Shades of Pink

Performing Dolly Parton

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and I

To make it, you've either got to be FIRST, different, or great.
– Loretta Lynn

The list of Dolly Parton's "firsts" is long, and she still holds a lot of "onlys" among country music women. She is absolutely different, and absolutely one of the greats, not only in country music, but in pop music as well. Dolly is[1] the:

- First woman to have two number one pop singles
- First female artist to accumulate 54 top ten country singles
- First and only country artist to have a hit dance single
- Fist country female artist to have six number one country albums
- First female songwriter (in any genre) to have 18 number one records
- First country female to star in a major motion picture, and first and only female to be nominated for an Academy Award (twice)
- First woman to co-own her own theme park
- First country entertainer to earn $400,000 for one concert performance
- First country artist to be worth $500 million
- First mainstream country female artist to produce her own album
- First country female artist to run her own film/television company

Obviously, the list of Dolly Parton's achievements is admirable.

I have always had a weak spot for the great "dumb blondes" like Marilyn Monroe. Something about their performance of femininity fascinated me, and this fascination goes back as long as I can remember. In my drawings from kindergarten it is clear that my idea of beauty was the "Blonde," and she was wearing pink, which (of course) was my favorite color, and most often her job title was "Princess". As an adult I have often sat down and contemplated this notion of beauty; where did it come from? Today I find myself surrounded by girls who look like pink princesses, but in the early 1980s in Northern Norway this was not the case. After the second wave of feminism swept Norway in the late 1970s, gender neutrality as a strategy was being abandoned, but girl's clothes were still in neutral colors and practical. I grew up in a home surrounded by books and always knowing that I would someday attend university. My grades

[1] My list of firsts is based on the "Firsts" from *The Dolly Fact Pack*, compiled by John Zarling (1998).

were good, I was active in sports, and I played with my Barbies until I was in my teens. I sympathized with the dumb blondes, and I thought that they looked beautiful. When Dolly Parton is confronted with her "trashy" look, and answers that she looks like that because she likes it, I believe her. I like that look too.

Dolly has been dismissed by many because of her looks and attitude. Her portrayal of naive femininity does not mesh well with politically correct feminism, but in 1987, after thirty years as a performing artist, she was listed as one of the "women of the year" in the feminist magazine *Ms.* Gloria Steinem wrote that Dolly was given the honor for "creating popular songs about real women, for turning feminine style into humor and power, and for bringing jobs and understanding to the mountain people of Tennessee" (Steinem 1987: 66). Today (in 2010) Dolly Parton's list of admirers is long, and many current country women claim Dolly Parton as a major influence (i.e. Allison Krauss, Taylor Swift, Miley Cyrus, Kellie Pickler, Carrie Underwood, Shania Twain, Reba McEntire, and Emmylou Harris).

Growing up in Norway Dolly was, for me, a celebrity that I knew of, mostly because she was highly visible in the popular press in the 80s. I did not know very much about her music, and country music was something young people were not supposed to like. It was my father's music, and I would not even give it a chance. In elementary school we would have *vennebøker* (friend books) and *skoledagbøker* (school diaries) where we would write on each others' friend pages. These friend pages would have questions about what we liked and disliked, what our favorite color was, our best friend, our favorite food; things that identified us to the rest. One of these categories was favorite music, another category was "music I hate", and that's where I would put country music. Country music became the symbol of everything that we were not. What bands we liked were incredibly important, but more importantly was what we didn't like. When confronted with the question "what music do you like", I answered "all music… except country music and classical". Of course, I did not know of any country artists, and would not have any clue if it was Beethoven or Brahms (or Vangelis for that matter), it was the idea of what country (or classical) music was that we based our judgments on, and we did not want to be identified with either.

For me it was the late Johnny Cash who opened my ears to country music. I was in my early 20s, and my knowledge of country music was no greater then than it was when I attended elementary (though by that time I knew a couple of names and a couple of songs). I still had

reservations against the genre, and was very specific as to what particular artists I liked (and of course, which ones I didn't), but Dolly became one of the artists that I "approved of". Later, while researching popular music studies, I became interested in the whys and hows of this taste judgment, and why I had been so eager to dismiss a whole genre – one that I really had no knowledge of at all! I started forming some ideas, and the primary ones have become questions that I address in this thesis. The first of the questions was; "How can Dolly be *real* when she is so artificial?", and this question led me into the other discussions; authenticity, gender, identity, and class. In this thesis I want to address aspects of these discussions which several books have explored thoroughly. And possibly most importantly; what does it mean to be a girl?

Aims and theories

While experiencing and interacting within popular culture, we are exposed to a multitude of impressions, some of which are consciously registered, others which we don't take notice of at all. These images (or texts) are audio and/or visual and influence the way we see ourselves in relation to others by altering our framework, or points of reference, and consequently alter the way we understand and perform our own identity.

I would like to argue that identity is not solely an expression of an innate self, and therefore since identity is formed from a dialogue between the individual and his or her culture(s), looking at Dolly Parton will also tell us something about our own culture. To get there, I will look at Dolly's background, at the culture from which she emerged, and also through the lenses of a female Norwegian, born in the 1980s.

> If [the] context is understood, a text can be analyzed as a kind of human utterance, in dialogue with other utterances (Walser 2003: 27).

A significant part of my research was done in Tennessee, where I have had access to the archives at the Country Music Hall of Fame and at the Center for Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). I visited *Dollywood,* Dolly Parton's theme park in The Smokey Mountains, her home town of Sevierville, and Nashville; Music City USA, the city where Dolly Parton became a star. I spent four months living and interacting with Americans, trying different cultural lenses. Trying to understand Dolly Parton has also meant trying to understand Americans, Tennesseans, and also my own position.

