acts since he had established himself, but this only increased the pressure on his frail constitution; he dropped many show dates due to alcohol and exhaustion. The schedule was grueling for his band, which traveled in cramped station wagons and was required to be back at the *Grand Ole Opry* most weekends. Williams was aging rapidly; Audrey even had him wear a toupee for a while to hide his baldness. At the close of 1951, after a particularly painful bender and sanatorium stay, Hank had surgery on his spine. He was supposed to stay in the hospital but insisted on being home Christmas Eve. He and Audrey got in a fight over Hank's suspicions that she was entertaining other lovers. According to Escott (1994), Hank threw a chair at her and hurt his back. He was bed-ridden and had to cancel scheduled shows. Audrey was going to cover a show for Hank in Washington D.C., as she often did. Hank was belligerent about suspicions of her infidelity. As she was sneaking out of the house with some girlfriends, Audrey heard four shots from a gun and did not turn back to go inside to see whether Hank had fired at her, into the air, or at himself.

With his divorce being imminent (again), Williams retreated to his mother's boarding house in Montgomery. He then moved into a house on the Natchez Trace near Vanderbilt with fellow musician, Ray Price. Sometime early in 1952, Hank had an affair with a twenty year old secretary, Bobbie Jett. In several months this affair complicated

Hank's messy life (Koon, 1983). On day after he and Audrey's divorce was finalized, Hank recorded "You Win Again." Audrey got half of Hank's assets and custody of Hank Jr.; this song was certainly autobiographical. Ever needy, Hank found a new love interest in his last days at the *Grand Ole Opry* in Billie Jean. She was dating Faron Young when Hank met her backstage. According to Faron, he and Hank had switched dates for the evening and met back at Hank's. Hank got about "half stoned," pointed a pistol at him, and said "I don't want no more hard feelings out of you, but I'm in love with Billie Jean" (Koon, 1983, p. 47).

Williams went missing for more of his performance dates in 1952. On August 9<sup>th</sup> *Grand Ole Opry* management decided he had missed his last show. Williams returned home unemployed to find his ex-lover, Bobbie Jett, pregnant and staying with Lillie; meanwhile, his current estranged lover, Billie Jean, had fled to Louisiana after a fight. This was an especially rough "trough" for Hank. Lillie thought it would do him good to go fishing at Lake Martin, Alabama, for a few days. Hank did not quite regroup there. He was taken to jail for cursing imaginary people in his room, a behavior which the police officer called "delirium tremors" (Koon, p. 46). Fred Rose, Williams' publisher and friend, managed to persuade the *Louisiana Hayride* to take Hank back and curb his downward spiral. August 20<sup>th</sup> he was back on the show that had launched his career, as commercially successful and broken-down as ever.

Williams' marriage to Billie Jean October 19, 1952, was an example of the strange juxtaposition of commercial and rural values in country. His promoter had turned the New Orleans wedding into a spectator event. There was a matinee and an evening wedding. Koon (1983) notes that the young Billie Jean may have been unprepared for the



instability ahead. Their honeymoon was curtailed when Hank passed out shortly after the wedding. Williams started a new string of shows throughout Florida in late November. Billie Jean went along and, after a harrowing plane ride, is likely to have had a miscarriage (Escott, p. 229). When Williams returned he went on a mournful bender and was placed in a Louisiana sanatorium.

During this last *Hayride* stint, Hank made the acquaintance of Toby Marshall, who supplied him with a deadly array of pills for the last months of his life. Marshall was a reformed alcoholic and ex-San Quentin resident who had several fake diplomas. He gave Williams prescriptions for a powerful sedative, chloral hydrate, which contributed to Hank's early death. With Toby along, the crew had a special way of getting Hank onstage, which Escott describes the following way: "Hank was allowed a few beers after he woke up, then, Marshall injected him with a drug that made him vomit up the beer. They would pour black coffee down him, hand him a few Dexedrine tablets, and point him toward the stage" (p. 230). This would be followed by an array of sleeping pills after the show. Hank was regularly being booed offstage. In Victoria, Texas, he physically broke down and either had a heart attack or overdosed. Hank took a break from the *Louisiana Hayride* and went back, once again, to Montgomery. He had dropped his manager, lost his band, and now his life consisted of Billie, his pills, his mother, his pregnant ex-lover, and two shows he had scheduled for New Years Eve and day (Hemphill, 2005).

#### Tragic End

For Christmas, Hank took Billie to meet his father, who was not home. Hank had written a song about his life in the logging communities for Lon. He left a box of

chocolates on the door at what would have been their last meeting. A winter storm overtook the southeast a few days before the shows. Since airports were not sending flights out, Billie went to Shreveport to spend New Year's Day with her family. Bobbie Jett was staying in a Montgomery boarding house and was expecting her and Hank's child any day. Williams had overseen the arrangements for the birth before he left (Flippo, 1983; Koon, 1984)

Williams hired a local cab driver's son, an 18 year old Auburn University student named Daniel Carr, to drive his blue Cadillac to the shows. At 3:30p.m., New Year's Eve, they arrived to catch a flight in Chattanooga, but the flight had to turn back. Hank had been boozing and sleeping the entire ride, and Carr was fatiguing, so they went to regroup at a hotel. Hank looked bad enough that the hotel staff called in a doctor to give him B-12 shots. At 10:15p.m., Carr decided it was time to start heading toward Canton, Ohio, for the second show (the first was no longer a possibility). Williams probably died in between Knoxville and a traffic ticket that Carr received in Blaine, Tennessee, around 11:30p.m. When Carr stopped to find a relief driver at 1:00a.m., Hank was certainly dead.

### Conclusion

Now that I have reviewed the chronological narrative of Williams' life, I will highlight the most important elements of Williams as an artist to the current study. Lange (2004) states, "Williams did not evoke a class consciousness so much as he raised awareness of the universality of emotional afflictions" (p. 172). He could explore painful emotions almost casually, emphasizing their normalcy and inevitability. Fred Rose learned that Hank had a certain range of songs in which he could be compelling, songs which were intimate, emotional snapshots (Escott, 1994). Some of Hank's songs that

followed trends (train songs, event songs, and narratives) were among his least successful. People wanted from Hank the very things that he did best. Cusic (1993) notes that no one was listening to Hank to hear a well-adjusted, happy, family man. The necessity of his autobiographical interior snapshots set up an interesting paradox; to be successful, Hank had to live a tragic and emotional personal life.

According to Lange (2004), "No other country music performer contributed more to the genre's stylistic development in the period of its modernization"(p. 168). His style was greatly influenced by Roy Acuff. Williams blended Acuff's emotional vocal style with honky-tonk rhythms from the likes of Ernest Tubb. Williams' band consisted of electric lead guitar, bass, fiddle, and steel guitar, as well as Hank on rhythm guitar (Ellison, 1995). Don Helm's steel guitar was always played in a register far above or below Williams' voice, and the fiddles consistently played a two-note harmony style rather than a jazzier single-string technique. Most of the songs were based around three major chords. An early member recalled how simple Hank required the sound to be. Before one show, Williams said, "Alright boys get them pop licks outta ya before we get on stage cause we're gonna keep it vanilla" (Escott, p. 37).

#### *Social Themes*

At the height of his popularity (1949-1953) Hank Williams was selling about a half-million records per year. His songwriting emphasized turbulent romances and stale marriages in post-war America (Ellison, 1995). Ellison has broken down Williams' catalogue thematically. Out of 138 songs, 39% are about domestic situations and 27% are about broken hearts. The domestic songs are also negative reflections on romantic trauma. To soften the blow of heartbreak, Williams employed what Ellison classifies as

"wit" in 20% of his songs; usually, wit involves laughing at one's treatment by a woman. Jerry Rivers, Hank's fiddler, made this important point about Hank's humor: "his novelty songs weren't novelty—they were serious, not silly, and that's why they were much better accepted and better selling. 'Move it On Over' hits right home, cause half of the people he was singing to were in the doghouse with the old lady" (Escott, 1994, p. 62).

Ellison draws from Coontz (1992) to suggest that Williams' popularity was tied to a group of jilted lovers, not acknowledged otherwise in the mainstream. These jilted lovers were a causality of postwar change in gender roles and conceptions of love. Coontz's figures suggest that up to two-thirds of women were neutrally or less than satisfied with their marriages in the 1950s (p. 35). Similarly, Malone (1982) states, "The threats to masculine supremacy, already strongly present in rural life, were made even more glaring in the newly adopted urban milieu"(p. 120).

15% of his songs, the next highest amount after those above, were about gospel salvation. Hank used his "Luke the Drifter" persona to record fifteen of his most plaintive gospel recitations. Fred Rose only allowed Williams to do his brooding, religious, often spoken material only if it was released under the pseudonym. According to Koon (1983), "the pseudonym helped let those who ran the jukebox concessions know when to skip Hank's work" (p. 34). None of his gospel songs are placed in Ellison's wit category. Hank Williams had a somber, fixed, spiritual message involving worldly suffering and the crucial choice of salvation. According to Ellison (1995), Williams felt it was his duty to do a gospel song every so often; these songs certainly did not bring in much profit.

The rural-to-urban migration was an underlying factor in widespread southern ambivalence toward notions of suburban success. Hank felt this ambivalence in a

magnified way. He was troubled by his "success" and how the term's embodiment might fall short of the ideal. Williams gave a *Montgomery Advertiser* interview around the time of recording "Cold, Cold Heart." Referring to a song called "Men With Broken Hearts," he said, "I don't know why I happen to of wrote that thing except that somebody that fell, he's the same man as before he fell, ain't he? Got the same blood in his veins. How can he be such a nice guy when he's got it and such a bad guy when he ain't got nothin'? Can you tell me?" (Escott, p. 141). This is one of Williams' most reflective available statements, and it shows the resentment he felt at being accepted by "refined" folks who did not care about him until he was rich. This quote tells something of the cycles of his life: money and friends one week, drunk, divorced and alone the next.

Upon his death, the image of Hank Williams within the country music industry was suddenly cleaned up, and all of his missed shows, bizarre behavior, and braggadocio were forgotten. According to Peterson (1997), "Many in the industry wanted to distance themselves from the stumble-bum, but the fan response was so overwhelming . . . they began to focus on his contributions" (p. 184). Around 25,000 people attended the Montgomery funeral. Ellison (1995) states, "Hank Williams' funeral was an important even for the self consciousness of country music culture" (p. 81). The image of Williams conceived in the immediate months after his life became "the implicit model of the authentic country music entertainer"(Peterson, p.184). Because of his significance as a post-war honky-tonk singer and his reflection upon understated cultural adjustments, Hank Williams' performances are appropriate for studying honky-tonk rhetoric. Even though the country sound has diverged from Williams' honky-tonk style, he is still among country's most exalted artists.

## VI. ANALYSIS

### 1. Country Music Piety: Appropriate Genre Elements

Piety, as a cultural impulse, is our sense of the appropriate (Burke, 1954). The impulse toward pious behavior, or acting in congruence with one's sense of the appropriate, forms an array of *pieties*. Imagine the respectable owner of a business strolling to lunch on a weekday with a beer in his/her hand and the impropriety of such behavior. Now, imagine that same proprietor decked out in college football regalia on a Saturday game-morning at the same hour, visibly inebriated, and note the perhaps newfound leeway in your judgment. Piety tells us what we can do, when we can do it, and when to feel guilty. As a relatively young genre in the late 1940s, commercial country was still coming to terms with the various pieties from the rural-evangelical South. Country was still a regional music with a fan culture that expected its worldview to be in the forefront of radio performance. In this section, I identify those persisting regional pieties as they are accounted for by Williams' *Health and Happiness* shows.

Scholars have suggested that southern music has a sense of piety revolving around religiosity, folksy commercialism, down-home performance styles, and domestic life. As a rhetor, Williams must first fulfill these pieties of his regional peers in some way, for they are the bulwarks of an orientation. Rogers (1989) refers to a "sincerity contract" that binds country performers and audiences in an interpersonal style relationship. Rogers states that the audience must accept the source's attitudes and treatment of topics if he/she

is to be seen as authentic and credible. Although country singers are expected to intimate that they actually feel the feelings indicated by the songs, Rogers (1989) notes that the audience must "recognize and approve of such sincerity" (p. 17). As mentioned earlier, the notion of piety may also be likened to Bitzer's rhetorical constraints that limit and enable influence (Jasinski, 2001).

### *Religiosity*

According to Malone (2002), "Country music has been subjected to no greater influence than southern religious life, which affected both the nature of songs and the manner in which they were performed" (p. 10). The music of revival camp meetings disseminated a message of emotional urgency and simplicity. Williams himself wrote twenty-one gospel songs. Williams sings one gospel song in each of the eight *Health and Happiness* episodes. Near the end of every episode, he announces matter-of-factly, "folks right now its hymn time again on the *Health and Happiness* show." Williams' hymns adhere to the piety of southern religiosity in that they present Heaven as a neutralizer of worldly problems and emphasize the importance of accepting God through emotional involvement and repetitious proclamation. However, Williams chooses several songs to elaborate on worldly suffering, which only in passing refer to the promise of Heaven. In doing so, the only real precept for proper living he gives listeners is a humane and sympathetic attitude towards others—not a passion for God or self-improvement. Heaven was *the* common denominator of traditional hymns, and merely motivated salvation. Although suffering was featured as a part of religious piety, Williams magnifies its presence.

Fillingim (2003) states that the most popular southern hymns have always focused on Heaven. Williams introduces two of his Heaven-focused renditions, "Where the Soul of Man Never Dies" and "I'll Have a New Body (I'll Have a New Life)" as "one of the prettiest old hymns" and an "old time shout tune," implying that they are traditional in their content. These songs emphasize the fleeting nature of worldly problems and the promise of Heaven. "Where the Soul of Man Never Dies" consists of two verses about passing from a dark world, "Canaan's land," to a better one where "darkest night will turn to day." In this song, Heaven is a place where "all is peace and joy and love," and there are "gardens blooming." In "I'll Have a New Body (I'll Have a New Life)," Williams delivers a similar message about Heaven as a resolution: "No more pain worry sorry in this wicked world of sin. I'll have a new body, praise the lord, I'll have a new life."

Although the previous songs speak to the triviality of this "wicked world of sin," Williams' own "When God Comes and Gathers His Jewels" shows that Heaven resolves the pain of this world by preserving loving relations from it. In this song, a preacher tells a young widower that he will certainly be happy with his wife in eternity. So the boy visits her grave each night "with his eyes lifted toward Heaven he's repeating the words he was told: when God comes and gathers his jewels . . . I'll meet you up there in Heaven so fair." Although the song presents Heaven as a resolution, it does not do so at the expense of worldly romance. This is an important adjustment Williams makes to the notion of the afterlife.

Williams does not offer a road or purpose to salvation for those who live complacent, comfortable lives, without loss, material want, or the things which Heaven resolves. In fact, several of his songs seem to take the extra step of ethicizing the struggle



itself rather than imagining escape from it. "Prodigal Son," "Thy Burdens Are Greater than Mine," and "Tramp on the Street," are all about going on painful journeys through this world toward Heaven. In "Prodigal Son," Williams sings, "goodbye to this world and all of its sorrow," as he compares his own journey through the world to Jesus' fated suffering. "Thy Burdens are Greater Than Mine" has no direct mention of spirituality. In this Depression-era song, Williams merely presents a string of hapless individuals who make him appreciate the most basic faculties. This song stresses the requirement of Christian sympathy toward the perceived less fortunate. "Tramp on the Street" also sacralizes struggle and requires sympathy of those who would be saved. In this song, Williams notes that the line dividing tramps from normal folks is thin, and all people enter the world as "some mother's darlin'." Williams sings of how Jesus' executioners "pierced his side and then his feet, and left him to die like a tramp on the street." Since everyone may find themselves as tramps, and Jesus lived an impoverished life himself, it rests upon Christians to let tramps "come in" and take "bread from [their] store." The only allusion of punishment appears in this song as encouragement toward alms: "If Jesus should come and knock on your door would you welcome him in or turn him away? Then God would deny you on the great judgment day."

Along with the construction of Heaven as a resolution for a fated worldly struggle, hymns offer a simple way to deal with one's own salvation. Allowing God into one's heart and repetitiously proclaiming that state is essential to the rural-evangelical notion of salvation (Malone, 2002). Salvation hinges on an interpersonal relationship with God. Ellison (1995) notes that references to the saving power of Jesus are widespread in all of country music. The emotional encounter with the power of God is

featured in several of Williams' songs. Instead of presenting a code for living righteously *here on earth*, he focuses on the importance that one internally realizes the power of God. In "I'll Have a New Body (I'll Have a New Life)," he reminds us what we are living *for*: "oh dear brother are you livn' for that day when Christ shall rise?" "I Saw the Light" is about the revelation of God's power, not necessarily by a conscious search. Jesus awakens Williams' heart "like a stranger in the night." When he sings about his "life filled with sin" and how he "was a fool to wonder and stray" Williams is focusing on God and salvation rather than a specific reform of behavior. In "When God Comes and Gathers His Jewels," there is no prescription for salvation/resolution but belief itself. The individual has only the personal task of *letting one's dear savior in*. The arbitrary and incomprehensible power of God in southern religion encourages meekness and humility in believers. Awe and passion alone can save one's soul.