Using a selection of songs that Dolly Parton has both written and performed, I wish to examine how Dolly positions herself as a subject in her own songs. She is also a well-renowned songwriter who has had her songs performed (and covered) by many, and she has also performed cover versions of other songs. Because of the nature of my task I decided to use songs that I find most representative of who she is as an artist, and to use songs that were big hits in the mainstream market. Most of the songs I have chosen have not been published as music videos, but where I find it relevant I look at concerts where the songs have been performed[2].

Central to my thesis is the Dolly Parton narrative. My intention is to discover how Dolly Parton portrays and negotiates aspects of gender, sexuality, and class through her recordings, performances, and written material (press releases, newspaper- and tabloid articles, interviews, autobiographies and fan writings). I also question why she has become a huge role model for a new generation of country singers and why she has such a broad public appeal.

Robert Walser argues: "You only have the problem of connecting music and society if you've separated them in the first place" (Walser 2003: 27), and it is important to recognize that music is created, performed and enjoyed within all societies.

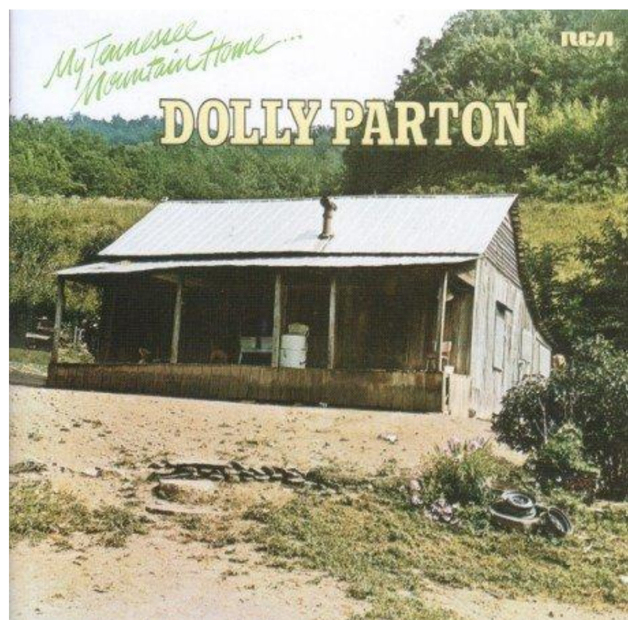
In carrying out my analyses of Dolly's music, I draw on a hermeneutic method which can be traced back to several scholars, in popular music studies; notably Philip Tagg (1979) and Richard Middleton (1990), who analyze music in relation to multiple discourses. Central to my readings[3] of Dolly is the concept of *intertextuality*. Intertextuality is the idea that a text communicates its meaning only when it is situated in relation to other texts (Shuker 2001: 94). These other texts can be intra-musical; other levels within the music itself, or extra-musical; texts outside of the music, in the *context.* The extra-musical texts can be visual (album covers, press photos, or the record itself), audible (other pieces of music, radio interviews, and sounds) and also historical, sociological, psychological etc. Using Serge Lacasse's (2000) theories on intertextuality and *hypertextuality* I hope to better understand how different texts

[2] In 1981 MTV changed the conduits for pop music distribution, and today the internet has changed the face of popular music again. Through internet sites like YouTube, fans are now able to make their own music videos and because of Dolly's vast fan base, there are hundreds of video collages of the biggest Dolly Parton hits. This phenomenon deserves further attention, but due to the format of this thesis I will not be able to explore them.

[3] I will employ Stan Hawkins' term 'reading', which is interchangeable with 'analyzing'. Hawkins employs this term "to designate a move between focusing on the structures of music alone and the broader context within which the music is located" (Hawkins 2002: 2). This move between the intra-musical and the extra-musical is central to the way my thesis is situated in a tradition which can be identified as Popular Musicology.

relate to each other. While intertextuality explains how elements of previous texts can be included in a new text, Lacasse uses the concept of *hypertextuality* as developed by literature theorist Gérard Genette, to understand how musical texts can be used and re-packaged. Hypertextuality refers to the production of new musical texts out of a previous one, and thus constitutes a framework to better understand cover versions, sampling, remixes, jazz improvisations over "standards" and so on. The musical text(s) being referred to is the "hypotext", and in the case of cover versions, is the "original" (though the original most often has intertextual elements as well). In my analysis of "Jolene"[4], the question concerning cover versions will be explored in The White Stripes' cover version. Neither a travesty, a parody, nor copy of the original, cover versions do not show any obvious intention at humor or "a debasing" (Lacasse 2000: 42) of the original version, but when Jack White sings the lyrics "please don't take my man", the concept of intertextuality and hypertextuality might shed some light on the gender bending evinced.

Michel Chion's concept of "added value" might also be helpful to this investigation. Often used in the analysis of music videos, it states that, "The phenomenon of added value is especially at work in the case of sound/image synchronism, via the principle of synchresis…the forging of an immediate and necessary relationship between something one sees and something one hears" (Chion 1994: 5). The image of Dolly Parton is such a dynamic one and has been such a huge component of her persona throughout her career that listening to her music without imagining her body is difficult. Also, the visual images of the albums themselves influence how we listen to the music. The album cover of *My Tennessee Mountain Home* displays Dolly Parton's childhood home, and provides a visual starting point for a musical interpretation. Using Chion's principle of added value, watching the image (or mentally recalling it) adds a value to the music itself. Previous knowledge and visual images might color our perception of an image in retrospect (retrospective illusion), and might also help



[4] A thorough list including all Dolly Parton-songs mentioned in this thesis might be found in the discography.

us create false memories (Chion 1994). In many country music songs the lyrics tell of very specific situations, and the song “My Tennessee Mountain Home” is no exception. Parton paints a picture of herself (or you?):

Sittin' on the front porch on a summer afternoon
In a straightback chair on two legs, leans against the wall
Watch the kids a' playin' with June bugs on a string
And chase the glowin' fireflies when evenin' shadows fall

While listening to the lyrics it is hard not to paint mental pictures of what Dolly is describing, the mental images are adding value to the musical experience. Because of the nature of intertextuality, interpreting music becomes an interdisciplinary task, and because we all have different points of reference, there are multiple meanings and “truths” to be found. Therefore, the intertextual relations I find may very well be arbitrary or random, but they are, none the less, truths.

One of the challenges when reading Dolly Parton is that she is a very active artist, both in composing new music and performing and rewriting earlier compositions[5], which in turn complicates the notion of *the original.* Dolly Parton also moves in and out of different musical styles (country, pop, rock, bluegrass) and her audience does not constitute a uniform group, but is very diverse in regard to age, political and/or sexual orientation, geographical location, gender, and also the degree of involvement with her music and her career. The way Dolly Parton, the person, has been read by the public has also been shaped by the changing context in which she has lived. From the start of her career in the late 1950s into the second decade of the new millennium, both her own and her audience’s socio-cultural situation has changed greatly, therefore, she and her music has to be approached as subjected to negotiation and re-negotiation. In my readings of Dolly, her background becomes central to the interpretations both because knowing a person’s background helps us understand their actions, and also because Dolly herself uses her background actively as a means to validate or authenticate herself as an artist which shapes her own narrative. At the same time, the media coverage of the Star and, maybe more importantly, the audiences’ appropriation of Dolly Parton, makes the narrative not just *hers*. She makes use of existing symbols while creating new ones. She is a pop culture icon.

[5] Such as her reworking of the song “9 to 5” for the musical version of the 1980 Jane Fonda film in which Dolly played one of the lead roles.

Popular music

The study of popular music should also include the study of popular music.
– Susan McClary

Even though academic discussions on popular music go back to the 1970s, popular music was first a subject of study for sociologists, not musicologists. Popular music was not seen as a subject worthy of serious examination by musicologists, and when popular music studies became a field of study again in the early 1980s, it was primarily the sociologists (again) who did the studying. First and foremost, they were more interested in the way popular music was used than what the specific musical features were. They were concerned with the meaning of music. These sociologists found the meaning by looking at how people used music. Music sociology (notably Hebdige 1979) was especially concerned with sub culture theory[6], which is also one of the things they have been criticized for. Instead of addressing mainstream music, they concerned themselves with popular music on the fringes of mainstream society. The other main criticism of music sociology, which Susan McClary so eloquently worded, is how they neglected the actual texts, or, the *music*, but focused solely on how it was used. My response is then, how can you really know how it is used if you do not know what *it* is?

The first musicologists who began looking at the popular in *music* (the actual sound) were criticized for even bothering. But nonetheless, the discipline slowly grew. Today, popular music studies are concerned with how people use music *and* what is happening in the music specifically. It is my aim to look at both at text and context in this thesis. From musicology, popular music studies inherited a terminology that did not fit the new object of study. Traditional musicology's tools simply could not incorporate the features that were unique to popular music. The tools had been invented for, and arguably shaped, classical music, and carried a value system with it as well, a value system where the Western art music is on top, followed by the "authentic" folk music, with commercialized popular music at the bottom (though even Theodor Adorno (1990 [1941]) states that there does exist such a thing as *bad* classical music and that it is as reprehensible as popular music). Middleton argues that in addition to a loaded terminology, the focus is skewed, the listening is monologic and there is a problem with notational centricity (Middleton 2000). Put simply, if we uncritically adopt the

[6] Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies, or the "Birmingham school" (1964-2002) was one of the first centres of research in the field of cultural studies, and probably the foremost representative of sub culture theory. See Middleton (2000) for a comprehensive overview over the Birmingham school.

terminology from traditional musicology, we will not be able to read *or* explain popular *music*[7].

Trying to understand Dolly Parton as a phenomenon has also meant trying to understand the society, (or rather societies) out of which she has come and within which she functions. As a researcher I switch between my fan and my scholar lenses, writing from the viewpoint of the *fan scholar*[8]. My position is between popular musicology, popular music studies and gender studies. Popular music studies draws heavily on music sociology as represented by Simon Frith (1986, 1996, 1990). To find meaning in music, Frith turned the focus on the context that surrounded it[9]. All cultures create, listen and dance to music. Music is created from within biographical spaces which are political (inspired by political issues, existing in, or even causing, political situations) and all songwriters live in and/or describe social relations.

"Popular musicology"[10] is influenced by both the representatives of British-based "critical musicology" and US-based "new musicology". They are concerned with the questions of autonomous music and the concept of "high" and "low" art which is heavily influenced by the sociological impact of the so-called "Birmingham school" and both have a more interdisciplinary approach to music analysis – critical musicology maybe more so than new musicology. It is important to remember that "British and US strands of popular musicology are connected at several levels and inform each other" (Lindvig 2008: 4), and that critical musicology and popular musicology share much common ground (Scott 2009: 2)[11]. The works of US scholars such as Robert Walser (1993, 2003), Robynn Stilwell (2003), and especially Susan McClary (2002 [1991], 2007d) have been hugely influential in both popular

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[7] We do not, for example, have a way to properly describe timbre, rhythm and sound (Middleton 1999; 2000), nor can we catch the music made by the dancers when they *make music* with the instrumentalists, or the different variations in the human vocal performance (sighs, breaths, scratching, wails etc.)

[8] It has become tradition to write as a fan first and an academic second because of the problems that are seen to inhere in preserving the "status of the outside observer, the objective and impersonal Ethnographer'" (Jenkins in Williamson 2005: 94) At the same time, I do not think that writing from the fan point of view will yield any more objective truths, but I do believe that my position as a fan scholar will enrich my research, because I have an "insider's view", but at the same time, writing from a "position of proximity or closeness…from a position of…[one's] own lived subjectivity" (Jenkins in Williamson 2005: 95) can only really tell us about that subjectivity. I am sure my work will reflect who I am, the time and society in which I interact.

[9] A problem with this approach is that the context at times can overshadow the music itself.