Malone (2002) has identified repetitious phrasing as a characteristic of the southern hymnal tradition. The emphatic phrase *praise the lord*, seems especially important in evoking the feeling of salvation. In "I'll Have a New Body (I'll Have a New Life)," the chorus is answered with group vocals that repeat "praise the lord." The song begins, "On that resurrection morning when all dead in Christ shall rise I'll have a new body, praise the lord, I'll have a new life." The phrase is also repeated in each chorus of "I Saw the Light." God is solely responsible for one's fate; Williams sings, "praise the Lord, I saw the light," as if the lord made the revelation possible. Each verse of the song furthermore repeats the transition from sin to salvation with little elaboration on the details of the sinfulness or specifics of conversion. Williams describes himself repetitiously as lost in the following ways: "I was a fool," "I wandered so aimless," and

“Just like a blind man I wandered.” The repetition makes it clear that we are relatively powerless to understand or direct our own will. Surrender to the power of God is the simple solution. Repetition is also important as community reinforcement. In the two shout-style songs “I Saw the Light” and “I’ll Have a New Body (I’ll Have a New Life),” Grant Turner, Audrey, and the rest of his band join in, most noticeably in revelatory parts of the song. It is important for all to help construct the feeling of salvation through ritualistic repetition of key ideas and phrases. Religious piety was thus somewhat based in a community experience, which joining together and repeating joyous choruses constructed. Overall, repetition is a ritual part of religious piety, which emphasizes certain phrases and feelings (i.e. awe, inspiration, thankfulness).

Save for compulsory sympathy, there are no prescriptions in Williams' hymns for this world or promise of God offering help in the meantime. While Williams adheres to the sense of piety in religiosity, he does begin to emphasize the worldly suffering element of it more vividly than the resolution. Goodson (1994) argues that Williams' secular songs advocate codes of behavior as established by his religious songs. Fillingim (2003) argues that Williams' religious songs feature a concern with human dignity. Furthermore, Goodson (1994) considers Williams' romantic laments as criticism toward the unjust order of things in the material world. In contrast, I have not found a code for living in the religious songs, nor perceive the hangdog Williams as being overly concerned with his own dignity. In fact, in my comparison of religious and secular songs, it seems that the hymns actually help one to ethicize and endure hardship rather than to question it.

## *Commercialism*

Pecknold (2007) argues that country could not exist without a certain populist attitude toward commercialism, and that part of its authenticity has been tied to its blatant commercialism. The commercial element, at least until the mid-1950s, was embraced by country fans as "a cultural validation of an underappreciated folk tradition" (Pecknold, 2007, p. 35). Fans created continuity between older forms of community cultural activity and newer mass entertainment. Williams adheres to rural commercial pieties in several ways. He synthesizes the medicine show and barnstorming traditions. He stresses the permeable boundary between artist and audience. Williams is both proud of and humble about his recording success; he presents his personal success as exemplifying the value of common tastes, which he shares with the audience. Finally, Williams evokes the class consciousness built into commercial country.

Pre-radio hillbilly music was often associated with medicine shows and snake-oil endorsements. Medicine shows were one original commercial context (along with fiddle contests) for country music. Even until the time of the *Health and Happiness* shows, patent medicines (i.e. snake oils) remained popular in the south (Malone, 2002). Medicine shows were free outdoor performances during which the audience would endure advertisements for the newest dubious cure-all; both the performer and audience were obliged by the sponsor's good will regardless of the product's quality. The radio tradition of a sponsor hiring a performer rather than a station segment was a holdover from barnstorming days (Peterson, 1997). Barnstormers were required to facilitate the audience's feeling of goodwill toward the sponsor. Pecknold (2007) notes that advertisements on country radio were often for companies that were already supported

largely by rural dwellers, such as hardware and flour companies. Unlike much of consumer culture, the sponsors were more likely to give unadorned facts and prices, rather than associating products with aesthetic tastes or status symbols. In these recordings, Williams has a traditional sponsor and cultivates the traditional neighborly attitude toward that sponsor. While not bearing responsibility for the quality of the product itself, he plays the expected rural performer's part in commerce—a service bestowed by a neighborly sponsor.

Escott (1993) states that these recordings were sponsored by Dudley LeBlanc, southern politician and inventor of Hadacol, a "foul tasting patent medicine." Hadacol was advertised by LeBlanc as "a service appreciated by suffering humanity . . . one of the truly great medical discoveries," but it was really a combination of laxative and alcohol which many dry southern counties did nonetheless appreciate. WSM station manager, Matt Hedrick, decided that Williams should never call the medicine by name, since the transcriptions could possibly be used to advertise other products (Escott, 1993). At the end of each show's introduction theme, the station announcer, Grant Turner, announces that Williams has "some good news that'll make you mighty glad you tuned in." He says, "here's a word from a good friend of ours that I know you are gonna wanna listen to," or "here's our friend again, so listen" each time he reaches a commercial break. There is no indication that Williams knew LeBlanc personally or that he used Hadacol; he adheres to the kind of neighborly commerce favored in the South by speaking of the advertisements as *news* and the makers as *friends*. He even integrates his own song "Mind Your Own Business" with an upcoming advertisement and says "friends if you listen to this message now you'll be mindin' your own business cause its really good business."

Williams emphasizes the new viability of country music in the music industry, proud of his authorship and status as a folk representative. After World War II, country music was shifting from an advertising tool to a product in its own right: selling country recorded country music was becoming profitable. Pecknold (2007) states that a country record breaking into the popular charts was seen as validation of an underdog genre by its fans. Country was historically neglected by serious recording companies. Fiddlin' John Carson, the first successful recorded artist, painted "recorded artist" on his touring car, an emblem of his unique honor among hillbilly peers (Peterson, 1997). Williams meets the standards set by the fan's rural populist attitude toward commercialism in the way that he always notes whether he recorded or wrote the songs he plays; he does not note the authors of other songs or tunes from the public domain. Williams seems to be proud of the fact that he favors many of his own songs.

He snickers when he says "I had the pleasure of writing this one too" before playing "There'll Be No Teardrops Tonight." He also states, "I gotta habit of singin' a lot of em' I wrote ain't I [snicker]?" before singing "I Can't Get You Off My Mind" in the final episode. Announcer Grant Turner tells the fans during the first episode, "confidentially," that the set-list has "a couple of tunes in there that have amounted to just millions and millions of record sales for this ole' boy's tunes." Williams does not directly mention that certain songs have sold well. He simply notes that they are well-known, or in demand. He avoids coming across as a profit-minded entertainer, and remains a representative of folk sentiment; in fact, Williams actually stated, "God writes the songs for me," and that he was simply popular because "there are more people like us than there are the educated, cultured kind" (Goodson, p. 111). It was, then, possible to be an ole' boy

and a million-record seller in the country music culture without necessarily being impious.

Williams stresses the permeable boundary between artist and audience alluded to in the quotes above. Many of his songs are constructed as responses to the audiences' written demands in the latter four episodes. Since the transcriptions were cut on two successive Sundays and heard later, there is no way Williams could have known which songs his audience would want to hear. Williams still creates the illusion that his repertoire is a function of audience demand. He states, "Tell us what you want us to do for ya'; we'll be glad to include one of your favorites on one of our shows in the near future." Williams, inquiring about the mail that Grant Turner has lugged into the studio for the sixth episode, asks "what's that big stack over there, Grant?" Turner replies, "aw, you oughtta know what that big stack's for. That's for that one great big song you recorded that's been so popular." Williams "guesses" (it was certainly scripted) correctly that the song is "Lovesick Blues" and goes on, "All them folks wanna hear "Lovesick Blues? Well I guess we'll just have to do it for 'em." Although he played the song once in the first episode, the imaginary fans get their encore. Similarly, to justify a second playing of "Wedding Bells," Williams says, "Looking through the mail we keep gettin' requests for this song; next to Lovesick Blues I reckon this is the top one." He also prefaces "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" and "Mind Your Own Business" by saying he has gotten a lot of requests for them. Escott (1994) notes that "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" had not even been released formally, so the audience certainly had not heard it, much less sent in letters asking for it. Williams assumes that he shares tastes with his audience; if he enjoys a song the audience hasn't heard they probably will too. For

instance, when introducing "There'll Be No Teardrops Tonight" he says, "we gotta little tune here we think you might like . . . We hope so, we like this one an awful lot."

Williams also builds the presumption of demand into his comments surrounding some of the hymns. He states, "I know a lotta you folks love" "Where the Soul of Man Never Dies." Before playing "I'll Have a New Body (I'll Have a New Life)," Williams notes "I know all you folks'll enjoy it, hope you will at least- I know all you folks know the song and like it." There is a built in cultural obligation for the audience and Williams to respond favorably to these traditional selections, without preference constructed by fake fan letters. The presumption of Williams satisfying demand is a method of radio stations for redirecting audience gratitude from the performer to the sponsor. Williams does not actively make this link, but Turner notes "here's one of the things that makes your radio worthwhile; you're always willing to spend a little money on the juice when this fellow comes calling round." An important aspect of being a country artist was sharing unique tastes naturally with the audience so that they felt as if they had a unique folk niche in popular culture (Pecknold, 2007).

Country fans' self-perception as a uniquely folk commercial culture was based partly having shared tastes and values with their artists, but the genre had also been stigmatized as working-class and low-brow by the music industry and music press. The low-brow commercial status of country as a cheap advertising product and as the form favored by urban migrants amplified the self-perception in the country community that they were a distinct socioeconomic class (Pecknold, 2007). Williams' "Mansion on the Hill" stands alone in clearly articulating class consciousness. It presents an antagonistic relationship between wealth and love, a view sustained by the religious tradition.



"Mansion on the Hill" is about a woman who has chosen to live alone in her hill-top mansion rather than with the narrator in his meek cabin down below. The choice is clear between luxury and happiness; Williams states that the ex-lover is living "in sorrow" and alone "with pride" in a "loveless mansion on the hill." This song shows that while country fans have learned to accept commercialism they have not taken the next step of ethicizing wealth or status. Several hymns such as "Prodigal Son" and the cowboy song, "Happy Rovin' Cowboy," show that rural asceticism was still the norm.

*Piety of Performance: Community Reinforcement*

*Liveness and Immediacy*

Williams challenges the notion of live performance, the country standard. He nonetheless conveys immediacy, constructs the radio performance as community participation, uses vernacular, and invokes traditional imagery. The result is a credible country performer, who is part of the audience that speaks through him. Country was originally profitable for advertisers on radio. Radio was important for generating interest for live performances from which the artist could profit (Peterson, 1997 Pecknold, 2007). Live performances were the standard, constituting another piety of country. Pecknold (2007) notes that country radio performances extended a community experience for listeners. The barn dance, the dominant country format, had a manifest studio audience. Because of Williams touring schedule, these shows were recorded but not broadcast live. He and his band, therefore, attempt to simulate the live feel of country and foster the sense of community surrounding live, informal performances. Peterson (1997) notes that radio "transcriptions," originally recorded to send radio overseas during the war, became profitable as a way for performers to have "live" shows in places they could not

physically be present. Peterson describes live transcriptions as an intermediate step between barnstorming and outright studio recorded music on radio. Although he recorded these transcriptions in two weekends, each episode has an introduction and conclusion. Grant Turner states that Williams has "dropped in on another little visit with ya'," and the audience applauds as if he has just walked into the studio for the first time that day. Williams states, "here we are again" in one instance and always greets as if he is starting anew in the studio. Every song ends with a round of applause by those in the studio to create the illusion of a manifest audience. At the end of episodes Williams speaks as if he is leaving the studio, stating, "we gonna have to get our satchel and go," and signs off by saying "until we meet ya' again." Williams thus manages the piety of live performance by structuring his transcriptions as if they are live; Williams enters the studio and leaves each morning as part of his listeners' daily routines.

The canned recordings presented here may have been considered impious in their lack of immediacy since they were split artificially. These shows blur the nature of live mediated performances. In effect, they had the same feeling of immediacy and were no less constructed than a carefully planned live-recorded barn dance. In fact, because of the natural sounding chatter in between songs and the one-performer format, they may have seemed more intimate than other live radio recordings. Even with its manifest audience, the barn dance had no more of a permeable boundary between audience and performer than canned performances. Studio records would not dominate radio for years to come; radio often sounded better and fostered the intimacy that audiences appreciated. These recordings straddle the definitions of live and recorded music. There was no way for the audience of knowing whether Williams was there with them or not. As a transitional

figure in the move from radio to records as the primary medium for country artists, it is interesting to note how Williams manages this shift piously.

Despite the barrier of canned recordings, perceived immediacy was important to the country performance style, and Williams manages to convey the notion that he is emotionally and culturally one with the audience. According to Pecknold (2007), "artists frequently addressed their listeners in personal terms, as friends and neighbors, and encouraged those in the radio audience to imagine that every word was directed to them" (p. 41). Grant Turner and Williams evoke an intimate bond between audience and performer. In the opening track, Turner always does his part to define the neighborly relationship. For Episode Two he says, "here's a fella that's always welcome at your house and mine." Similarly, for Episode Three, Turner states "when you invite this fella into your home it seems like the sun shines a little brighter." In Episode Six, he suggests that the studio gang is much like a bunch of relatives; he says, "when you invite the Health and Happiness gang into your home its . . . well it's sorta like a visit from the home folks, but we don't stay as long as the kin folks do we?" So Williams' band consists of good ole' neighbors, but they are even better because they give the courtesy of taking up a fixed amount of time. Grant presumptuously describes Williams as "the Alabama boy who has been taken into the hearts of all you many listeners."

As another aspect of immediacy in performance, Williams conveys *sincerity* in all of his songs. He attempts to both verbally and vocally involve himself with each selection. Roy Acuff began a trend of emotional wailing in secular songs in the late 1930's, which reinvigorated the country community's preference for artist sincerity (Malone, 2002; Lange, 2004). Williams has a burden of not only showing the audience

that he is willing to perform songs that they enjoy, but that he connects to their subject matters intensely and experiences the emotions of the songs appropriately. He asserts the importance of playing meaningful songs in statements such as "this one here says more than any song I think I ever heard," or "there's a little prophecy in song." Hank describes Audrey's performance of "There's a Bluebird on Your Windowsill" as having "a lot of good meaning to it." He assures that "I Want to Live and Love," has "a lotta' good sense in it." Williams often describes the songs that are the most emotionally charged as the "purtiest," such as "Where the Soul of Man Never Dies" on the high end and "Lost Highway" on the low end. He blatantly equates "mighty good" with "sad" when prefacing "I've Just Told Mama Goodbye," stating, "all these Mama songs are mighty good; here's a sad one I recorded this year." Emotion for emotion's sake is thus ethicized as a good in itself in his songs. More importantly, he creates the notion that he is experiencing the emotions of the song *with* the audience. When prefacing "Lovesick Blues" Williams notes, "there is a lot of sufferin' in this song . . . we have to [go through it] quite often." He implicates himself as being the frustrated protagonist in "You're Gonna Change (Or I'm Gonna Leave)" and "Long Gone Daddy." In the former he states, "if you don't change . . . I'm gonna pack up my suitcase and go home," and in the latter, "this man got tired of his wife beatin' him on the head with a fryin' pan." As the character and writer of these songs, Williams asserts his understanding and closeness with his audience by virtue of his personal immersion in universal feelings.

### *Community Listening*

Williams and Turner also work to facilitate a *community* listening experience. To begin episode seven, Turner states, "Before we start today's program we're gonna give ya'

just time enough to run to the phone and call your neighbor or raise the window high and yell to her and tell her that Hank Williams is on the air again." Turner frames his attempt to get more listeners involved as a courtesy to an interested community. Williams asserts himself as part the community of listeners; by virtue of their participation in listening, the audience has agreed on a neighborly relationship. For instance, Williams always takes introduction as an opportunity to give good wishes to the audience, referring to them always as "friends," "neighbors," or "you folks," and extending hopes that they are healthy and happy as can be. He states that his performance is congruent with the title of the show, that "all the boys, myself, Miss Audrey, Grant Turner, we all here to try to make you happy for the next few minutes." Williams assures the audience in each episode that his band is "all spryed up," "happy", "spry as a two year old" and "feelin' good" in keeping with that purpose. As noted above, Williams presents himself as being tapped into the collective tastes of the audience in making his selections. He often assumes, "I know all you folks know this song and like it" when performing hymns or assures them "here's another tune we think you might like; we like it an awful lot."

Williams also chooses religious songs that present recognizable morals to the audience which likely evoke their experiences in the southern church—a cornerstone of rural community. Songs played during "hymn" time either take the form of testimonials ("I Saw the Light," "They Burdens are Greater than Mine," "I've Just Told Mama Goodbye") or narrative revelations ("When God Comes and Gathers his Jewels," "Tramp on the Street," "Where the Soul of Man Never Dies"); both forms establish *community* consensus on what is important. Williams treats the audience as a congregation, such as in "Where the Soul of Man Never Dies," when he says, "Dear Friends there'll be no sad

farewells," and when he prefaces "Thy Burdens are Greater than Mine" with, "like everybody to listen to the words to it." With the revelatory public domain songs "Where the Soul of Man Never Dies," "I'll Have a New Body (I'll Have a New Life), and Williams' own "I Saw the Light," he recruits harmony singers to create an old-time church aesthetic; for instance, to kick off "I'll Have a New Body (I'll Have a New Life)" Williams states "I'm gone ask Miss Audrey all the boys our announcer Grant Turner we gonna all gather around the mic here." Williams stresses, "Jerry, lead us off...*all* of us." These songs are not important because they are artistic or profound, but because they are shared: such familiar songs and themes are dependable for connecting the audience and performer to their community.