[10] The term "popular musicology" came into use after Derek Scott and Stan Hawkins edited and published a journal with the same name in 1994, and was fist used in Hawkins' (1996) article "Perspectives in Popular Musicology: Music, Lennox, and meaning in 1990s Pop".

[11] The blurring of the division of high and low art has at the same time elevated the status of popular music research.

musicology and critical musicology[12]. In this thesis I draw extensively on these scholars as well as works by British scholars Richard Middleton (1990, 2000b, 2006b), Allan Moore (2002, 2003), Stan Hawkins (2002, 2009, 2007a) and Sheila Whiteley (2000, 1997). These scholars have all, in different ways and with different outlooks, helped shape the academic field within which I study.

Popular musicology addresses the musicological lack of engagement with popular music, and differs from "popular music studies" in that "its primary concern is with criticism and analysis of the music itself, although it does not ignore social and cultural context" (Scott 2009: 2). The questions I find pertinent in the case of Dolly Parton cannot be answered by popular musicology alone, so I have also drawn on gender studies to understand the social and cultural context in which she is situated.

Identity

The definition found in the Merriam-Webster On-line Dictionary reveals the two-sidedness of the concept of identity; it is both "sameness of essential or generic character in different instances" and "the distinguishing character or personality of an individual" (Merriam-Webster 2010: URL). In the social sciences identity is related to self-image, and constitutes that which makes an individual the same as others as well as distinct from others. Personal identity is both group self-awareness and individual self-awareness of inclusion in such a group. Hawkins writes that "a most effective way of comprehending identity is by disconnecting it from an 'essence' and perceiving it as a dramatic effect rather than an authentic core" (Hawkins 2002: 14). In other words, identity is not solid, but changeable. Frith also argues against identity as a *core*: "identity comes from the outside, not the inside; it is something we put or try on, not something we reveal or discover" (Frith 1996: 273). Identity thus is both the sameness and the uniqueness of a person or what we are and our relation to the outside. Tia DeNora discusses music and self-identity (DeNora 2006), and links identity to performance, stating that "[a] great deal of identity work is produced as presentation of self to other(s)" and as "a presentation of self *to* self, the ability to mobilize and hold on to a coherent image of 'who one knows one is'" (DeNora 2006: 141). This presentation is then both a performance and an act of remembrance, because the individual's

[12] For a discussion of New musicology and Critical musicology, see Scott (2009), Moore (2003), Middleton (1990; 2000; 2006).

understanding of itself is based on memories (factual, imagined, or a mix of both, as remembered by the individual and the culture) and is formed in a performance of "self *to* self".

Creating a community is not only about agreeing on what we like, but also what we *don't* like. Pierre Bourdieu argues in *La Distinction* (1995, Norwegian ed.) that taste is defined by distaste, and that we, through the rejection of *their* taste, try to distance ourselves from the classes closest to but still beneath us. By defining and affirming the borders between "us" and "them", the group's identity becomes stronger. Identity is both what I am or want to become, and also who I don't want to be (Ivar Frønes in Ruud 1997: 134).

Today, there seems to be an academic consensus[13] that identity must be understood in a more contextual way, that "we embody the discourses that exist in our culture, our very being is constituted by them, they are a part of us" (Sullivan 2007: 41). This opens a new door when engaging with popular music, because when we do not view identity as an expression of an innate self, it becomes possible to discuss how an artist through music is not only telling us something about themselves, but also about the society within which they live. Popular culture can provide subject positions[14] from which individuals may understand and develop their identity. Stan Hawkins recognizes that aspects of identity are negotiated through the consumption of popular music:

> Issues of class, gender and race become central to any interpretation of music and identity…They are inextricably connected to the modes of production and reception of music within a socially grounded context (Hawkins 2002: 26).

[13] One of the major debates around the concept of identity is between the primordialist and the constructionist approach; primordialists understand identity as fixed while constructionists view it as fluid, formed by the choices we make. While some will argue that some traits of an individual are given, others argue that the understanding of that trait will change as the context changes. Even though I recognize that some still see identity as an expression of an inner core, I do not believe that that alone can explain how people function in the world. If identity is something that exists isolated, inside the person, and is not shaped by society, no actions would have any meaning at all.

[14] The concept of subject positions, derived from Michel Foucault, is that "discourse (as regulated ways of speaking/practice) offers speaking persons subject positions from which to make sense of the world. In doing so, discourses also subjects speakers to their rules and disciplines. A subject position is that perspective or set of regulated discursive meanings from which discourse makes sense" (Barker 2008: 293). A person can only inhabit certain subject positions, created and supplied by the discourse. This subject position is a space in a discussion, where the individual can understand and shape their identity, and the available spaces are provided by the discussion itself (Bourdieu 1995). If subject positions are provided by the discourse, and they are the only one available to us, stepping into another subject position than the ones provided by culture is not possible.

Music's importance in creating identity is quite evident. Writing about music and identity, Tia DeNora writes, "Using music…as a mirror for self-presentation…is a common practice of identity work in daily life" (DeNora 2006: 146). In addition, Even Ruud (1997) suggests that we use music as a part of our self-representation, that "many use music to signal where they belong in relation to social class, cultural priorities, economy, attitude and lifestyle…there might also be a correlation between musical taste, gender, age, social class and ethnicity" (Ruud 1997: 9, my translation). In 1991 Susan McClary was one of the first musicologists to explore the topic of gender in music with the publishing of *Feminine Endings* (McClary 2002 [1991]), where she writes about both the classical western canon as well as popular music. Gender perspectives in music have been pursued by several scholars "post" McClary. Mavis Bayton (1997, 1998, 2006) Susan Fast (2001) Lucy Green (1997) Sheila Whiteley (2000, 1997, 2006) and Trine Annfelt (2008) all look at women in music; as performers, students and consumers. When looking at gender representations in music I also draw on gender studies, notably Judith Butler (1999) and Judith Halberstam (1998, 2005), Toril Moi (1999, 2002) and Simone De Beauvoir (1997, 2000, 2005).