### *Vernacular*

Williams emphasizes his hillbilly roots with heavy, unscripted use of vernacular expressions. "Can't" is pronounced "cain't," "right here" is pronounced "rye-cheer," and "invitation" becomes "invertation." Most final g's disappear from the end of words such as "foot pattin," and "willin'." Several filler statements from southern culture are used such as "mighty," "awful," and "whole heap" to mean "very." There are also several idiomatic statements that serve as banter-filler, as when Williams comments that he will perform "Lovesick Blues" again "if my tonsils don't backfire and slap the taste right outta my mouth." After an abridged fiddle tune, he notes "shame the haircut went up on this one to about a dollar and a half a hair there didn't it?" Also, after "Fire on the Mountain," Williams comments, "It sounds like that boy's gonna saw that fiddle slam in two when he rears back and takes off like that." He signs off each episode with his catch phrase, "If the good Lord's willin' and the creeks don't rise we'll see ya' before long." This quote has an

earthy connotation and shows the dichotomy between the realm of spirituality and earthly problems for southerners. Here, he wittily symbolizes the uncertainties of day to day life for southerners, although many of them no longer have to fear the creeks rising. These statements surround songs with the kind of natural expression that Escott (1993) calls "Hank's molassified haw-haw" (p. 7) that would accompany performances in informal live settings and assert his shared cultural identity with his audience. Idioms, as a marker of regional origin, gained significance in the post-war decade; hillbilly giveaways such as these vernacular expressions were the source of both urban biases against southerners and sense of shared culture for the migrants (Lange, 2004; Pecknold, 2007).

### *Familiar Archetypes*

Although rural southerners identified with one another strongly because of shared experiences, cultural idiosyncrasies, and values, many markers of this community at the same time marginalized them from mainstream culture. Rural southerners used the few positive mythologies at their disposal to dignify their community in the national context. The country community embraced the few images of respectability which were acknowledged by mainstream culture; barn dances and popular culture idealized the cowboy and the ole' timer mountaineer to counter the rampant hillbilly stereotypes of the 1930s and early 1940s. These positive archetypes eschewed the well-known negative characteristics of the hillbillies moving into cities (Pecknold, 2007; Malone, 2002; Jensen, 1998). Singers such as Roy Acuff and Jimmie Rodgers also idealized the roaming lifestyle represented by trains. These images of respectability and familiarity were well-loved but offered little to the sincerity and content of country; very few performers who were not actors wrote cowboy lyrics, and even fewer could actually reference the true

lifestyle of a cowboy (Peterson, 1997; Malone, 2002). Train hopping had lost its appeal after the Great Depression. Williams pays tribute to each of these images despite their superficiality, as they are nostalgic to himself and the community,

Williams sandwiches each show in between "Happy Rovin' Cowboy," his theme song by the Sons of the Pioneers, and a public domain fiddle tune called "Sally Goodin." Tribe (2006) notes that this was one of the first fiddle songs ever recorded and probably one of the oldest surviving from the Irish folk tradition. These songs evoke Appalachia's old time mountaineer of the East and the idyllic cowboy of the West. None of Williams' songs allude to the cowboy or mountaineer lifestyle; their presence as intro and closing themes implies their familiarity to listeners and allows Williams to assert his immersion in the standing traditions of country folklore. According to Peterson (1997), the cowboy image proliferated by Hollywood, already an attractive American hero, became a replacement for the unpopular "hillbilly" caricatured on barn dances and stereotyped by urban dwellers. Not only did singers from the Southwest find the image profitable; many bands, such as Hank Williams' Drifting Cowboys, dressed the part although there was no sign of the cowboy influence in their music.

Along with the closing tune, there are snippets of mountain style fiddle instrumentals midway through each episode, usually after a commercial break. Williams makes several comments about cutting them short; for instance, after thirty eight seconds of "Bile Them Cabbage Down" he says, "he just got a chance to stew em' a little bit on that one"—that is, the song called for the cabbage to be *boiled* while the time allotted gave them no such chance. Only one of the instrumentals plays over one minute. The fiddle tunes can be seen as rounding out the performance but not constituting its featured songs—



Williams features his lyrical songs. Scholars note that fiddle instrumentals were initially the most successful radio style of hillbilly music (Malone, 2002; Peterson, 1997). Their presence as rushed "welcome back" music confirms that this form, once favored by country radio, has now become a comforting novelty in vocal-centered repertoires. Still, the fiddle is prominent as a backing instrument in the lyrical songs, sharing solo time with the steel guitar. The fiddle itself, emblem of the mountaineer archetype, is an indispensable rural style marker.

Williams also alludes to one final compelling image to country music: the train. "Pan American" is a song about a train he heard pass his childhood homes in southern Alabama, which for him represented the fantasy of escape proliferated by earlier artists such as Jimmie Rodgers. Trains had been an important part of southern culture and industry, and connoted a free-roaming lifestyle much like the cowboy myth. The train song, standing alone with none of the idealistic drifter imagery within, appears as novelty song without any sort of reflection. Instead, Williams merely describes the sounds of the train, and lists the cities it passes through. Williams does not associate himself with the train-hopper lifestyle popularized in the thirties, but nostalgically hears the train pass.

Even in his rising popularity and new big-city location in Nashville, Williams emphasizes that he does not speak *for* or *about* his audience but *with* them as a cultural peer. He appeals to the most important pieties of country performance, which culminate in a reassertion of regional identity. He constructs a quasi-live performance with the transcriptions, conveys the immediacy of someone who experiences the songs with the audience and facilitates an all-around community listening experience. Williams also speaks the idioms of southern culture and evokes familiar rural imagery. While these

final two elements are superficial, having little content meaning, they connote Williams participation with the pieties of his audience.

### *Domestic Piety*

As a foundation for much of southern rural culture, home serves as "bastion of virtue and security in a world of ceaseless change" (Malone, p. 13). Malone notes that vocal-centric country music extends from a domestic tradition, of singing in the home, as opposed to the frolic tradition, which featured fiddle instrumentals. Williams includes "a song about Mama" in hymn time, showing the central importance of domestic stability in rural life. The brief song is wholly melancholy, with no Heavenly resolution. It ends abruptly with "Mama's day with her children is through." It is especially poignant because of Williams' own situation with his single mother, with whom he often lived and was guided by until his death. He sings "today I'm saying my first prayer" when he sees that his mother is dying. Domestic stability is placed on the same sacred level as salvation represented by Mama, the anchor of the southern home. Another interesting characteristic of this song is that Williams defines the connection between mother and child as emotional rather than material. It is Williams who must now "hold her hand and say goodbye," for the first time reversing the role of emotional support. There are no descriptions of his mother's chores or excellent cooking or typically expected maternal roles. While not impious, the song does downplay the rural mother's order-keeping function as her most important virtue (Malone, 2002; Lange, 2004).

Audrey Williams is also as a representation of domestic stability. She is referred to, respectfully, as "Miss Audrey" and is introduced as a co-headliner with Hank; Grant Turner introduces "Hank, Miss Audrey, and all the drifting cowboys." She sings with

Hank on his only happy song about love, "I Want to Live and Love Always." The couple sings, "I sang a lonely song until you came along. I'm a-headin' for the bright sunny day. And I'm tellin' you what this love will do. I wanna live and love always." The song promises that if only one could find the right person, both their troubles would fade away. Audrey also sings with Hank on the two public domain religious songs and "I Saw the Light," which exhibits the interdependence of religiosity and domestic life. One interesting exchange occurs before Audrey sings a song she wrote called "I'm Telling You" to Follow Hank's "I'm a Long Gone Daddy:

Hank: Here's one that looks to me like sorta was wrote as an answer to that first one about I'm leavin' now [chuckle]. What's the title of this one hun'?

Audrey: I'm tellin' you.

Hank: tellin', whatcha tellin' me?

Audrey: I'm only kiddin' Hank.

Hank: You only kiddin'; alright here we go then.

Here, Audrey shows deference to Hank and convinces the audience that certainly the hosts of the *Health and Happiness* shows do not write antagonistic songs about leaving one another in earnest. Hank does much more in these shows to question the possibility of happy domestic life than he reinforces it, but the allusion to standing traditions is essential to shifting perspectives.

### *Conclusion*

In this section, I have discussed how Williams accounts for the major pieties of commercial country. He meets important standards of religiosity, folksy commercialism, community performance, and domesticity. The insular, southern culture was especially

attuned to its own presence in popular culture (Pecknold, 2007). A performer who seemed to have been overly gentrified by success or had manufactured their southernness may have easily recognized and written off as passive entertainment. However, Williams, because of his reassertion of shared cultural origins, affords himself the credibility to comfortably reorient the southern symbols to times when not regional-class identity but volitional culture-class would define the country audience. The rhetoric of reorientation blurs old pieties but also adjusts them for new purposes. I have also alluded to how Williams manages impiety (e.g. liveness of transcriptions, domestic instability) and utilizes those aspects of certain pieties that support his perspective (e.g. the hardship of religion, sympathetic and non-hymns). Managing impiety is closely related to perspective by incongruity, which is a more distinct shift of associations made with pieties. In the next section, I will show how Williams facilitates a new emphasis on emotionalism to provide the rural audience a recognizable fated struggle toward salvation once bound to material conditions. A culture can preserve itself when it connects old pieties to new contexts, when the new manifestation, although bearing little outward resemblance to the old, is still recognized by its members as an expression of their culture.

## 2. Perspective by Incongruity: Adjusting the Symbols of Country

It is indeed ironic that Hank Williams would be chosen to record the *Health and Happiness* shows (Escott, 1993). As an individual, he was neither of these. It was well known in the industry that Williams was a raging alcoholic and was often in conflict with his wife. Aside from his biographical blemishes, Williams presents several incongruities, that is, makes *impious symbolic linkages* throughout the shows. First, I discuss how he un.masks the constructed cowboy persona as an unhelpful role model. Next, I examine the implications of bringing the honky-tonk repertoire back home: William's confrontation with images of domestic stability. Third, I discuss Williams' managing of the tension between individual loneliness, and notions of a rural community, culminating in *communally shared alienation* rather than an *alienated community*. Finally, I discuss how Williams elevates flawed love to the level of ultimate concern and, conversely, sidelines spiritual salvation. In essence, he reallocates passion and perseverance from salvation to romantic love. These transcriptions offer an opportunity to expand on the interplay between the spiritual and secular traditions in rural culture, which is addressed throughout my analysis (Goodson, 1993; Fillingim, 2003). Williams' emerging perspective outfits southerners with a new perceived divine trial, dysfunctional love, to be encountered emotionally with stubborn devotion. His honky-tonk form, made palatable for normal folks, offers deeply personal identification (or at least sympathy) with this struggle while reaffirming the rural audience's shared cultural identity.

### *Happy- Rovin', Lonesome-Crying, Cowboy*

As I noted in the previous chapter, Williams utilizes the respectable myth of the cowboy as an element of rural piety; his band is called "the Drifting Cowboys." In his

theme song, "Happy Roving Cowboy" (Bob Nolan), Williams enjoys the freedom of being detached from normal responsibilities. He is a heroic cowpoke, "herdin' the dark clouds out of the sky, keepin' the heavens blue." However, Williams also has the incongruous persona of the "Lovesick Blues Boy," which he plays more convincingly. In fact, Williams never refers to himself or the band as "cowboys," calling them simply "the boys" when he introduces them. The dark clouds seem to rather stampede the real Hank Williams. In "Lovesick Blues," "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," and "I Can't Get You Off of My Mind" the protagonist is stuck under dark clouds of sorrow; in, "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," Williams sees himself in the moon, which "went behind the clouds to hide its face and cry." When Williams' characters roam in his other songs it is un-heroic. He runs from an abusive wife in "You're Gonna Change (Or I'm Gonna Leave)" and wanders aimlessly in "Lost Highway."

Not only does Williams show that his type of roving is not so happy, he is also a poor excuse for the cowboy archetype in terms of his self-restraint and selfless virtue. Lawrence and Jewett (2002) note that the Lone Ranger, popular from 1933 to 1954, was an important figure for the evolving American hero monomyth. The Lone Ranger exhibited sexual restraint, rapid mobility, selflessness, and the ability to tame unruly elements (i.e. his horse, bad guys). Williams portrays a lack of self-restraint in "Lost Highway," when he succumbs to "just a deck of cards, and a jug of wine." In "I Saw the Light," Williams' character was unable to keep from wandering "aimless" in a "life filled with sin." He cannot restrain himself from crying over infidelity in "I Can't Get You Off of My Mind." Williams shows that he is not able to keep his relationship in order in "You're Gonna Change (Or I'm Gonna Leave)." The introduction to that song reveals that

Williams is going to slink back to his mother's house after enduring excessive indecision from his significant other. Hank neither teaches lessons nor resolves conflicts in his secular songs. And in his religious songs, it is only by the grace of God that such a flawed individual might have any hope at all.

Williams is simply playing "dress-up" as a cowboy; he can't even tame himself, yet these conflicting images amplify the contrasting seriousness of his selections against the contrived characters found elsewhere in country music radio and popular culture (e.g. Roy Rogers, the Hollywood cowboy singer, Western films, the Lone Ranger comics). The perspective offered by this incongruity is that *cowboy* is a construction; real "cowboys" are performers for hire in flashy garb so they will seem respectable enough to be hired by sponsors. Williams thus sidelines the grandeur of the cowboy, offering him as nostalgic reference only; the band name and title song are superficial to the listening experience. While the cowboy image was profitable and fun, it was not a fulfilling form of rural self-expression and did not offer commentary on existential problems faced by rural southerners during the era (Malone, 2002). Williams is not here as a hero, but to offer identification as the "Lovesick Blues Boy."

#### *Honky-Tonk Homecoming*

Williams introduces further incongruity as the "Lovesick Blues Boy" by bringing his honky-tonk style to the traditionally sanitized southern radio. Williams raises uncertainty about normal couples' abilities to settle into stable home lives. Specifically, he violates the ostensible purpose of the show with his performance and describes various domestic problems without resolution. Radio performance standards were established by barn dances and barnstorming shows during the thirties (Peterson, 1997; Pecknold, 2007).

Performers were, for the most part, either one-dimensional or sanitized by advertiser involvement. One successful barn dance sponsor, Martin Davey, noted that he "carefully avoided everything that is vulgar and everything that would be objectionable to people of refined taste" (Pecknold, 2007, p. 19). The combination of Williams' honky-tonk instrumentation (prominent steel guitar and electric lead), whining vocals and bleak, first-person content was at odds with the home-affirming ethos pioneered in the 1930s. Williams had neither the pressures from the barn dance producer nor the direct involvement by a sponsor. Furthermore, he had a hit record which validated his performance style. Williams uses his radio show as a testimonial rather than a passive novelty. And he is able to give emphasis to sorrowful side of life. He presents homes with the reality of honky-tonk life.

Williams invokes both the good-ole radio performer and the down-and-out honky-tonker. Peterson notes that "in a way unique for the late 1940s [Williams'] repertoire expressed the full range of hillbilly sentiments from sacred to lusty" (p. 177). According to Lange (2004), honky-tonk was the "realist" approach to urbanization in country style. It appealed to those who found Acuff too hokey and traditional as well as those who did not enjoy the popular music sounds of Eddy Arnold or George Morgan. Acuff had pioneered a similar rough-hewn sound analogous to honky-tonk, but he was a careful performer with a contrived mountaineer stage presence. The primary difference in content was that the southwestern honky-tonkers spoke more frankly of lusty love and its consequences (Peterson, 1997). Williams was a unique combination of rough-hewn southeastern mountain music and southwestern honky-tonk. Pecknold (2007) notes that honky-tonk music developed a seedy image, which offended middle class country fans



and city-dwellers. Peterson points out that "in the 1930s lusty songs and sentimental songs were generally performed by different artists, or, if they were performed by the same artists, only in entirely different contexts" (p. 177). Honky-tonk was initially its own world, bred of an early economic boom, and filled with the sort of characters left out or constructed as deviants by middle-class oriented radio programmers. These programmers realized that "women and children comprised most of their radio audience" (Malone, 2002 p. 116).

The aims of the *Health and Happiness* transcriptions as middle-class entertainment are contradicted by much of the honky-tonk content. Williams implies that happiness is not predicated on happy entertainment; he goes about pleasing his families of "friends" by offering them his maudlin introspection. Grant Turner facilitates honky-tonk's home-coming by asserting that "Hank is always welcome at your house or mine." Williams refers to his audience as "neighbors," asserting that he is one of them. Time and again, Williams confirms his purpose of making the audience happy but plays songs with unsettling domestic content. To begin episode one, he states, "we hope you feel awful good" and follows up with his first song "Wedding Bells," which is about a lonely man who finds out his sweetheart is getting married although he knows he never will. The song concludes, "I knew someday that you would wed another, but wedding bells will never ring for me."