De Beauvoir has an existentialist view on identity, arguing that identity is formed in a cultural discourse and our acts define us "we are what we do" (Moi 2002: 85). Moi argues that the body exists in a specific context, surrounded by other bodies, and the individual has ontological freedom to create itself and its world in relation to the surroundings, but that "when most people stick to a set of social norms, they guarantee the preservation and reinforcement of those norms (Moi 2002: 85, my translation). Moi also suggests that "[t]he imposition of femaleness on women (or in other words, the gendering of women as socially female) can be seen as [an] example of *social magic*[15]" (Moi 1999: 290). Social magic can be used to explain how certain personality traits or skills can be cultivated, but still give the impression of being "natural", or, put simply: how to *make girls*.

> [A] socially sanctioned act which attributes an essence to individual agents, who then struggle to become what in fact they already are declared to be. In other words: to cast women as women is precisely to *produce* them as women. … the category of woman is neither an essence nor an indeterminate set of fluctuating signifiers, but a socially imposed definition with real effects. Like all other social categories, the category of woman therefore at once *masquerades as* and *is* an essence (Moi 1999: 290) .

[15] Moi borrows from Bourdieu (1996) where he states that "[a]ssigning someone to a group of superior essence (noblemen as opposed to commoners, men as opposed to women, educated as opposed to uneducated, etc.) causes that person to undergo a subjective transformation that contributes to bringing about a real transformation likely to bring him closer to the assigned definition" (Bourdieu 1996: 112).

A person's subjectivity is constituted by sociocultural facts, other's behaviors and expectations but, at the same time, the individual reacts to the given facts in his or her own way. To be able to grasp the whole picture, it is also important to theorize on a macro-level. The ways power structures limit people's scope of action cannot be reduced to individual situations. The subject positions are governed by systems of (gendered) power. By introducing structuralism to existentialism it becomes possible to understand how rules, relations, and their material consequences create privilege for some, while limiting others. Bourdieu's theories on culture are helpful when interpreting gender roles. He stresses the importance of structural reproduction of culture and argues that a group is, through the creation of such structures which in appearance seems autonomous and impartial, in fact selecting and producing individuals required for the continued existence of said structure. In the essay "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction" (Bourdieu 1973) he applies this to the educational system in France, but it is also transferable to other systems of cultural power. These systems of cultural and social reproduction might help explain the division between high and low culture, and also gender roles. Postmodern feminist Judith Butler sees gender as performative. Some of Butler's critiques are rooted in a misunderstanding of the word performativity[16].

> [P]erformativity is not something the subject does, but is a process through which the subject is constituted, and that gender is not something that can be put on or taken off at will" (Butler in Sullivan 2003: 89).

Gender identity is shaped through the individual's interaction with culture, but since culture has certain subject positions for the genders[17], reproduced through seemingly autonomous systems, the individual has to relate to and quote these subject positions when performing a gendered identity[18]. If we abandon a "voluntarist model of identity, which assumes that it is possible to freely and consciously create one's own identity" (Sullivan, 2007: 87), and understand identity as something that is negotiated, we can recognize the importance of

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[16] When Butler talks of *performativity* it must not be confused with *performance.*

[17] These rules might be formed on an interpretation of biological feature (women give birth, therefore they must be closer to the child and better caretakers), but an interpretation is just that – an interpretation. Western culture is heavily influenced by binary thinking, which means that we tend to interpret things as either/or, even though that is not necessarily a given. The man/woman category or the heterosexual/homosexual category has left many variations out, forcing many to choose, the most extreme maybe being hermaphrodites, where parents were forced to choose a gender for their child that was in line with "approved" genders, and more commonly bisexuality, which, especially for men, has been frowned upon by both heterosexuals and homosexuals, trying to make people choose "them or us".

[18] Several theorists have argued that identity is founded around notions of difference (Ruud, Hawkins), and if these differences also are regarded as mutually exclusive, gender roles become very rigid, meaning, if masculinity is assertiveness, then femininity must be passive.

culture, more specifically; popular culture. Frith states, "pop music has been an important way in which we have learned to understand ourselves as historical, ethnic, class bound, gendered, national subjects" (1996: 276). When pop music[19] has had a massive impact, it is also because of the increasing globalization of culture, and this is the reason why Dolly Parton, being an American artist, can say something about Norwegians as well. Due to the nature of mass culture (TV, movies, internet, etc.) many people find that they have more in common with people on the other side of the globe than their neighbor. People come together, crossing borders, physically or virtually, because of pop music, finding kindred spirits on internet forums and travelling to venues in other countries to see *their* artists, because, maybe more than idols, popular music fans see artists as an extension of themselves[20]. Mass culture's role in creating a common platform for people across the globe should not be underestimated. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* helps explain why. Habitus is "internalized capital" (Bourdieu 1984: 114) which is beyond that which has been directly learned (Bourdieu 1984: 170). A different condition of existence would produce a different habitus. Even though people across the globe would have a different habitus, the platform popular culture creates can help people of different nationalities have meaningful relationships[21].

Gender and music

Gender is usually understood as a social and cultural entity constructed around the dichotomy of man and woman. Since gender is regarded as a construction, it is also seen as changeable, whereas sex is something stable and unchangeable; you are either this or that.[22] In the West, though, gender has been tied very closely together with sex, and your socially constructed role

[19] Here in the wide understanding of the term, encompassing forms of popular music which have been commercially successful from the 1940s onward, from Elvis to Lady Gaga.
[20] This globalization of music raises other important questions as well, like the usage of fan sites on the internet and global communities, but I due to the format of this thesis, I do not have the opportunity to address them here
[21] The growth of popular culture, mass media and online social networking has made it more difficult for totalitarian states to control their subjects, and thus it has also become a symbol of democracy and human rights for many of the inhabitants of eastern European, Russian and Asian countries.
[22] There is some debate over the number of biological sexes. Many individuals aren't born either/or, but some have both male and female reproductive organs, some have chromosomes that do not match their reproductive organs (male chromosomes and female genetalia/female chromosomes and male genetalia) and some again feel that their body has the wrong biological gender, or that they do not belong in any gender category. Since questions about third and fourth genders are not relevant for the answers I seek, I will not pursue the topic further, but Nikki Sullivan's *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and Iain Morland and Annabelle Williox' *Queer Theory* go further into these discussions.

is supposed to correspond with your biological sex; men are masculine, women are feminine[23].