In episode two, Williams assures the audience that "the boys and myself and Miss Audrey, we all feelin' good," and proceeds to "start of with a little advice in a song" called "if you don't change, honey I'm gone pack my suitcase and go home and live with mama. " That song, "You're Gonna Change (Or I'm Gonna Leave)," is about a lover who

is always threatening to leave, lying, and generally misbehaving. Williams, the first person singer, "has done got peeved." The song references Hank and Audrey's recurrent separation. In episode four, Williams states that "we are all here to make ya happy for the next few minutes," and goes on to play "Lost Highway," a song which tells a fate of irrevocable depravity: "just a deck of cards and a jug of wine and a woman's lies makes a life like mine. From the day we met I went astray. I started rollin' down that lost highway." Williams, then, gives his best wishes to the audience, but he does not exemplify those wishes in song.

The dueling opening songs in episode three isolate the incongruity between Williams' songs and the cultural expectations for such a broadcast; Audrey responds to one of Hank's self-authored complaint songs with her own message of romantic estrangement. Turner states that "when you invite this fellow into your home it just seems like the sun shines a little brighter." Williams comes on and says, "we all feelin' just as spry as a two year old." And then, he prefaces "Long Gone Daddy" by stating "this man got tired of his wife beatin' him on the head with a fryin' pan." Within the song, Hank announces, "I'm leavin' now. I'm a long gone daddy I don't need you anyhow." Audrey follows up this song with one that Hank notes "looks like sorta was wrote as an answer to that first one," "I'm Tellin' You." Audrey sings her own lyrics, "While around the town you chase there'll be someone in your place. If you don't stop your cheatin' I'm a-tellin' you." At the end of the song Hank states, "I don't know whether you was kiddin' or not." Quite possibly, the audience did not either. Although there is still some banter to qualify that the couples are somewhat joking, this instance indicates that the songs are possibly closer to domestic reality than other country programs would admit. Blatant conflict on-

air might have insulted the audience's sense of appropriate, neighborly entertainment; by approaching romantic friction playfully, Williams may actually afford himself more leeway to perform serious, painful songs and, in the process, he might disarm judgmental listeners about taboo topics.

Williams' selections not only violate the joy-bringing purpose of the show, but also bring possibilities of domestic misery into the audience's homes. Williams is invited in the home only to describe marriage as a "license to fight." He suggests that marriages can be built on shaky foundations in "There'll Be No Teardrops Tonight," in which the woman seems to have gotten married "in spite" of Williams rather than for fulfillment. He shows that one might miss out on marrying the right person altogether, as in "Wedding Bells," and "Mansion on the Hill." Williams, as the character in "Wedding Bells," hears the "wedding bells . . . that should be ringing out for you and me." He had already "planned a cottage" and "even bought a little band of gold," but she has chosen to wed another. "Long Gone Daddy" suggests that even once harmonious couples may have irreconcilable tendencies within; Williams sings, "I remember when you were nice and sweet but things have changed, you'd rather fight than eat." He suggests that unhappy couples might stay together through constant bickering in "You're Gonna Change (Or I'm Gonna Leave)." In this song, a frustrated Williams states, "the way to keep and woman happy and make her do what's right is love her every morning, bawl her out every night." Fighting is regularity in some relationships, each party alternating with threats to leave. Although Williams is making the present threat of leaving, the woman has indecisively "wore out a brand new trunk, packin' and unpackin' [her] junk." Both of the songs are more about reasons for leaving—constant fighting and threats of abandonment—than they

are resolution. Williams never successfully leaves his relationship in song and, most of the time, does not even acknowledge the desire to leave. While he states, "hope you all happy" out of goodwill and on behalf of the sponsor, Williams brings his message of domestic trouble to the forefront.

With his incongruous message and presentation of various domestic problems, Williams suggests that there is no clear line between those who live the "honky-tonk" life and regular folks. Domestic unrest, personal feelings of failure and confusion, romantic dissatisfaction, and general sinfulness were likely commonplace, at least beneath appearances. Coontz (1992) states that there was an 80% increase in out-of-wedlock babies placed for adoption between 1944 and 1955 (p. 39). Coontz (1992) also notes the following inconsistencies between 1950s behavior and mores: "250,000 to a million women a year sought illegal abortions" (p. 196); 20% of married couples self-reported that they were unhappy in their marriages (p.36); and that surreptitious alcoholism was prevalent in marriages. Honky-tonk addressed not only people who relished being in trouble, but also those who felt helpless amidst the challenges to their orientation. The wholesome entertainer persona, which Williams sidelines here, is like the cowboy entertainer: a comforting illusion, not a sincere representation of home life. Here, he has begun to shed the contextual baggage (i.e. the drunken live playing context and jukebox environment) of honky-tonk problems.

#### *Communal Alienation*

Williams establishes the honky-tonk alienation caused by marriage, heartbreak, and lonesomeness as a private affair in that the individual should not be subject to public shame. But he also performs songs that are intensely private over the radio, introducing

the third incongruity: communal alienation. Williams sings predominantly in the first person, each song taking the form of a lament directed at a specific other, "you," whom he both describes and addresses. As Fox (1992) has suggested, Williams is the self-consuming subject of his songs. The songs do not tell a story, but function to normalize, or make public an otherwise aberrant internal condition. Williams places himself as the protagonist in several songs by speaking the title as a declarative sentence as a phrase; "if you don't change, honey, I'm gone pack my suitcase," "wedding bells will never ring for me," "I got the Lovesick blues". An exception to the rule is "Long Gone Daddy," in which Williams states, "*this man* got tired of his wife beatin' him over the head" (Perhaps because the presence of Audrey would have made the song too visibly confrontational).

In "Mind Your Own Business," Williams is complaining that his neighbors judge him unjustly:

If the wife and I are fussin', brother that's our right  
Cause me and that sweet woman's got a license to fight.  
Mind your own business.  
If I wanna stay out till' two or three,  
Brother that's my headache, don't you worry 'bout me.  
Why don't you mind your own business?

Williams adds a verse that he left out of the studio version (Escott, 1993); "If I get my head beat black and blue, now that's my wife and my stove wood too." He asserts his right to confront difficulty in marriage without the added pressure of social judgment. The incongruous message is that domestic troubles are intensely private, but at the same time, in their emotional universality, are fit for being broadcast for public consumption.

*Other people*, in the abstract, should mind their own business, but Williams' performance offers a way for the individual listener, as a sympathetic or similarly afflicted person, to join him in heartbrokenness. When introducing "Lovesick Blues" he states, "there's a lot of sufferin' in this song. We hope you never have to go through nothing like this . . . we have to do it quite often though [chuckle]. So, while romantic suffering is unfortunate and personal, it is fairly normal—not an exclusively deviant experience.

Williams suggests that the individual bears unique burdens in the realm of romance, burdens which are not to be publicly solved, but which may still be used for public identification. He refers to fan mail which requests songs such as "Lovesick Blues," "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," "Wedding Bells," and "Mind Your Own Business." Grant Turner brings in a "big ole' stack" of mail requesting "Lovesick Blues" for the second time. Williams, feigning reluctance, states, "well I reckon we'll just have to do it for them again." He also claims he has a "whole sack-full" of requests for Wedding Bells. Although this audience responsiveness is a construction, Williams' vast success with such subjects is very real. The audience may perceive that they are each alienated by domestic problems, but that a large number of others are also alone with their problems—as is evidenced by the performers' repeating of more painful material. The fake fan responses emphasize the normalcy of the kinds of songs that they request. This fosters identification between the individual listener and Williams and between the individual listener and their introverted community; each person sees that Williams is able to articulate problems for them, problems which their peers may not publicly realize or approve.

Williams' performance of and the commentary surrounding "Mind Your Own Business," especially highlights honky-tonk's unique ability to bond individuals with

performers in alienation. Grant Turner has just asked the listener to "call your neighbor or raise the window high and yell to her that Hank Williams is on air." After this close-knit assumption, Williams introduces his song with the following: "Here's a little tune we been gettin' an awful lotta requests for . . . folks want me to dedicate this to this one and that one and the other one. I wrote this, but I didn't write it for no special somebody." So, while it is addressed to one person lyrically, the song is applicable to many in the audience who imagine it being someone they know in particular.

Meanwhile, religious songs instruct the audience on how to treat an alienated individual. The honky-tonk problem of interpersonal domestic hardship, with its dubious causes such as drinking, cheating, and character flaws implied, is not visible in pre-war country music literature as a chief problem of God-fearing people; country was originally produced for radio as passive entertainment or thoughtful moralizing (Malone, 2002, Lange, 2004). Although male-female relations gained attention in songs beginning in the 1930s, Lange (2004) notes that "radio expansion and personal appearance tours inevitably encouraged writers to explore more conservative themes" (p. 39). Even if there was precedent for the emotional emphasis and stark content of some country music, barn dances, western swing, country-pop, and progressive string bands offered little *identification* with unsavory characters in untraditional roles. Williams, however, encourages sympathy for interpersonal hardship due to bad luck in courting. While the hymns do offer the compulsory promise of salvation, they more directly teach sympathy and humility toward all wayward beings. The hymns Williams chooses necessitate community understanding for alienation. While many of his songs give one-on-one, yet publicly performed accounts of pain, Williams is not to be viewed as a warning to all

sinner or made an example by his misdeeds; in fact, he was once "just a kid, like you" ("Lost Highway"). The song "Tramp on the Street," repeats several times that every person is some "mother's darlin'," who was once cherished and innocent. Williams also reminds the listener that the next vagabond may be Christ himself; he asks, "If Jesus should come and knock on your door, for a place to come in or bread for your store. Would you welcome him in or turn him away?" and offers the consequence that "God would deny you on the great judgment day." Williams thus places the burden on the observers of the downtrodden rather than the poor individuals themselves to reform. In "Thy Burdens Are Greater Than Mine," the first person singer realizes that other people may have exceptional circumstances that warrant sympathy. "Prodigal Son" implies that perhaps all journeys toward salvation entail a survey of worldly pain.

In the southern religious canon, economically tough times and unforeseen tragedies prompt a need for salvation. The individual is not held responsible for a condition of poverty or loss of a loved one. Williams suggests that tough times caused by interpersonal conflicts, which are seemingly more volitional and blameworthy, are equally worthy of sympathy; domestic quarrelling, loneliness, Depression—*honky-tonk* problems—are also necessary to confront and endure. So while he does not ask for anything from the listener within his secular songs, Williams has presumed their sympathy rather than condemnation and has not made himself such an outlier to be enjoyed simply as a moral tragedy. He is a regular person, cut from the same rural-Christian cloth, not a trouble-maker. Williams plays the dual roles of grief-stricken lover and benevolent observer. He connects with his community of listeners to achieve identification on the grounds that those who suffer in similar ways can relate most



intimately to his secular songs, and those who do not can learn their attitude of sympathy and respect toward sufferers. In either case, one may take the perspective of the first-person or the religious observer, experiencing solidarity and mutual understanding of the proper attitudes in both roles; the complementary religious and secular songs thus offer a comprehensive view of communal alienation.

*Love Almighty*

When dealing with perspective by incongruity I am addressing both symbolic representations and their *linkages*, or the affective associations underlying symbols that determine how they are used. Incongruity may occur at the level of outward representation or inward association; orientations deal with denotation and connotation. Semiologists have been especially interested in the cultural significance of signs and the potential of signs to support social realities. Although denotative meanings are simple descriptions that are perceived across cultures, Berger (1999) notes that connotative meanings deal with the "cultural baggage" that signs carry for specific cultures (p. 77); furthermore, "connotative meanings of signs turn into myths or reflect myths" (p. 77).

While the sign itself, the word, is more dramatically changed when it collides with another incongruous symbol such as *saintly devil*, often times the symbols do not change forms as such but, instead, their affective associations shift, giving them new utility—connoting new mythologies. The symbol itself is like the body of a car. Certainly body adaptations are quite noticeable to the casual observer, but the same performance of that machine may remain if the internal associations do not also change, that is the driver drives the car the same way and realizes that the exterior does not change its performance.

The jarring collision of symbols may cause a driver to behave differently as a fin on the back of a sedan may encourage a speed-junkie teen to drive faster. But, often times, a surface adjustment will be fitted to the old function, as when a family uses a sport-utility vehicle only to drive suburban freeways. Sometimes, new perspectives might be more effectively achieved when the user realizes an old symbol set has been invested with a recognizable form of underlying mythology, a new engine. The space race of the 1960s, for instance, was invigorated by its associations with nationalism rather than technical scientific achievement with no material benefit to the people. It became a *race*, not massive, fruitless, government expenditure. The old symbol has authority established by an existing pattern of relationships, actively endorsed by the symbol user. Hank Williams, who is dealing with very dear pieties— the remains of a once regionally defined culture—finds it profitable to give turbulent love a new engine, to modernize it, allowing the rural culture to feel comfortable in a new environment that places higher performance demands on romance. He installs the machinery from the rural evangelical religious tradition. It is this incongruous matching of religious machinery with romantic love that constitutes the most important perspective by incongruity advanced by Williams' performance.

### *The Religious Model*

The religious mode of attaining salvation is transferred to the realm of romantic love. Williams' hymns imagine heaven as a new start, without the problems of this world. By virtue of their suffering and repetitious, emotional proclamation, individuals secure a place in heaven. However, the southern-evangelical emphasis on Heaven as material resolution to worldly misfortune places zealous faith in a precarious situation; logically,

those living material ease (i.e. the increasingly affluent South) are less moved by the notion of Heaven (if it is simply the difference between material need and provision) The heavy weighting of existentially troubled secular songs in Williams' repertoire suggests that when material ease of life increases, the reward of heaven inevitably loses some emotional impact. The effect of the transposition, then, is to imbue interpersonal relationships with the urgency of one's eternal wellbeing, and to move the promise of heaven to a more peripheral comfort; hymns go the way of the cowboy, mountaineer, and physical closeness of the rural community. The burdens placed on the rural southerner are perceived less as issues of character, social respectability, material want, or social standing: the toughness of urban life is faced interpersonally, between romantic partners.

#### *Salvation by Suffering*

Williams constructs his lovesickness as a special struggle toward a different kind of salvation. His reversal of perspective from observer of material misfortune in the religious songs to bearer of existential angst in the secular songs encourages a new appreciation for inner-suffering as especially harsh. He construes lovesickness as a righteous path while neither asking for nor enjoying it, much like attitude toward hardships encountered in the hymns. Williams reinforces his belief in "love almighty" by emotional proclamation and repetition, the means of propitiation offered by the religious model.

Williams describes turbulent love as a special kind of struggle, characterized by its isolation, confusing prescriptions, and his defenselessness against it. Unlike the hymns, he sings all but one of the secular songs alone. Isolated suffering is a recurrent theme in "Lovesick Blues," "Lost Highway," "Wedding Bells," and "I'm So Lonesome I

Could Cry," which feature a character who is either "alone" or "lonesome." In "Wedding Bells," Williams sings, "at home *alone* I hang my head in sorrow" while the protagonist imagines the ceremony that he is too fragile to attend. In the very first lines of "Mansion on the Hill" and "Lost Highway," He defines the characters' isolation in sorrow: "Tonight down here in the valley I'm *lonesome* [italics added] and oh how I feel. As I sit here *alone* [italics added] in my cabin" in the former, and "I'm a rolling stone all, *alone* [italics added] and lost" in the latter. He avoids the images of communal sin and temptation proffered by much honky-tonk music and implied by its bar-performance context. Instead, those who hurt may destroy themselves from the inside out.

Lovesickness and unstable relationships are especially trying struggles because of the absence of a solution or compensation for what is desired. Love holds no stable promise. Lovers change, as in "Long Gone Daddy," where the woman was once "nice and sweet." Lovers stray, as in "I Can't Get You Off of My Mind," when the significant other "[jumps] from heart to heart." Finally, lovers may ignore their best-suited partner altogether, as in "Wedding Bells" and "There'll Be No Teardrops Tonight."

Furthermore, Williams' characters are lovesick for no apparent faults of their own. Much like the hymns about the downtrodden, his secular selections provide little context for the falling outs. He instead focuses on feelings of pain and hostility. Williams presents the lovesick man as helpless to solve his problem. In "Mansion on the Hill," his significant other has chosen wealth over true love. In "Lovesick Blues," the protagonist "tried to keep her satisfied." By devoting themselves emotionally to a specific other, he and his characters run the risk of being unable to "get [her] off of his mind." Also, in "Wedding Bells," the character has banked all hopes on a woman who is marrying

another, and Williams concedes, "wedding bells will never ring for me." No amount of striving or re-evaluation can rectify the situation of one party not committing him/herself in the same way to the ideal of love as the other. Thus Williams is fairly blameless and pitiable as the "Lovesick Blues Boy." He is not a bounder and has not courted such grief by his own lack of character. The character's dissolution (i.e. "a jug of wine") in "Lost Highway" attends his experience with unfaithfulness (i.e. "a woman's lies"); Williams presents a regrettably flawed situation rather than an immoral individual.

Not only are characters isolated and enveloped by suffering caused by uncommitted significant others, they are also excluded from the consolations of the religion and the promise of some replacement in heaven. While the hymns offered here do answer for poverty ("Thy Burdens are Greater Than Mine"), loss of loved ones by death ("When God Comes and Gathers his Jewels) homelessness ("A Tramp on the Street"), and, more importantly, build sympathy toward generic suffering, they do not offer hope to unhappy romantics. There is no replacement for a love that never materializes on earth, and God does not seem to regulate romantic chemistry. Not one of the hymns here presents God as ordaining love or regulating faithfulness.