There has been a vast distance between how scholars talk about music, thematically and linguistically, and how the public recognizes and understands music. Critical musicology has, to some extent, opened the musicological field to the public, dealing with topics within popular music and introducing culture criticism to musicological discussions. Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings* was published in 1991 and is now by many seen as a marker of the beginning of feminism in musicology. Feminist music criticism drew on feminist work in other branches of academia, and was concerned with several subjects, such as; women in music[24] (historically and presently), musical and narrative constructions of gender and sexuality, gendered aspects in traditional music theory[25], and, intriguingly, why there had not been any discourse about gender in musicology already. The objective of critical musicology has been to unmask some of the seemingly autonomous systems of power which have influenced the musical discourses. The focus has been directed at the objectives which are the rational and technical aspects of musical composition and performance. Music has been elevated "as the most 'spiritual' or incorporeal, of art forms" (Annfelt 2008: 20). The great music written by men has been termed "universal", while music written by (and for) women has been viewed as less distinguished (Annfelt 2008: 20). Susan McClary argues that music as an art form has strong associations to the movements of the body and a person's feelings. Therefore, music performance and consumption has been continually in danger of being misunderstood as feminine activities (McClary 2002, 2007d). After McClary insights were published, discussions on music and gender continued. Many musicologists began exploring

[23] The word feminine stems from the word *femina,* the Latin word for woman, and refers to traits connected to the biological sex of women, visually, auditive and emotionally (Guttu 2005). Femininity must be understood in a binary relation to masculinity, and further as a binary relation between woman and man. Questions about the genetic or biological qualities that might (or might not) *make* women feminine and men masculine surface from time to time and the results of this type of research is often used to "keep people in their place", as arguments against gender and racial equality efforts. Even though I find these debates very interesting, they are not questions that I believe I can answer, nor that I find relevant to answer when writing about Dolly. There are no answers to what femininity is, because women are always ambiguous (Beauvoir 1997: 287). Women were thought to be somehow closer to nature, more in touch with their feelings and the spiritual world, but also to be more irrational and prone to let their emotions govern their actions. Men, on the other hand, had logic and reason which at the same time was the tool for understanding the world: objective truth.

[24] As performers, composers, teachers, patrons, promoters

[25] The title *Feminine Endings* refers to one of the teachings in traditional music theory, where there's an unfulfilling or weak ending in a musical piece (tonal or rhythmically). "**Masculine, feminine cadence**. A cadence or ending is called "masculine" if the final chord of a phrase or section occurs on the strong beat and "feminine" if it is postponed to fall on a weak beat. The masculine ending must be considered the normal one, while the feminine ending is preferred in more romantic styles" (The 1970 edition of the Harvard Dictionary, cited in McClary 2002: 9).

different genres of music, employing different methodological tools and exploring the field from different angles, including, but not limited to; Stan Hawkins (2002, 2009), Richard Middleton (1990, 2006b), Freya Jarman-Ivens (2007, 2004), Mavis Bayton (1997), Lucy Green (1997), Catherine Clément (1999) and Jill Halstead (1997).

The relation between gender and musicianship was addressed by Mavis Bayton in “Women Making Music” (2006), a re-working (and toning-down) of the article “Women and the Electric Guitar” (1997), where she explains how social norms and mechanisms have served to limit women’s musical practice. In *Frock Rock* (1998) Bayton also poses questions about the gender divided music industry, arguing that “there is both horizontal and vertical differentiation within the record industry” (Bayton 1998: 3). Possibly Bayton’s most important point is the control of women’s *space*; women’s space is public, such as the kitchen and the bedroom, and public space is dominated by men (Bayton 2006: 349). Theories on space are important contributions to understanding the mechanisms that serve to exclude girls from playing in rock bands in that it both explains women’s music consumption (in the home) and what is hindering them from attending rock concerts. Bayton quotes Frith saying that he “argued that leisure in general is perceived to be a male preserve, the ‘private’ realm of the home being a female domain” (Bayton 2006: 350). An important thing to consider when reading Bayton is that even though she bases her research on in-depth interviews, the subjects she interviews are all British women, interviewed in the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, and that in Norway many women (and men) do not recognize the situation she describes[26]. Enforcing and being conscious of gender equality policies has also helped change the modus operandi in schools and youth clubs, encouraging girls to pick up, just as Bayton discusses, the electric guitar. What hinders women picking up the electric guitar is that “[p]laying supposedly masculine instruments works to undermine their femininity” (Bayton 2006: 349).

> Traditionally the phallic woman is submissive. Soft gentle, non-violent and moral, she is controllable, pure and as such, the cornerstone of a healthy society (Whiteley 2005: 52).