Williams also transposes the means for securing religious salvation to the realm of love. His struggle is sanctified by public pronouncement. Because it holds no stable promise and is its own realm, love must be propitiated tirelessly. Folks cannot become as complacent about worldly salvation (i.e. lasting love) as they can the stable image of heaven. Propitiations to love almighty are, like the hymns, characterized by a basking in the emotions which love evokes, a fascination with its power. Romantic love is deeply

personal and ethereal, not a social end or a rational project for the self-directed individual.

The simple, repetitive phrasing of choruses in "I Can't Get You Off of My Mind," and "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" resemble the use of "praise the lord" in "I Saw the Light" and "I'll Have a New Body (I'll Have a New Life)." The effect is that of an elated revelation when Williams repeats, "I'm in love, I'm in love" in "Lovesick Blues." He certainly notes the power of love to harm in its lack of finality, but nonetheless constructs its undeniable and enveloping presence. Just as the religious songs propitiate God through humility, subservience to his will, and realize humanity's inadequate wisdom ("I Saw the Light," "Where the Soul of Man Never Dies,"), Williams steep himself in the emotions of troubled relationships as a prayer to love almighty. He does not often understand the choices of his loved one, wondering, "Why, oh why should you desert me?" in "There'll Be No Teardrops Tonight," but nonetheless continues to court love as evidenced by the only optimistic love song in these transcriptions, "I Want to Live and Love;" Hank and Audrey sing together "I'm a-tellin' you what this love will do, I want to live and love always." As bleak as relationships may seem, they are the only path to satisfy the soul with love.

#### *Love Takes Precedence*

Williams constructs love as a spiritual parallel, if not precondition, to the after life. He implies that it is righteous struggle, outside of the scope of religious precepts. Like religion, love also depends on emotional outpouring. Without the love of this world, Williams' characters do not seem motivated to pursue the afterlife at all. In these songs, troubled love often turns into an obsession; in Williams' case, it also fed his self-

destructive tendencies. "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" stands alone as a piece of hillbilly poetry in the transcriptions. In this song, he marries the earthy aesthetic of mountain music to the overriding significance of romantic dissatisfaction in honky-tonk. Love colors Williams' perceptions of the natural world. He projects his loneliness onto a "lonesome whippoorwill" who "sounds too blue to fly." He also personifies the moon in keeping with his own state: "the moon just went behind the clouds to hide its face and cry." He hears the train's whistle "whinin' low." The train, which traditionally signals escape in country, for the sad man is a sad regularity. Finally, Williams alludes to a fatalistic impulse: "Did you ever hear a robin weep when leaves began to die. Like me he's lost the will to live. I'm so lonesome I could cry." There is only one concrete reference to the cause of the grief in the last line of the song; "as I wonder where you are I'm so lonesome I could cry" Escott (1994) and Cusic (1993) note that this is considered Williams' masterpiece. It is a portrait of time standing still, an irrational, poetic lament which insists that love precedes the impulse to live. "Lost Highway," "Wedding Bells," and "I Can't Get You Off of My Mind" enact a similar eternal pining; it may be "too late to pray" when love has gone sour.

In summary, Hank Williams generates perspective by incongruity by sacralizing difficult love. In doing so, he makes profession of religious faith seem increasingly compulsory. The assent to faith in God is simple and repeated, and salvation is assured. Especially as material conditions were improving for most rural southerners, the promise of heaven did not seem such a deliverance from a harsh world as it might have in the past. However, Williams has shown that love holds no stable promise; it must be propitiated tirelessly, and is a rather fluid power, not a universal constant. Therefore, it

takes more emotional energy than spirituality, and is devoted more attention by his work. William's association shift, which makes love an almighty spiritual force, is indeed incongruous. However, while reallocating the machinery, he does not undermine southern religious piety.

### *Conclusion*

Through perspective by incongruity, Williams challenges some assumptions of country music's rural pieties. He suggests that the bulk one's emotional energy need not be devoted to modeling oneself after familiar archetypes, meeting perceptions of social/domestic respectability, or even securing a place in the afterlife. Instead, pursuing love between two people is the paramount concern of humanity. He unmask the cowboy hero of the era, using the image only as a veneer for his honky-tonk anti-hero. Williams implies that honky-tonk is not confined to a location, and that problems of honky-tonk music exist in everyday domestic life. He establishes a sense of communal alienation in that he facilitates public identification with deeply private conditions. Finally, Williams transposes the model for spiritual salvation to romantic love; thus making religion a compulsory (yet important) exercise, and instead, making romantic love the mysterious and sacred endeavor. The post-war decade raised existential challenges to rural southerners long accustomed to attending to material well-being. In an era especially shaking for rural-to-urban migrants, Williams suggests the usefulness of virtues such as humility, perseverance, emotional proclamation, and faith in dealing with the fluid needs of romantic others.



### 3. Recalcitrance: Submerged Sentiments of a National Audience

Although country music after World War II was still constructed to sound like music made by rural southerners for rural southerners, its radio presence in more populated cities established its appeal to city dwellers. Along with addressing rural orientation concerns, Williams challenged important elements of the United State's national orientation in the late-1940s and early-1950s. In considering country music nationally, my focus shifts from the orientation of rural southerners (a working-class orientation) to the early Cold War orientation (a middle-class orientation) of United States culture at large. This perspective is closer to the scope of Burke's concerns with the late-capitalist "technological psychosis." Although undoubtedly still guided by the purposes of manipulating nature and evolving to a perfect society, early Cold War anxiety created a new stagnancy of the individual manifesting the dominant rationalization. The overriding emphasis shifted from previous interest on conquering new frontiers or solving economic ills, toward ensuring proper social adjustment to counter communist sentiments. The notion of progress was inverted; whereas the early 20th century saw an individual perfecting society which reflected his/her interests, after World War II, society began to perfect the individual which, in turn, reflected *its* interests. Hank Williams' honky-tonk offered revision attempts against elements of the scientific rationalization, including Cold War notions of contentment in ease, domesticity as the purpose of marriage, and masculinity as the immovable anchor of society.

After World War II, American society valued leisure more than ever before. Media were saturated with idealistic models for happiness ground in consumerism and domesticity. Ogersby (2001) states, "Dominant ideological discourse constructed post-

war America as paradise on earth" (p. 68). Entertainment often encouraged domestic complacency and marginalized deviant behaviors (Reisman, 1961; Eisler, 1986; Coontz, 1992). Riesman (1961) notes that popular entertainment became focused on one's adjustment to the group (p. 149). While group-minded character formation was the norm, Williams offered identification with deviant dispositions, which alienated the individual from the group. Williams' music challenged norms of the era, supporting character types that undermined politicians' counter-communism strategy (Ogersby, 2001; Courdileone, 2000). Specifically, Williams voiced the existential consequences of an increasingly homogeneous middle class (Coontz, 1992), increased emphasis on marriage as the foundation for self-fulfillment, and a heightened concern with gender roles (especially masculinity) in being well-adjusted. For this reason, Williams' message is recalcitrant. Weak, emotional, economically unmotivated people were treated by media and politicians as demons to be exorcised from mainstream culture. According to Riesman, fifties individuals "learned to forget aspects of [their] character that [were] not 'social,'" or sentiments which did not increase the sense of group harmony, and facilitate consensual progress (p. 277). In popular culture, deviant individuals were either marginalized by scientific rationalization (psychoanalysis), or tucked away for the greater good (success literature, films), lest their problems be seen as *consequences* of a social order rather than *inconsistencies* of it (Reisman, 1961).

#### *The Context: Age of Anxiety*

An increasingly homogenous middle-class existence was brought about by an economic boom and refined by media representations. Coontz (1992) notes that 61% of the population was considered middle class by the 1950s compared with 31% in the 1920s.

Between 1945 and 1960, per capita income grew by 35%. Many Americans moved to the suburbs, or fled the country for the city, with the lure of a placid consumer-based lifestyle more attainable than ever. Although popular culture of the fifties (e.g. *Leave it to Beaver*, *Ozzie and Harriett*) and popular memory (e.g. *Happy Days*) have cast the era as a time of family values, peace, and prosperity, there was also a price to pay for those appearances. Some social critics became concerned with the conformist direction society as early as the 1950s. Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* highlights the threat to autonomy posed by the trends of the late 1940s and early 1950s through an analysis of changing social character types. Riesman (1961) defines *social character* as "the more or less permanent socially and historically conditioned organization of an individual's drives and satisfactions- the kind of 'set' with which he [sic] approaches the world and people" Riesman is thus concerned with how people, in general, fit into their cultural milieu, and how they derive notions of place in society and personal achievement. Riesman notes that "the satisfaction of the largest 'needs' in society is prepared, in some half-mysterious way, by its most intimate practices" (p. 5).

Riesman (1961) examines how the "mode of conformity"(one way of discussing social character) changed from the Depression era to the post-war era (p. 6). In *tradition-directed* societies such as those found in Central Africa, India, and China (at the time) of "high growth potential," the birth and death rates tend to be high, and conformity takes hold quickly and comprehensively (p. 12). Cultural patterns in such societies are determined by age, clan, or caste, and social relationships and are controlled by rigid etiquette. Ritual, routine, and religion occupy and orient members to a relatively fixed structure in which all have a self-evident role. The ranges of choices in pursuing

individuality are limited, and consequently, the individuated type of character has little value. Tradition-directed societies are characterized by their dependence on kinship and family for instilling values. These societies have a monolithic web of values, and an overall slowness of change.

*Individual-directed* societies began in earnest after the European Reformation. An inner directed society is "characterized by increased personal mobility, by a rapid accumulation of capital, and by an almost constant expansion" (p. 14). To manage the new choices and specialization which is necessary, certain character types must be adopted by individuals and internalized. People are no longer blanketed in consistent cultural rituals with self-evident roles. Riesman states, "the source of direction for the individual is 'inner' in the sense that it is implanted early in life by the elders and directed toward generalized but nonetheless inescapably destined goals" (p. 15). Whereas mere behavioral conformity was satisfactory in tradition-directed eras, individual-driven times must adhere to a chosen set of ideals, and behave in congruence with them. Riesman suggests the metaphor of a "psychological gyroscope" to describe how individual-driven people stay a certain course through the uncertainties of those periods of rapid growth and industrialization.

For Riesman (1961), the post-war era fostered the *other-directed* type of social character, which occurs at the plateau of economic expansion and upward mobility. Riesman notes, "People may have material abundance and leisure, besides. They pay for these changes however-here . . . by finding themselves in a world shrunken and agitated by the bureaucratized society and a world shrunken and agitated by the contact . . . of races, nations, and cultures" (p. 18). Inner-driven enterprise and tireless pioneering

become less necessary as the physical environment is mastered; the new problem of existence is other people. Peer groups become more powerful than parents in constantly reshaping a person's priorities. Instead of internalizing models for success in a particular endeavor, the other-directed type constantly internalizes the guidance of peers. Riesman states, "While all people want and need to be liked by some of the people some of the time, it is only the modern other-directed types who make this their chief source of direction" (p.22).

Riesman (1961) distinguished each type of social character by the type of emotional sanction it carries. Inappropriate behavior in tradition-directed eras is sanctioned by *social shame*, which is enforced by one's authority group. The inner-directed person, on the other hand, feels *guilt* when he/she does not match internal ideals; their corrective is internal and may occur regardless of social disapproval. The other-directed person, finally, has a socially sanctioned emotional control, but the judgments are much more diverse and conflicting than in tradition-directed societies where roles are self-evident. Riesman states, "While the inner-directed person could be 'at home abroad' . . . the other-directed person is, in a sense, at home everywhere and nowhere, capable of a rapid if sometimes superficial intimacy with and response to everyone" (p. 25). Riesman concludes, "One prime psychological lever of the other-directed person is a diffuse *anxiety*. This control equipment, instead of being like a gyroscope, is like a radar" (p. 25).

Although each character type has its downfalls, Riesman (1961) is concerned with the threats of the other directed type to the *autonomy* of individuals. According to Riesman, the autonomous are "those who on the whole are capable of conforming to the behavioral norms of society . . . but are free to choose whether to conform or not" (p.

241). Riesman sums up the dysfunctional nature of other-directed persons as such: "He [sic] is often torn between the illusion that life should be easy if he could only find the ways of proper adjustment to the group, and the half-buried feeling that it is not easy for him" (p. 160). Riesman is important for the current study because many of the pressures he associates with other-directed life are symbolized in Hank William's life and music. He presented the hidden nemesis of post-war culture.

#### *Middle-Class Discomfort*

Williams is a recalcitrant force amongst the cosmopolitan trends of the post-war decade; he was recalcitrant most broadly because he became popular nationally with a markedly regional form of music, a style which was behind the times instrumentally and vocally. Riesman (1961) notes that in the era of consumption popular culture tastes had become more important in defining oneself. Preferences for musical forms such as hillbilly, hot jazz and classical were considered marginal by middle-class consumers as confirmed by market research. (See also Pecknold, 2007.) Riesman (1961) states, "the need for musical conformity is today much more specialized and demanding" (p. 77). Furthermore, William's own history set him up to be a recalcitrant force in popular culture. He was born working class with a degenerative illness, never graduated from high school, was raised by an overbearing single mother, was a hopeless alcoholic, was trained by a black street musician, and had already divorced Audrey the first time by 1949. None of these factors established Williams as a role model for middle-class success.

More specifically, the *Health and Happiness* shows challenged the presumed happiness offered by *middle-class stability*, contrarily presenting the alienation that might

occur with concerns of upward mobility realized. Ogersby (2001) states, "Images of affluent suburbia were pivotal to the ideological strategies through which American capitalism asserted its claims to economic and moral superiority" (p. 67). In the following section of this chapter, I discuss the relatively folksy appeal of Williams as *recalcitrant* in symbolizing the age of anxiety that underlies the affluent veneer of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Before Riesman acknowledged the notion the following year, the phenomenon of the "lonely crowd" was evident here.

Williams did not factor the consumer economy and opportunity to join the middle class into his ideals. For the most part, Williams does not exhibit status consciousness in song or banter in these transcriptions; however, his performance does magnify hillbilly style markers, which certainly arouse working-class associations. Unlike William's chameleonic pop-country peer Eddy Arnold, he disliked jazzy guitar riffs and prided himself on the simplicity and sincerity, *not* the eclecticism of his music (Escott, 1994; Lange, 2004). Williams was also at odds with the notion that ease of lifestyle, the driving force of the suburban-consumer explosion, may afford happiness (or salvation). Williams' heroic cowboy in his cover of "Happy Roving Cowboy" is poor. He sings, "I don't have a dime, just a wastin' my time. I'm a happy rovin' cowboy," suggesting that the cowboy is free and happy *because* of the absence of economic concerns. The woman's mistake in "Mansion on the Hill" is, conversely, choosing her comfortable status at the expense of an uncertain life down below. Williams gives us an idea of the stagnant complacency her easy life: "the lights shine so bright from your window. The trees stand so silent and still. I know you're alone with your pride dear in your loveless mansion on the hill." Here,

Williams suggests that the superficial aspects of comfort cannot replace the passion rooted in the struggle of his cabin existence.

Although the Cold War conception of progress idealized ease of lifestyle as requisite to happiness, Williams' religious selections especially sanctify tougher paths of life as counterweights to the glory of salvation. Tough-life themes were prevalent in Depression-era rural music (Malone, 2002). He uses the dark to light metaphor to describe salvation in "Where the Soul of Man Never Dies." He sings, "My darkest night will turn to day where the soul of man never dies". The promise of heaven in songs such as, "When Gods Comes and Gathers His Jewels" is predicated on worldly grief; the song opens at a funeral where "a lad stood alone in tears." Before he "saw the light," Williams also "wandered so aimless" and was immersed in his own "worries and fears." The protagonists in "Tramp on the Street," and "Prodigal Son" are noble despite (perhaps because of) their vagrancy. For instance, in the allegory "Prodigal Son," Williams describes the pattern of salvation as set by Jesus: "The prodigal son once strayed from his father, to travel a world of hunger and pain." Salvation begins with a lost individual, one who must be *hungry* for something. His message harkens to the "inner-directed" sentiment prevalent until World War II, in which people believed that character had to be forged through struggle or asceticism (Reisman, 1961). In other words, they believed that more humanity was experienced in suffering than in ease; Nietzsche went so far as suggest that many of us would rather feel pain than nothing. How else could Williams consider "Lost Highway" a *pretty* song when its protagonist is "lost, too late to pray" in the end? While more Americans were moving toward the suburbs, finding themselves with more leisure time, and experiencing new conveniences, Williams is recalcitrant in



glorifying struggle and ennobling poverty (Coontz, 1992; Riesman, 1961; Ogersby, 2001).

### *City Alienation*

Not only does Williams glorify struggle, he implies that alienation may be just as possible in a mass society as it is in isolated rural kinship networks. To say that Williams also appeals to a sense of neighborly community is not to say he appeals to the piety of an increasingly homogenous national society. On the contrary, he evokes images of the marginal and disappearing rural community. He appeals to places where folks "bile them cabbage down" ("Bile Them Cabbage Down") and get in the "foot pattin'" mood ("Old Joe Clark"). He employs such distinctly rural language in reference to the pious community barn dance. Williams also introduces the "old-time" "I'll Have a New Body (I'll Have a New Life)" with "I know all you folks know the song and like it." He appeals to his audience's familiarity with several "old hymns," implying that the *friends and neighbors* listening are from a culturally distinct sphere. However, he limits the community references to spirituals and fiddle tunes; there is no presence of good old neighbors in Williams' personal songs. Instead the secular songs emphasize the relative pressure placed on romantic interpersonal relationships in an indifferent world.

The community imagery is left in the old context, the barn dances of old and rural porches where it is to be transmitted: where people "raise the window high" and shout at their neighbors. Riesman (1961) suggests that the multitude of cultural options available in cities may overwhelm rather than enlighten the individual, and states that if one attempts to be at home everywhere one ends up being at home nowhere. Williams is recalcitrant in voicing a submerged skepticism that one may be comfortably at home in

the suburbs and cities that must offer that sense of home to a vast array of cultures. He sees remnants of a community in his old time songs, but that community does not seem to assuage his loneliness and romantic grief in his contemporary personal laments.

Williams addresses problems specific to the new milieu of speed, economic plenty, soft labor, and leisure-centeredness, which the old pieties are not equipped to handle.

I have noted that happy adjustment to the group predicated on material plenty was an ideal conveyed by dominant discourse of the era. Williams cannot be mistaken for a happy, socially adjusted individual; in fact his identity is forged on his only number one song, "Lovesick Blues." Grant Turner always introduces Hank as the "Lovesick Blues Boy." No one familiar with Hank Williams' work at WFSB in Montgomery or the *Louisiana Hayride* would have anticipated much happy song material here. However, Williams' message must have had some appreciable resonance with his audience's experiences.

#### *The Home Front: Love and Marriage*

Williams ruminates about the interpersonal consequences of finding love for the purpose of getting at one's presumed destiny: family building. Increasingly homogeneous communities, low-intensity labor, increased leisure, and the political climate of the Cold War placed a special burden on marriage. Elsewhere, 1950s popular culture emphasized early, stable monogamy as necessary for the social good (Eisler, 1986). Williams symbolizes the pressure, and often failure many people experienced in living up the domestic focused ideals of love and marriage. Securing love was still the chief concern in Williams' life well into his twenties. Meanwhile, most of his peers had used marriage to segue into family life at the expense of romantic longevity (Coontz, 1992). He questions

the smooth, sudden, transition from youthful bachelorhood that was presumed by cultural norms. Second, he presents the disquieting reality of difficult marriages of which affection is inconsistent. Last, Williams questions the prosaic advice of sticking out marriage for the good of society.

### *Domestic Ideals*

The nuclear family home was seen as the cornerstone of a strong society, the first line of defense against communism. Of course, the ideal family could only get underway with a speedy course through courtship and marriage. The divorce rate soared from ten per 1000 marriages in the 1930s to 24 per 1000 in 1946 (Ogersby, 2001). Reisman (1961) suggests that the divorce rate was an index of new middle-class demands placed on marriage for sociability and leisure. While World War II signaled a boom in marriages and births, it also threatened the clear lines of gender-appropriate behavior. According to Ogersby, one in four married women held a job outside the home by 1945. The influx of people to the suburbs also ushered an era of sexual experimentation. Riesman notes, "Many divorces [were] a result of wildcatting on the sex frontier that our leisure society has opened up to exploitation by others than aristocrats and bums" (p. 280); although general sexual chaos was a concern, the threat of economically mobile *women* roaming the sex frontier was certainly an exaggerated fear for the insecure Cold War patriarchy. Riesman argues that subduing sexuality would not restore a stability upset by other-centeredness. He states, "any effort by the neo-traditionalists to close the sex frontier . . . would be irrelevant to the greater demands a leisure oriented people place upon their choice for companionship" (p. 281). Riesman suggests that a reactionary attitude toward marriage would do little good and that the difficulty posed by the era should have been

incorporated into a “new model of marriage that finds its opportunity precisely in the choices that a free-divorce, leisure society opens up” (p. 282).

By the mid-1950s, divorce rates had fallen somewhere in between the previous figures, reflecting a reinvigorated impulse toward meaning and security in an uncertain world, but not due to a new functional marriage model (Ogersby, 2001). Political strategies of containment found their parallel in the nuclear family, defending against such fears as those generated by Kinsey's 1948 and 1953 reports on aberrant sexual behavior (Ogersby, 2001; Eisler, 1986). According to Kinsey, more than one-half of American men had been unfaithful husbands (Eisler, p. 176). Kinsey's group also found that 26% of women had extramarital affairs out of a sample of over 500 women studied for fifteen years. Over half of men and women had premarital sex. As the first of their kind, these studies upset commonplace assumptions about typical sexual tendencies. Kinsey's reports helped make marriage the subject of focus for intertwining fears about communist expansion, domestic subversion, and impending state of sexual chaos among psychologists, politicians, magazines, and throughout entertainment media; marriage (not “love”) became *the* calling and signifier of adulthood. During the Cold War, marriage secured the patriarchy, demarcated sexuality, and offered a feeling of social stability to the nation in uncertain times.

### *Aching Love*

In these transcriptions, Williams implies the dual pressures of early marriage and the attempt at curbing of sexual promiscuity made love quite difficult, but nonetheless paramount. Unfaithfulness is the cause of aching love in several of his song choices. When introducing his cover of "Lovesick Blues," Williams makes it clear that the song is

not a hypothetical situation; he applies the content to himself, stating, "there's a lotta sufferin' in this song" that "we [he and the band]" have to endure quite often. In other words, being loved and left is typical experience for a good ole' boy. The protagonist, a once "sugar daddy" of the love interest is now stuck in misery. He sings, "Lord, I've tried and I've tried to keep her satisfied, but she just wouldn't stay." The woman is simply promiscuous, as the lyrics "she'll do me, she'll do you, she's got that kind of lovin'" suggest. Williams' character is quite aware of this woman's tendencies, but cannot help having the blues. The song acknowledges that sexuality can be both appreciated and resented at the same time, as he conveys; "Lord I love to hear her when she calls me sweet daddy . . . I hate to think it's all over. I've lost my heart it seems." Whereas some men may have simply moved on and settled for stability, Williams insists on his passion.

The new challenge to romantic stability was that the other partner might not yet be willing to settle down. This may have been especially painful to men who were expected to be stoic and romantically successful with ease. In "I Can't Get You Off of My Mind," Williams has the same problem of being fixated on a roaming lover. He reflects, "didn't think you would leave me behind, but I guess you're the two-timin' kind." The woman is seen as cool and manipulative; "you believe that a true love is blind, so you fool every new love you find." In "Lovesick Blues" he is also on the run from "a woman's lies." There is evidence of patriarchal assumptions in both of the songs above, that women will sew misery by acting outside of their prescribed roles, but here, I am more concerned with Williams' stepping out of his own prescribed role—this move being less sanctioned by the dominant orientation than the subjugation of women. Furthermore, Williams is not cast as innocent in the turbulent love affairs of these transcriptions, as

"Long Gone Daddy" testifies. He is willing to leave and find "a gal that wants to treat [him] right," apparently unprepared for dealing with the pouting, fussing, and grudges which seriousness commitment entails.

Audrey presents a recalcitrant, woman's perspective when she brings a man's misbehavior to public account and threatens recourse in her counterpart song, "I'm Telling You." Audrey informs us that Hank has been sneaking away at night and cheating as well; she says, "if you don't stop your cheatin' I'm a-tellin' you." Whereas she once might not have noticed, she is "getting wise" and is "not the foolish sort [she] used to be." Audrey also expresses her willingness to change partners, singing, "while around the town you chase, there'll be someone in your place." The recalcitrance of a woman's confirmation of this turbulent dating style is mitigated by Hank's silly commentary around the song: "listenin' to the words of that one I don't know whether you was kiddin' or not." Audrey had replied to Hank's suggestion that the song was an answer to the first by saying "I'm only kiddin' Hank." Disgusted and degraded by his affairs, Hank is still unwilling to abandon his search for love, as is indicated by his fixation on the topic in fourteen of the seventeen non-religious lyrical songs. He is thus recalcitrant to the notion of settling, but also to the notion of a smooth courtship toward marriage.

### *Unhappily Married*

Marriage was presumed to be a signification of adulthood and meaningful participation in society during the Cold War; it transformed immature lovers into stalwart domestic units. However, dysfunctional love cannot be solved by overshadowing it with the finality of marriage. According to Ogersby (2001), the "postwar reaffirmation of family life was charged with ideological concerns" (p. 63). As evidence of the

effectiveness with which various sources bolstered the marriage ideal, Coontz (1992) notes that during the 1950s, couples consistently told pollsters "home and family were the wellsprings of happiness and self-esteem" (p. 25). In 1955, Coontz states that only 10% of married couples believed that the un-married individual could be as happy as the married individual. The ideal went largely unquestioned. One "fell in love" to expedite marriage. Eisler (1986) notes that the average age of marriage in the United States dropped to an all time low in the 1950s. Eisler states, "few young people saw life experience as a prerequisite for becoming husbands, wives, and parents"(p. 174). Waiting on real love was too risky and only appropriate for those with "emotional capital to spare"(p. 178); love, was pursued with the expectation of stability and family, often at the expense of emotional fulfillment. This trend created an undercurrent of romantic frustration, which was calmed by encouragement to focus on molding oneself to fulfill the perfect family and assurance that complacency in marriage was preferred to questioning (p. 152). Popular culture of the era especially reinforced the conception of happily complacent marriage and domestically grounded self-identities.

Riesman (1961) examined the fictional stories in several women's magazines in 1948 to support the notion that "popular culture is exploited for group adjustment purposes in fictional guise" (p. 151). Riesman points out how the short story, "Let's Go out Tonight," (Slocombe) from the October edition of *American Magazine* encouraged women to find satisfaction in the status quo. The hegemonic story is about a young, "college-bred suburban matron," who has the perfect life in terms of children and financial provision from her husband. She is, however, dissatisfied with the amount of affection her husband shows her after work. Imagining her courtship during college a

more exciting time, she revisits the campus only to remember how difficult it was to get married in the first place. According to Riesman, "She concludes that she has just been loafing on her job as a housewife, and returns full of tolerant understanding of her husband and enthusiasm for new and improved manipulation" (p. 152). Indeed, this story reinforces the notion that self-fulfillment is found within domestic complacency. As a general characteristic, Riesman states that home economics literature of the period makes the "assumption that a solution of conflict is available that involves neither risk nor hardship." He further suggests that this was indicative of a dangerous and stagnant conformity (p. 153). Men's and women's magazines as well as films stabilized marriage. According to Coontz (1992), "for the first time, men as well as women were encouraged to root their self-identity and self-image in familial and parental roles" (p. 27). In fact, male stars who had played heroic loners in the 1930s and 1940s transformed to neurotics and psychotics. After 1947, The Actors Guild even organized a series of events to emphasize to various civic groups that Hollywood was committed to rejuvenating family life.

Professionals also consciously bolstered the importance of a stable family. In 1948 a conference of over 100 organizations met and discussed "The Family-America's Greatest Asset" (Ogersby, p. 64). Sociologists such as Talcott Parsons placed the nuclear family at the core of modern social stability (Ogersby, 2001). Popular success literature often focused on positive thinking, ignoring problems, and role-playing one's way to happiness (Riesman, 1961). In retrospect, the perceived happiness in marriage appears artificial, and the late forties to mid-fifties simply represent a cultural hiccup between periods of high divorce. Coontz (1992) suggests that although marriage rates went up,



happiness did not. In fact, between one-quarter and one-third of marriages contracted in the 1950s ended in divorce.

Williams symbolizes the underlying tension indicated by conscious efforts at stabilizing marriage. He offers a view of love that is unstable regardless of whether it is sanctified by marriage. His songs that focus on marriage never end well. The audience is assured that Williams is not speaking hypothetically, or merely for humorous entertainment because he adds an introductory phrase which situates him as the author/protagonist in most cases. In "Wedding Bells," he stands by as the woman he loves marries another man: "Wedding bells are ringing in the chapel that should be ringing now for you and me." Williams seems resolved to remain single if he cannot have the bride-to-be, stating, "those wedding bells will never ring for me." In "There'll Be No Teardrops Tonight," which Williams notes he had the "pleasure of writing," he ruminates on the meaning of his loved one's wedding day. He forces himself to "pretend that wrong is right." Williams seems to believe that the wedding is not legitimate, singing at one point, "are you doing this for spite?" and at another, "shame oh shame for what you're doing!" Marriage here, as in *Wedding Bells*, is an *interruption* or *betrayal* of love rather than the proper context for its existence. This is certainly a recalcitrant perspective in that it undermines early or calculated marriages.

Elsewhere, Williams alludes to the reverse view of marriage: the misery of staying together with a quarrelling, unsuitable partner, of which he had plenty of experience. He describes marriage as "a license to fight" in "Mind Your Own Business." Also in that song, Williams voices his disgust at a society that insists on expedient marriage and the appearance of romantic harmony; he sings, "mindin' other people's

business seems to be high-tone. It takes all of my time just to mind my own, why don't you mind your own business." He presumes that others may relate to the song by stating, "looking through the mail, lotta folks want me to dedicate this to this one and that one and the other one." Regardless of whether there was mail, Williams senses the need to vent the pressures of "other-direction" in the form of nosiness. He attests to the autobiographical context of the songs by stating, "*this man* got tired of his wife . . . so *he wrote her a song*;" presumably, Williams (the author) is *this man*, with his wife uncomfortably nearby. In "Long Gone Daddy," Williams sings, "I've been in the doghouse so doggone long, when I get a kiss I think there's something wrong." In the same song he presents the reality of marriages with unfit partners: "I remember when you were nice and sweet, but things have changed, you'd rather fight than eat." Finally, in the same song, he refers to his wife as "my ball and chain." His solution: "I'm leavin' now." Not only that, he is *sneaking* away by means of "ridin' on the midnight train." Just months earlier Audrey had given birth to Hank Jr. and just more than a year before that Hank and Audrey had been divorced. Audrey shows that the discord is not generated from the female side only. In her follow up to "I'm a Long Gone Daddy," her "I'm Telling You" she suggests that she is aware of Hank's infidelity. "I'm getting wise . . . I'm not the foolish soul I used to be." She also asserts "while around the town you chase, there'll be someone in your place. If you don't stop cheatin' I'm tellin' you." The prospects for Hank's nuclear family did not look promising.

Williams profited throughout his career from autobiographical songs that described what would have been socially shameful life. By his unwavering focus, Hank does assert the significance, if not the blissfulness of love *aside from* the context of

marriage. Where it was thought of as abnormal to be wavering in commitment and miserable in marriage, Williams presents it as a fact of existence, not as a social aberration. When people identify with a message that would be considered socially shameful it is evidence of recalcitrant sentiments, which may not be dealt with effectively by the current orientation.

### *Masculinity*

#### *Gender Roles in Romantic Relationships*

Williams sang of men in ways that undermined culturally understood representations of masculinity. In these transcripts, he presents men as equally vulnerable to heartbreak as women, emotional by nature and dependent on reciprocated affection for functioning. The stabilizing of marriage after the spike in divorces was carried out with new focus on functional "togetherness" as a marriage philosophy. Family life was expected to be emotionally satisfying if couples were mutually understanding of one another; however, this understanding was ground in distinct gender roles, man in the instrumental and woman in the expressive capacities. According to Ogersby (2001), "A battery of popular texts and academic opinion combined to advocate the role of housewife and mother as natural and fulfilling" (p. 66). Ogersby notes that psychological texts of the era propagated the view that women were biologically wired to be receptive, passive, and fear resentment; these qualities were assumed to prepare them for their purpose as mothers. Those who failed to meet the standard were even sometimes labeled neurotic or schizophrenic. The post-war decade bolstered the male breadwinner even more than it did the feminine counterpart. The ideal of masculinity became a paramount concern in popular culture, politics, and social psychology. The idea of sex-proscribed

gender roles was strengthened during the Cold War most certainly because it seemed more threatened than ever before. Ogersby (2001) states, "the sense of generalized uncertainty found coherence around specific objects of concern . . . issues of sexuality and gender identity" (p. 62). If the nuclear family was the first line of defense, then the husband was to be its field officer.

### *Masculinity in Politics*

For the first time, *consciously* cultivated masculinity became an issue of national concern. With the current economic ease came the political fear that the expanding middle-class American lifestyle would begin to foster communist sentiments. According to Cuordileone (2000), political culture in the early Cold War put a new premium on masculine toughness. In 1950, Joseph McCarthy began blaming America's "position of impotency" on what he considered unmanly liberals; McCarthy often lumped the "communists and queers" together to contrast his ideal of masculinity. The problem of massification was seen in gendered terms. Ogersby (2001) notes that fear that "masculine drive and creativity was being phased out by softness embodied in the mothers' materialism, and feminine socialization emphasizing passivity (p. 73)." The conformity of the era was discomfoting in resembling the collectivist mentality of communism.