Women have, in most cultures, sung and danced while the man played the instrument (Ellen Koskoff in Annfelt 2008). Lucy Green (1997) writes on gender and music that the idea of a

[26] Growing up in a country with a focus on gender equality and in a culture where pub culture not as strong as in Britain and almost absent as a concert venue, going out to enjoy music more often meant going out dancing, and at a club you will find at least as many girls as boys, often more. Going to concerts in Norway you will find that there more often than not are more men in the audience than women, but concert attendance for both genders is quite low compared to the population in general.

woman paid to publicly display her body and her voice has, in practically all societies, been associated with the role of temptress or prostitute, while on the other hand is portrayed as the mother singing to her child. It is this Magdalene/Madonna duality Lucy Green (1997: 29) uses to explain how women who perform music have been viewed. If the woman, on the one hand, is displaying her skills as an *instrumentalist*, her sex life is not as suspect anymore, and is less likely to be questioned (Green 1997: 53)[27]. The norms that regulate women's participation in music go far back, as Even Ruud (1997) shows us. Ruud cites *Il Cortegione,* an Italian textbook on etiquette from 1500s:

> On the topic of women, they are warned against playing instruments that make the performer unsightly, such as playing the tambourine, the drums, the flute and the trumpet (!) [sic]. Women may play for people of a higher status, but they should always be persuaded to, and not themselves suggest to perform. The women must not be too skilled, not display more conning than sweetness (Ruud 1997: 132, my translation).

It is a fact that most composers and music producers are men. In *The Woman Composer* Jill Halstead (1997) discusses some of the reasons. One of the fundamental reasons is a woman's lack of determination and belief in her own abilities. In western culture these traits are gendered male. Feminine traits like submission and modesty come in conflict with the determination needed to be viewed as an independent artist. One of the reasons Dolly Parton says that she "looks like a woman but thinks like a man" is because she inhabits these masculine traits; she is determined, she is not shy, she has a strong sense of self and believes in her own abilities[28]. Women who have these traits are in danger of being perceived as un-normal, and following Hylland Eriksen's (2006) theories on normality, have to compensate by filling other traits of womanhood to *pass* as a woman. By dressing the way she does, Dolly shapes the way people look at her and treat her. Women who are determined and who are aggressive are likely to be perceived of as a *bitch*, but by acting out a hyper-femininity, playing the dumb blonde, a character with a child-like naivety, Dolly avoids this characterization. The dumb blonde is not, and can never be the bitch.

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[27] In *Music, Gender, Education* Lucy Green writes that being on display on a stage does not come into conflict with phallic femininity, because singing is a natural sound (not technologically created or modified) and reaffirms woman's nearness to nature (Green 1997: 28). Women who are playing the electric guitar assume the role of master of nature, a masculine role and male subject position.

[28] I find such comments problematic in that they reinforce the mind/body-split (think like a man=have rational thought), as well as repeat the connection woman=body, man=brains. I have given some thought to whether or not public figures should mind what kind of signals they send out. Stars should not have to "parent" their audience, but I do think this shows how deep this way of thought sits in our culture.

The Gaze

"The gaze" is a term first used by Jaques Lacan to describe "the observation of oneself"[29]. Laura Mulvey used Lacan's term in analyses of Hollywood cinema. She says that the exploiting *male gaze*[30] is thought to express an unequal power relationship between the onlooker and the one looked at and is specifically linked to men (the gaze) and women (the gazed-upon).

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionistic role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness (Mulvey 1989: 19).

Feminist theorists took Mulvey's theories out of the cinema and placed them within the context of society, and used them to explain the objectification of women. This is where the feminist critique of Dolly Parton intersects. The argument that whether or not women welcome the gaze is not the issue, because they might merely be conforming to the hegemonic norms established to benefit the interests of men. The power of the male gaze is the ability to reduce a person to an object. There are also some questions as to whether the object is as powerless as Mulvey sees it or if the object can assert a form of control over the onlooker. Artists like Madonna have certainly been very much aware of their to-be-looked-at-ness, but I find it hard to see them as objectified victims. Does not Dolly too play with the gaze in a way that lets us see what we want to see? Can dressing *for* the gaze give power to the gazed-upon? Mulvey states that man is reluctant to gaze, that men cannot be objectified, and that female gaze is a mere cross-identification with masculinity. But is it that simple? Is the power relation one-sided? Susan Fast states that onstage and through photographs, "[m]ale rock stars, in one sense, at least, are the passive objects of the female gaze, a controlling gaze that is partly responsible for the man acting as he does" (Fast 2001: 187). Theories on the gaze have been expanded, and while it might have been relevant to speak of the male gaze as clearly gendered before, today we have found that the power relations in cinema, on television

[29] He linked the concept of the gaze to the development of individual human agency, to the dialectic between the Ideal-Ego and the Ego-Ideal. The ideal-ego is who the person imagines herself to be or aspires to be, while the ego-ideal is the imaginary gaze of another person gazing upon the ideal-ego.

[30] One of the reasons why the gaze is male is that women in these movies served as foil or antagonists, while the protagonists were men. In addition to that, the directors and most of the technicians in the movies were men, and the women were filmed in another style than the men, the focus being their looks rather than their actions or causality. Foil in the diegesis is a character that contrasts and highlights the protagonist, thereby bringing him into focus.

and in magazines have been disrupted. There is also a need to see the gaze as queer, recognizing that not only do men look at women, but women look at women, women look at men and men look at men. In *Running With the Devil* (1993) Walser states that “ images of masculine display are available to be constructed [by fans] in a variety of ways” (Walser 1993: 115), and that some gay male fans view hard rock and metal videos as erotic fantasies (Walser 1993: 115-116). Susan Fast addresses the ways women look at men in rock in *In the Houses of the Holy* (2001), stating that women found erotic pleasure in images of 1970s band Led Zeppelin (who arguably dressed *for* the gaze), and criticizes Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze (Fast 2001: 185-186). Hawkins suggests that “[w]hen the spectator is queer, black, female, or mad, then perhaps the male gaze no longer makes ‘sense’” (Hawkins 2007: 44).

It has become increasingly common to see men stylized in the same way as Mulvey’s Hollywood females, but because we have female (and gay) directors and photographers the woman is not necessarily the person at which the gaze is aimed. The gaze might have an element of masculinity in that the gaze is active and the object is passive[31], but does this masculinity belong to either gender? If the gaze is masculine, does reading *Playgirl* equal a masculinisation of women? Also, the gaze might also be asexual, the viewer comparing the gazer’s body image to that of the gazer’s object. Idolization and admiration could also be an example of asexual gazing, women (or men) who look at models in magazines might not want them sexually, but might want to *be* them.