The political dichotomy of hard/soft masculinity was just one more way of preventing dialogue and disabling autonomy, in effect increasing the "diffuse anxiety" of post-war America (Cuordileone, 2000; Eisler, 1986). World War II recently ended, and the United States was preparing for a showdown with communism. Cuordileone (2000) states, "Unequaled consumption and white-collar work generated concerns about male physical fitness and vigor"(p. 526). There were doubts that not only the physical, but the

character-softness of men could not meet the demands of the hyper-militarized era; in fact, psychiatrist Edward Strecker published a 1946 study on the growing numbers of young men unfit for soldiering due to immaturity. Williams was a poster child for the soft side of the masculinity: attached to his mother, unfit, dissolute, a poor husband, irresponsible father figure, immature, and emotionally unrestrained.

Williams shirks his masculine dominance duties throughout *Health and Happiness* shows. He presents the emotional and instrumental qualities of men and women as rather balanced. First of all, the shows featuring Hank and Audrey presents them as co-headliners, although Audrey had never released a song; Grant Turner introduces "The ole' Lovesick Blues boy Hank Williams, Miss Audrey, and all the Drifting Cowboys." It is left implied that Hank and Audrey are married; when he introduces her, Hank says "Miss Audrey" or "a young lady," rather than "Mrs. Williams" or "my wife." He at least gives her some amount of professional space, although he is the one who was singing on the *Grand Ole Opry*.

#### *Masculine Vulnerability*

Williams presents men as emotionally needy—sometimes more needy than women. In songs such as "Lovesick Blues," "I Can't Get You Off of My Mind," "Wedding Bells" and "There'll Be No Teardrops" the woman is seen as neglecting the helpless male protagonist's affection. In "Lovesick Blues," Williams is "in love with a beautiful gal, but she don't care about [him]." In "I Can't Get You Off of My Mind," he wonders how his wandering lover can be so cruel and "fool every new love [she] find[s]." Hank asks his two timing lover, "do you think that it's smart to jump from heart to heart when I can't get you off of my mind?" But, she has a hidden agenda: "Stars in [her] eyes

but they can't hide the lies." In "Wedding Bells," he presents the man as the sensitive party, unable to move on, singing, "I knew someday that you would wed another, but wedding bells will never ring for me." Rather than the woman needing the man to keep her stable Williams is lost without his one woman.

In "Long Gone Daddy" and "Mansion on the Hill," the woman is actually portrayed as inherently colder and instrumental. In the former, Williams expresses his desire to "go find a gal that wants to treat me right. You go get yourself a man that wants to fight." He is not the cantankerous, demanding one (according to Hank); he has been in "the doghouse" constantly. In "Mansion on the Hill," Williams sings, "you said you could live without love dear in your loveless mansion on the hill." The woman is thus presented as being able to at least choose a life that is not in keeping with her presumed biological role. In terms of role-taking, this song presents the man's vulnerability much more than it shows the consequences for a woman who chooses material well being over love. Williams admits that he is "lonesome" in his cabin. The woman can "live without love," but it is Hank's character that cannot let go. He asserts that men are just as apt as women to feel the emotional impact of a relationship. This perspective is offered with little warning or casting of judgment.

The even exchange surrounding "I'm a Long Gone Daddy" between Hank and Audrey is especially interesting; the quarreling couple publicly expresses their autobiographical perspectives. Hank offers the perspective that he has a cantankerous wife who has taken a dark turn since their union. Audrey responds that she is striking back against an unfaithful husband, and if necessary, will replace him. At the end of Audrey's song Hank giggles, "I don't know whether you was kiddin' or not listenin' to the

words to that," indicating the exchange may have been *cute* had it not been accurate. Furthermore, Hank admits that he is *physically* vulnerable to women in a time when this weakness would have been especially shameful; he introduces the song saying, "this man got tired of his wife beatin' him on the head with a fryin' pan." He repeats this vulnerability in the extra verse that did not appear on the studio recording of the song "Mind Your Own Business:" "If I get my head beat black and blue, now that's my wife and my stove wood too." Williams confounds expectations of men in terms of the internal and external consequences of love with which he identifies.

### *A Song about Mama*

An important part of masculinity preservation during the Cold War became severing young men from the feminizing mother influence. Williams, however, performs a song that showcases his emotional connection to his mother. After World War II, the masculine ideal was no longer clearly based in economic superiority, and popular science compensated with new measurements of masculinity. Eisler (1986) states that testing for internal masculinity became an obsession when external measures were most threatened. The tests emphasized the social responsibility of parents in fostering the *natural* development of strong men. As well as needing clear masculine role models, scholars suggest that one important element of a healthily adjusted male was making a clear "Oedipal break" from his mother. "Momism" was a term popularized to signify the emasculating influence of overbearing mothers (Eisler, 1986; Ogersby, 2001; Cuordileone, 2000). Such a misogynistic term may be seen as a way that masculine authority and influence was consolidated in soft science as the gender gap somewhat closed economically. Williams, raised by a single mother who cared for him intimately

until his death, shows what would be considered unhealthy (indeed recalcitrant) attachment to his mother. Earlier in the show, Williams has threatened to "go home and live with mama" when introducing "You're Gonna Change (Or I'm Gonna Leave)." More significantly, he substitutes a "mama song" during hymn time.

The song itself is sentimental, not about the mother as the cornerstone of domestic stability, but immersion in the sorrow of losing an intimate loved one. The song is painfully slow and only has these few lyrics:

Each year on Mothers' day the rose I wore was red,

But today I'm saying my first prayer.

Mama's lying on her dying bed.

I've just told Mama goodbye.

Mother's day has turned to night.

Like the flowers in May, she withered away,

And my red rose is turning white.

Her time on earth is through,

And there's nothing I can do.

Only hold her hand and say goodbye.

Mama's day with her children is through.

Williams voices physical and emotional connection to his mother, even at a time when psychoanalysis had begun to suggest the dark implications of Oedipal attachment (Eisler, 1986). He intimates that affect is the basis for parental influence, rather than certain partitioned roles. The 1950s fostered a formulaic approach to constructing the nuclear family, insisting on the wife's nurturance of children, sexual satisfaction of the husband,



and domestic duties. However, the masculine role model was still supposed to be the dominant influence in the male child's life. Williams' performance does not even mention a father, and suggests that with her unreasonable load of domestic duties—and more importantly, her emotional availability—the mother may override the father in character formation and inspiring allegiance.

*The Maladjusted Bachelor*

Williams presents the maligned bachelor of early Cold War culture as one deserving of sympathy: a lonely man rather than a loner-type. According to Eisler (1986), "solitude and solitary pursuits were not only worrisome in themselves, such preferences pointed to other, still more dangerous tendencies" (p. 37). Reisman (1961) notes that "one is not permitted to identify with the lonely escapist; his lot is pictured as a set of miseries and penances" (p.157). Bachelors were deemed narcissistic, deviant, or pathological; some psychologists argued that any bachelor over thirty should undergo psychotherapy (Coontz, 1992; Cuordileone, 2000). Williams exemplifies the alienation of many men in a society that encouraged marital stability on one hand, and on the other, scorned inappropriately long periods of bachelorhood that some men took to find that stability.

It is important to note that while Williams presents negative effects of solitude and bachelorhood, he does not criticize his character for socially defined shortcomings. These songs are recalcitrant in offering identification to those in situations that were presumed to result from character flaws. In "Wedding Bells," "I Can't Get You Off Of My Mind," "There'll Be No Teardrops Tonight," "Mansion on the Hill," and "Lovesick Blues," Williams finds himself stuck in bachelorhood with no promise of future security in love but at no fault of his own; he has fallen in love, but the struggle continues. He

suggests sympathy for the man who continues to wait for affection rather than condemnation. In "Lovesick Blues" all he can do is "sit and sigh." Especially in "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" there is no attempt on his part to move past his emotions. Williams' romantic loneliness rules his life: "the silence of a falling star lights up a purple sky. And as I wonder where you are, I'm so lonesome I could cry." In his rendition of "Lost Highway," Williams assumes the role of "a rolling stone, all alone and lost" because of "a deck of cards, a jug, of wine, and a woman's lies." He notes the social experience of being a loner: "When I pass by all the people say, 'there goes another boy down the lost highway.'" Williams is left behind in wedding songs, abused in marriage songs, and cheated on in courtship songs. He sings in the first person, in solitude. Perhaps the "lost highway" of alcoholic dissolution was the only alternative to the love freeways of fifties culture. It may have been tough to wait on true love when so many people were willing to pass it by for whatever instrumental reason. Williams is recalcitrant in his willingness to wait out love and to accept a socially shameful state, even sing it so that others may realize similar emotions. As a bachelor, Hank Williams is not maladjusted: he is neglected in spite of his sincerity.

#### *Masculine Maturity as Emotional Restraint*

"Maturity" in settling down without delay was the countervailing virtue to bachelorhood, even when it was a veneer for suppressed adolescence and cynicism (Eisler, 1986). 1950s films replaced autonomous heroes with loyal and low-key everymen. Eisler describes male stars as having a "middle-aged quality, even when they were young men playing young men" (p. 53). Protagonists were passionless and reliable rather than romantic. William Holden, the most consistently employed male actor of the

early 1950s, embodied the ideal: relaxed, understated, and attractive. Eisler (1986) suggests that "Holden's faintly ironic manner and crow's feet suggested wisdom and feelings held in reserve" (p. 54). His roles covered the range of Cold War masculinity: citizen, corporate manager, defender of democracy, suburban husband, and father. In one interview conducted by Riesman (1961), the respondent states, "the reward of our maturity was collusion" with properly hidden inappropriate behavior (p. 82). Holden followed the rules and hid his own alcoholism and personal problems until they prematurely killed him (Eisler, 1986).

Lack of emotional self-restraint was considered a sign of immaturity. Reisman (1961) concluded from a set of interviews, "temper is considered the worst trait in the society of the glad hand" (p.232). The prosaic advice to not *get involved* romantically, for Reisman, "seeks to control the personal experiencing of emotion that might disrupt the camaraderie of the peer group" (p.233). Williams defies the convention of emotional control at the risk of his maturity. Unlike the prominent stars of the day, he was literally an *ole'* boy; Williams looked and spoke in a way that indicated older age, but sang and expressed himself as a perpetual adolescent. In "Lost Highway," he has become stuck in the bad habits of his youth: "I was just a lad, nearly twenty-two. Neither good nor bad, just a kid like you. But now I'm lost, too late to pray." In most every other non-religious song, Williams is immersed in emotional weakness. For instance, in "I Can't Get You Off of My Mind," he sings, "I've tried and I've tried and all night long I've cried, but I can't get you off of my mind" even as he realizes his lover is unfaithful. He cannot bear to show up at the wedding of his ex-lover in "There'll Be No Teardrops Tonight." In "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," Williams has been so immobilized by his emotions that he has

"lost the will to live." He sees sadness in the moon, hears it in the birds chirping and the train. For Williams, emotions are not things one works past, they must be experienced and encountered, even if debilitating. His identity as the "Lovesick Blues Boy" never faltered. Once again, emotionalism and male vulnerability were to be hidden for the sake of the social good during the post-war decade. Williams is recalcitrant in singing to the irrepressible nature of emotions, and the special weakness that men have for romantic emotions.

### *Conclusion*

Although country emanates form and employs the pieties of a relatively insulated, traditionally conservative culture, it does not follow that its message always serves reactionary or conformist political ends. My examination of Williams' recalcitrant honky-tonk message suggests otherwise; Hank Williams is recalcitrant toward middle-class consumer values, marriage and domestic stability, the cult of masculinity of the post-war decade. Perhaps he was too hokey, and down-home to be considered a social threat, but Williams cannot be construed as a helpful voice in the fight against male softness, gender rigidity, self-control, or as an agent of Cold War social progress. It is in this sense that Williams' honky-tonk stands apart from the sideshow of early barn-dance country and the sweet consolations of wartime music. This perspective may also help explain the weakly articulated notion of "authenticity" most important to fan culture and opponents of the Nashville Sound as "sincerity." Sincerity is most obvious when it contradicts normalcy and respectability, when the emotions are not channeled appropriately but simply expressed as frankly as one's internalized cultural resources allow him/her. It takes some

combination of extreme autonomy and marginal self-absorption to deliver this  
recalcitrant message.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

In this final section, I review the grounds for the study and the significance of its findings for rhetorical and cultural studies scholarship. This study began with my curiosity about the parallel time frame for the rise of country music and the rural-to-urban migration (1940-1960). As the migrants settled, so did the sound of their regional form, country. By 1960 country music faced charges of going "pop" or hiding its roots to gain a larger audience. It seemed logical to think that the music might have had something to say in regards to the challenges that the rural audience faced as they gained economic status. Roughly in the middle of the migration, country music was also at a liminal state—between regional and national, marginal and popular music. Post-war honky-tonk adapted the rural-southern symbolic orientation to the urban milieu. The genre prepared the rural-southern culture for the interpersonal strain and dissolving physical community of the Cold War era. According to my study, honky-tonk preserved the notion of struggle as a defining characteristic of southern culture, transforming material struggle to a struggle for intimacy and stability in romance. Furthermore, post-war honky-tonk offered its national audience identification with recalcitrant sentiments; it contradicted the overarching, politicized Cold War orientation. The chief contribution of this study is a more nuanced understanding of how cultures may use a common stock of symbols to coordinate a meaningful existence amidst perplexing socioeconomic changes.

Hank Williams was an exemplar of the post-war honky-tonk sound. He is especially interesting as an artist who experienced the general troubles of his audience in magnified ways. Post-war honky-tonk dealt with the present threats to the rural-southern community; it also fixed its own role in their lives as a folk-commercial product. The music was at once comforting for its reference to the mountain tradition in vocals and melodic structure, and unsettling in its consistent presentations of unhappiness and its addition of brash-sounding instrumentation (lead guitar and steel guitar). After the initial wave of rock music in the mid-1950s, however, the country industry unified with a selling strategy, casting templates for songs that *sold* well. Country was never again in such a position of being distinctly regional in origin and nationally popular. And it has never since been involved with such sweeping long-term changes within the music industry and the lives of its listeners.

The bulk of scholarly research has assessed country as a unified genre with little regard to the social contexts that attended its changes in sound, commercial production, and performance. Cultural studies and content analyses have subsumed honky-tonk by explanations that address country as a monolithic genre (defined by commercial strategy or generalized content). Neither major focus allows for country to be influential in the lives of listeners—as rhetoric. In this study, I offer a conception of rhetoric and a set of terms that accounts for those very things which are absent from scholarly literature on country music. I focus on the rhetorical situation, which is the sustained rural-to urban migration and how it relates to rural pieties.

I highlight the recursive interplay between symbols and their embodiments in experiencing the world. Cultures speak a world into existence and also symbolically

attend to the problems that their perspective creates—a cure must be found in the illness itself. Honky-tonk dealt with the consequences of an orientation that made material ease an endowment of the after-life, justifying asceticism and dutiful worldly suffering. This perspective actually made material well-being a rhetorical problem because material progress suddenly appeared arbitrarily and rather uniformly; worse yet, it did not assure contentment. Finally, I advocate an inclusive notion of rhetoric as reorientation to characterize influence in the honky-tonk milieu. Pervasive cultural rhetoric occurs at the pre-persuasive levels of naming and association. Reorientation is tantamount to symbolic action.

This study posits that piety, a culture's sense of the appropriate, is a precondition for understanding the rhetorical nature of an artifact. Williams adhered to the following elements of rural-southern piety: religiosity, folk-commercialism, community-affirming performance style and, most weakly, domestic stability. Williams amplified the human suffering element of religious songs and also conveyed immediacy in canned performances, altering without violating those pieties. Williams ethicized suffering as a spiritual element and offered little support to domestic piety to prepare for perspective by incongruity. The immediacy in performance, evocation of community, and Williams' general convincingness as a member of the normal rural community was important in allowing for new perspectives: these pieties mitigated the friction of his re-working of suffering and salvation.

After World War II, the material impetus for the afterlife subsided as the South underwent an urbanizing trend. I argue that Williams offered rural-southerners a new salvation quest for which to suffer: romantic love. Williams' overarching incongruity was



to imbue romance with a this-worldly spirituality with a recognizable pattern of propitiation through proclamation. If the after life was central before, it became more peripheral to lived culture in this construction. Williams presents the home with incongruous images of domestic unrest; with his reassuring banter and fluency in piety, Williams made honky-tonk problems normal problems. In doing so, Williams also employed love-gone-bad as a means for reasserting community. These shows offered a way for sympathetic neighbors to reflect on the plight of the less fortunate and allowed those with intensely private feelings to find public identification without being alienated. Williams approached love with such seriousness that he downgraded the appeal of popular, free-roaming figures that fled it, the cowboy and the train hopper. Although Williams' role as a cowboy is nostalgic and recognizable, his "Lovesick Blues Boy" persona represents his rhetorical identity.

I assess the critical dimension of honky-tonk as it clashed with the dominant, national orientation with Burke's recalcitrance. I find that Williams represented elements of the human condition increasingly marginalized by the Cold War orientation. He offered an ideal state of suffering in a time when material ease was taken as a mark of success. Williams was also recalcitrant in offering a view that made marriage less a simple means to maturity or social usefulness and more of a continuing struggle to find love. His assumed role as a lover (and a son) contradicted a highly charged political notion of masculinity as synonymous with national might; furthermore, he exposed the gender roles offered by Cold War culture as constraining male emotionality as much as they downplayed natural female agency in romance.

I use Burke's terms in a way that most comprehensively accounts for the artifact's participation in its cultural milieu. This study illuminates the utility of Burke's concepts in collaboration with one another understand the rhetoric of reorientation. Together, piety and perspective by incongruity is a strong pair of concepts for explaining cultural constraints on a message and creative solutions to an exigence within those constraints. Scholars may always begin by noting relevant pieties—as cultural resources rhetors use—and, then, address the reweighting of these resources that occurs with perspective by incongruity. Recalcitrance may also be identified when the rhetoric is critical of mainstream culture. These terms facilitate an artifact-driven style of analysis. They need not limit or predetermine the scope of a study. In this sense, they demand curiosity throughout a study and should raise many unforeseen questions about the role of symbols in cultural change. The concepts of perspective by incongruity and recalcitrance assure that symbol work is never complete. With such a cultural emphasis they encourage an attitude toward the artifact as part of a cooperative social endeavor rather than an instrumental persuasive attempt.

Piety is a way of perceiving the extent of symbolic reweighting (i.e. perspective by incongruity). Especially when a culture recognizes itself as distinct, immersion in pieties is essential. I have argued that the country community was especially reliant on pieties to preserve a sense of common origin. Within a rhetorical situation, when new understandings are necessary, adherence to piety gives a message its rhetorical potency. Piety conveys that a culture is being preserved even as it is advancing. Williams thus employs all important pieties even as he manipulates some of them.

Burke is emphatic that any solution to a culture's ills must bear some resemblance to the sickness itself. New solutions must feel similar to old understandings. In this case, with a culture that is threatened because of a dissolving lifestyle, reworking the pieties is necessary for countering alienation. Piety is how a rhetor may convince a culture that he/she speaks *from among* them, rather than *for* or *to* them. When the rhetor is able to do this, the rhetoric may not seem like a distinct persuasion attempt at all.

I use a broad notion of perspective by incongruity as a *process* of introducing incongruities into a pious system. As with other terms, Burke offers perspective by incongruity in both a myopic and broadminded way. Previous scholars have chosen the former as a useful way to identify jarring collisions within a traditional piece of rhetoric—rhetoric in which perspective by incongruity served an instrumental purpose. I approach perspective by incongruity as an incremental shift in associations. Furthermore, I deal with complex connotative associations—not just individual symbols, but symbol systems (i.e. the religious model for salvation)—to develop a more nuanced understanding of how perspective by incongruity must also manage impiety to be meaningful. Here, perspective by incongruity constituted the reorientation—it *was* the rhetorical action toward the rural audience. My study engages perspective by incongruity as a concept for analyzing subtler forms of nontraditional rhetoric in which the rhetor has a heavy cultural obligation.

Not only did Williams' work preserve the rural-southern sense of identity, it had a different, subversive, use-value for his national audience. Burke uses recalcitrance as a way of defending the utility of his poetic solution. He argued that symbolic acts face an objective process of revision, and, at the same time, symbols access a world that could not have existed without them. So, while defining reality, the poetic metaphor has

bounds, both symbolized and yet-to-be symbolized. Since recalcitrance is a generalized term that acts upon any symbol system, it may be used flexibly. Recalcitrance may shape a fledgling orientation from without or it may revise—seep through—an overextended orientation

The focus in this study is the extent to which Hank Williams' message encapsulated ideas marginalized by the Cold War orientation—with its focus on masculinity, social conformity, ease of lifestyle, and happy, fulfilling, and efficient domestic life. Williams' message carried extra rhetorical potency because it not only preserved/advanced one culture but also offered the respite of identification to another. Williams' mournful, romantic message symbolized sentiments, presumably normal experiences, which were antithetical to the dominant socio-political orientation. In this sense, the message exemplifies the critical notion of "polysemy," that texts may vary in their specific meaning depending on who is doing the reading (McKerrow, 1989).

Wander (1983) suggests that the practice of critical rhetoric hinges on a scholar's advocacy of an alternative, or "being able to choose from among and act on a given alternative in resolving a crisis" (p. 110). Furthermore, Wander warns that those uncommitted to social change may fall into complacency, in effect, reinforcing ideology in the academy. However, I assume the posture of a perpetual skeptic of both dominant ideologies and their planned alternatives, acknowledging that every solution sews new problems of its own. Recalcitrance offers a way to simply acknowledge that orientations must abstract reality, or advance certain sentiments over others, and that rhetoric may account for yet-to-be symbolized concerns of an audience. Critical rhetoric does not have to cohere around a political program; recalcitrance is an often fragmented, context-

specific response and need not be construed otherwise. Recalcitrance is a way to make an ad-hoc "ideological turn" without requiring the scholar to be politically invested in such an approach (Wander, 1983). After all, for Burke, orientation is the basis of *all* human understanding. As Crable (1998) has argued, ideology may simply be considered a larger denomination of orientation.

Although the critical rhetoricians offer Burke as a transitional figure who advocated skepticism of established orders, Wander (1983) notes that Burkeanism was institutionalized as a replacement of the Neo-Aristotelian method (Burke's dramatic pentad, in particular, became a ubiquitous method). Wander argues that Burke was appropriated by scholars who downplayed rhetoric's "potential for securing an intuitive sense of community among all Americans" (p. 99). Furthermore, Burke's more blatant concern with social cooperation in his 1930s and 1940s work (i.e. economic structures), was later lost in Burkeanism. Many critical rhetoricians have since unnecessarily abandoned Burke. I offer a set of terms from his neglected work on social cooperation through symbolic activity, which may serve as a more flexible Burkean method that allows for varying levels of rhetorical analysis with different amounts of critical emphasis. Orientation can be global (as in the epochs of rationalization: magic, science religion), national, or local. Perspective by incongruity can be a way of one culture reaching new understandings for its own existence (as it was here), or it may be a process of intercultural rhetoric (when one culture is changed by confrontation with another culture's "impious" association), or it may be used, as it has in traditional rhetoric, as a culturally-loaded metaphor. Recalcitrance, as noted, may be used to describe how a

dominant ideology suppresses or defuses counter-culture rhetoric, or to describe the resilience of some symbols to that suppression.

My study expands on notions of rhetoric as a pervasive process of symbolic action. This study examines a more mundane, folk rhetoric than traditional scholarship. It gives us insight into rhetoric constructed for a locally experienced (as opposed to monolithic) context that serves to preserve and extend cultures. Considering that folk-forms of rhetoric are valued partly for an origin among the audience, *preservation* may be as important a function as innovation when it requires symbolic re-weightings. The rhetoric of reorientation may be both mundane and incremental; re-orientation is not an objective, but a process. Seemingly provocative rhetoric is not inherently useful. By this, I mean that clearly articulated political or revolutionary rhetoric, which consciously attacks and favors *entire symbolic orders*, may not be useful, even to those whom it would seek to emancipate. On the other hand, a mundane message, received daily as part of one's routine (such as Williams'), may be thoroughly and unquestioningly integrated into his/her belief system. Useful rhetoric is reverent to pieties, especially when it seeks to alter them. Burke's popular notion of literature as "equipment for living" is thus implied in the rhetoric of reorientation; perspective by incongruity may be seen as *maintenance* on a specific culture's equipment for living. For instance, I explain that the rural community ethicized suffering in search of salvation, and that Williams updated suffering (the equipment) by attaching it to romantic love.

In expanding the notion of rhetoric as often being mundane and incremental, this study emphasizes the significance of radio programming as a valuable rhetorical form, especially for examining the cultural discourse of the first half of the twentieth century.

Lange (2004) notes that by 1940, 80% of United States homes had at least one receiver. Furthermore, much of the radio programming before the mid-1950s was locally produced, live, and yet nationally available. Available radio transcriptions may shed new light on the perceptions of regional cultures, and offer new understandings of cultural cross-pollination. Interpretive radio research may be valuable for disclosing marginal perspectives lost to more descriptive forms of historical and social analysis.

Hank Williams spoke as a member of the rural-folk culture. Because he was so intimately connected with the culture, his inward-looking songs had cultural utility. My analysis of Williams' work blurs notions of intentionality. Williams' rhetoric is, indeed, intentional in the sense that he comes to grips with the pieties and problems that he shares with his group. However, he is unintentional in the sense that he is not dealing with an instrumental process but an *existential* one, which changes the grounds for what means what in the first place—preceding how instrumental behaviors may even be counted. The process of perspective by incongruity is an objective in its own right; reweighted symbols are the products/outcomes of the rhetoric of reorientation.

Rhetorical effectiveness may be judged from a variety of philosophical positions, but rhetoric always "works" for reorientation if an audience presumably accepts the voice of the rhetor as their own and is able to identify with a meaning that may have been otherwise incomprehensible; a new *yet familiar* reality is the only attestable outcome. This rhetoric worked for the rural community because of Williams' fluency with symbols that had pre-existing cultural authority. The *utility*, if not effectiveness, of Hank Williams' message was clear from the social context and historical reflections. The value of the rhetoric was presupposed by a context that challenged understanding locally and begged

for identification nationally. Ordinary rhetoric, popular culture, may serve important functions because of its quaintness; it should be judged in terms of how it challenges and bonds listeners.

If intentionality is difficult to establish in terms of the rural-directed message, it is nonexistent in terms of the recalcitrant, national message. Recalcitrance is an interesting way to suggest critical albeit not politically-motivated rhetoric. Honky-tonk was both apolitical in conception and critical in circulation. Williams' message was introspective and was marketed specifically at the rural-radio community, yet his insular message propelled him to national notoriety. His national success does not implicate Williams as a progressive-minded genius, but does exemplify how different audiences "'activate' the meaning of a text differently" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 131). Mediated communication, especially popular culture, may have utility outside of its conception. McKerrow has suggested that critical rhetoricians must acknowledge that "any articulatory practice may emerge as relevant or consequential" (p. 116). Whether rhetoric becomes critical, or is proven recalcitrant, may depend on the audiences' need and reception of it, regardless of the rhetor's intent. My conception of recalcitrance thus focuses attention on the way that "symbolism addresses publics" (McKerrow, p. 124), or carries critical potential.

This is not to say that unintentional, recalcitrant fragments need be constructed by scholars as a replacement ideology. In fact, what distinguishes my approach is the focus on the relatively objective-seeming "rhetorical situation" while at the same time allowing for the emergence of critical rhetoric. This study has shown that a critical nod is possible without losing focus on a "real" social context and creative author/agents as the *primary* symbol shapers, which put discourse into motion. My goal is not "the production of



knowledge to the ends of power, and, maybe social change." (McKerrow, 1989, p.125); it is simply understanding necessitous symbolic constructions and/or their stubbornness, which *indirectly* addresses the power inherent in orientations.

Being so invested in cultural adaptation and a culture's relationship with mass media, my work is relevant for several areas of interest to cultural studies scholars: most notably, notions of industrial determinism, the presumed effects of massification, and notions of authenticity. Cultural studies scholars have subsumed honky-tonk in the country music industry's commercial strategy for survival. For honky-tonk, where there is a clear exigence, or a need for symbolic adaptation, commercial opportunism is an oversimplification. Furthermore, the industry was not yet fully formed and country was still scattered among several subgenres. So, the argument that honky-tonk adheres to rules conceived by scholars analyzing 1970s country is simply inaccurate. Music may be commercially successful because it has utility. Audience needs, not untapped preferences, may drive a genre forward. One good example is Tony Bennett's number-one hit with Hank Williams' "Cold, Cold Heart" in 1951. Although Bennett may have recorded the single solely to make money, here was an artist who was manipulated for audience needs, not vice-versa. Years earlier, no record executive could have imagined such a respected performer covering a serious hillbilly song. The more necessary reorientation is for an audience at the time, the less commercial strategy seems an appropriate way to describe the cultural role of that artifact.

This study also offers cultural studies an example with how a folk-form may not be deterred by mass mediation. In this study, country radio intensified rural-southerners identification with their roots; in fact, radio replaced communal aspects lost to the

migration. Whereas massification is usually presumed to erode specific cultures, country's rise to national prominence and its presence in rural-to-urban migrants' lives actually preserved or bolstered a folk-culture. Mass-mediated culture can just as easily supplement as it can replace "real" cultures. Nor does a mediated communication necessarily deter immediacy. In fact, Williams was able to be perceived much closer to each individual audience member as one voice to one home than he would have been on stage, in an "organic" context; Williams' voice was heard in each home, audible in a quiet speaking voice. In this case, intimacy was *enhanced* by mass mediation.

I exemplify how piety and perspective by incongruity allow scholars to ascribe cultural involvement and cultural integrity to certain types of popular art. Overall cultural utility is an attractive alternative to using the much maligned term "authenticity." Without bringing charges of cultural elitism, scholars may assert that some forms are more involved with both specific contexts and specific groups' symbols (pieties) than others. Popularity, commercial success, artistic complexity, and abstract classification schemes are not indicators of whether or not a culture recognizes rhetoric as its own and incorporates it into a belief system. Establishing links between culturally loaded signs and those signs' concurrence with the contexts to which they related (or become related) may be a way to engage what would have once been called "authenticity" or "realness."

Although discounted as a genre due to its historical positioning between activist-folk and rock music, honky-tonk deserves attention as a contextually engaging genre with subversive potential. I suggest that music forms should not simply be judged only for their novelty of style but also for their novelty in usefulness. Between the 1930s and 1950s the "folk" genre was divorced from country. The genre of folk did emerge from a

particular scene. The unfair labor conditions which spawned labor uprisings in the early 1930s presented an occasion when northern labor organizers could implant their ideas into fecund, working-class southern ballads (Malone, 2002). Folk has been distinguished from country as activist music, grassroots political commentary—the rural music that has a moving message. However, folk has lacked a lasting connection with the rural audience from which it sprang; many in this audience have not seen political involvement as a matter of principle as much as circumstance.

Alongside "folk," honky-tonk has not been rustic enough, but alongside rock music, country has seemed too hokey and behind the times. Rock music's ascendancy depended on and adapted to a new-found youth market. Deprived of their parents' hard-life experiences and thoroughly integrated into consumer culture, many young adults gravitated toward the fun, hedonistic lyrics and rhythms of rock. Rock music is considered more provocative and progressive because of its merging and updating of sounds from Black and white music (blues and country). Rock music had a new vigor of sound compared to blues and country, but the message, considered contextually, may fall short of revolutionary. Early rock lacked the cultural situated-ness that both country and blues had; furthermore, it had no exigence. From a critical standpoint, rock may have emerged out of nowhere, but it had a flippant, hedonistic message which did little to challenge an order that was upheld by a combination of masculinity and consumerism.

Popular culture studies tend to gravitate toward artifacts that are lionized as provocative or progressive in cultural memory; however, cultural usefulness is equally important to judging a genre as progressive, compelling or outdated. I have shown that honky-tonk's cultural value was fulfilled in keeping an old form relevant during a time of

upheaval. Provocation and progress are relative to the culture that uses an artifact and to the situation that prompts its usefulness. Forms which are provocative simply because of stylistic syntheses might be approached more skeptically in the future as possible commercially-spawned, distinctly non-folk forms. They should be questioned for what (and who) gets left behind with the older forms. I am not suggesting a genre be consciously "preserved" (like folk), or that it be artificially (commercially) propped, but simply that scholars index a genre by how its music has corresponded with locally experienced contexts. After all, how a culture responds to one context changes how it will experience the next. There is no ultimate "progress" in the narrative of a genre, simply a progression of rhetorical moves.

Honky-tonk music was rhetorically significant in the lives of rural-to-urban migrants. It was not only an adaptive folk-form which negotiated a position in modernity, but also an affront to conformist trends. Music styles or genres are important for understanding the rhetorical resources and modifications made by cultures. Marginal cultures often have minimal mainstream political/intellectual presence. They do not often seek to guide the nation, but only to navigate themselves. Music is one way that a folk-driven culture may realize itself that is pervasive, comprehensive, and accessible.

I have argued that the honky-tonk style was more than an aesthetic choice; its utility did not hinge on perceived novelty. By investigating the preservation function of rhetoric, this study provides insight to how a culture can adopt new ways and means of asserting itself. Honky-tonk's availability through mass media countered the alienation, or cultural homelessness, that was a consequence of other homogenizing trends of industry and consumerism. In adjusting themselves, folk-cultures also offer unique perspectives

on the meanings of social change—perspectives that are not present in mainstream historical accounts or simplified, popular music chronologies. Folk cultures need not always be viewed as fossilized or outdated. Honky-tonk was not a living history but part of a living culture that offered commentary on sweeping changes, which were not (and are still not) fixed with inherent meaning.

So, *because* marginal folk cultures are often concerned with survival in a moving present, they have much to offer to scholars. There is nothing either sacred or foolish about an orientation; reality must have a lens, and all lenses distort our view. Every orientation has something unique to offer about the historical moment. Every response that engages the moment tells us about the range and limitations of perspectives, the extent of cultural homogeneity, and the way that sense-making is enacted across cultures. Humanity cannot go back to imagined glory days, and we cannot impose a plan on the course of civilization, as it will mean something different when manifested. We can simply use our symbolic resources by the moment to find a habitable version of reality. Complacency is the mark of occupational psychosis, living in service of symbols rather than employing them. As long as we live through our constructions, they will pose challenges and require revision. The more tools we validate and put to use, the better our orientations will serve us in the future.

*Well folks, looks like the clock has done caught up with me. That means I'm gonna have to pack my satchel and get goin'. This is Greg Robinson saying, "If the good Lord's willin' and the creeks don't rise, we'll see ya fore long."*

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