Dolly Parton came into the public sphere at the same time as the second major wave of feminism and for many feminists Dolly (very much a sex object in the 70s and 80s) represented everything they were fighting against. Dolly’s image was that of a dumb blonde, and also, because she was making *pop* music she was, per their definition, not a serious artist[32].

> Although some feminists have spoken out against the objectification of women’s bodies as fetishes of male desire, on the grounds that such objectification reduces women to a passive state that victimizes them, one counterargument attributes power to the woman who controls – and controls the use of – her own image (Wilson 2001: 287).

In addition to being a pop star, her roots were country, a genre that has been accused of being both sexist and racist. Also, there can be little doubt as to what Dolly’s role on the Porter

[31] Conforming to hegemonic ideas of masculinity as active.
[32] Pop music has historically been viewed as artificial music, without any serious (read: political or rational) content.

Wagoner Show was; she was “the little gal”, the foil that was there to make Wagoner sparkle. If we look to Walser’s work on women in heavy metal videos, we can see the similarities; “the presence of women as sex objects stabilizes the potential troubling homoeroticism suggested by male display” (Walser 1993: 116)[33]. The way the women are stylized can be read as conforming to the male gaze, displaying women as pretty ornamentation, or “canaries”, as Trine Annfelt (2008: 20) refers to when discussing female jazz vocalists. The display of femininity and women as imagined by men, a problem addressed by Clément in *Opera or the Undoing of Women* (1999). If men write the part of a woman in an opera, the woman has no voice of her own. In pop music this is often the case, as there are more male composers and producers (though this is slowly changing). It is an intriguing coincidence that Dolly Parton’s first big country hit “Dumb Blonde”, a song and a theme which in many ways defined her career, was not written by her (as most of her hits are), but was penned by the male songwriter Curly Putman and produced by Fred Foster. Still, as the choice of song (in most cases) is an active one – Dolly probably liked the song, or maybe cunningly thought it would help her career – it might be too easy to dismiss the control Dolly had over her own image, an image which she has used so actively throughout her career. Would we not be taking away women’s agency by attributing their image to the male writers and producers? In a song like “Dumb Blonde” there is more than one voice. Even though penned by a man, Dolly’s voice and the voice of the (female?) protagonist also shine through.

To find how Dolly Parton portrays and negotiates aspects of gender, sexuality and authenticity, and to investigate some of Parton’s feminist appeal as well as her position as the “Godmother of Country”, I will look at her background, at her image and at the narrative constructed around her. In the second chapter of this thesis I wish to take a deeper look at country music, the musical world from which Dolly Parton emerged, and where can be found her *core* audience. Country music originated in southern USA, but has become a global phenomenon, which also has a strong foothold in Norwegian communities. While this thesis will not investigate the Norwegian appropriation of country music and American culture, my Norwegianness will probably become evident in several of my observations. One of these observations is the Southernness of country music. While it might be an obvious truth for many Americans that country music mimics southern culture that is not necessarily the case when the music reaches those without the cultural knowledge to tell The South and The USA

[33] “the potential troubling homoeroticism” is linked to how being on display is seen as feminine, as well as the male gaze.

apart. What I do see coming across the Atlantic is country music's ties to the working class. Through the use of Pierre Bourdieu's theories of taste I hope to be able to shed some light on the aesthetics of country music and the ideal of simplicity. In 1968 Tammy Wynette evoked the rage of feminists with the song "Stand by Your Man" [34], and still today country music is by many viewed as sexist (and racist, but it is not within the scope of this thesis to pursue questions of race in country music). To better understand Dolly Parton's feminist appeal (and disgust) I will in the third chapter deal more specifically with Dolly Parton's performance and the Dolly Parton narrative. Using what I find, I will in chapter four complete an analysis of one of Dolly's most beloved hits, "Jolene", and through that analysis show what and how the song reflects both Parton and her *habitus*.

[34] "Stand by Your Man" is one of the standard in country music, and is often referred to, maybe most famously when the wife of the Arkansas governor running for president, Hillary Clinton; "I'm not sitting here, some little woman standing by my man like Tammy Wynette" (In an interview with 60 minutes, January 26, 1992).

2: Country Music

Dolly Parton was born and raised in a small wooden shack in the woods near Sevierville, Tennessee which is a small town in The Smokey Mountains in the eastern part of the state. Tennessee is a part of the Southern United States[35], a region that was, and by many still is, viewed as less educated, poorer and less cultivated than the Northern states, such as Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, where the Puritan heritage was strong and the Ivy League Universities of the North had the *Bourdieuan* cultural capital. Since the Second World War, this situation has been changing; economically, socially and culturally, through "The New Deal", through confidence in own cultural expression and also through music[36]. While blues and rock'n'roll, which also emerged from the cultural melting pot that was the South, has been granted much academic attention, country music has been largely ignored by popular musicologists. I hope my thesis will help change that picture.

Giving a short explanation of what country music is herculean due to the issue of genre, especially when writing about music that came out of this unique racially and culturally mixed geographic area that is the South[37]. The lines are not sharply drawn between rock, bluegrass and country music, simply because they came out of the same source, a place of great cultural exchange:

[35] Formed as the Confederate States of America during the American Civil War between 1861 and 1865, the region is also called *Dixie* or simply *The South*, and is often referred to as "a state of mind".

[36] Ole A. Moen (2005: 186) explains how from the Second World War onwards, the development of new technologies, such as air conditioning systems, made it possible to industrialize the region in a way that had not been possible, due to the warm and moist climate. Space research and development, as well as military research centers, was located in the South. At the same time we see Rock'n'Roll music bursting onto the popular music scene. Rock'n'Roll was addressing a new audience; the *teenager*, a new audience category put forward by a market that saw the economic potential in selling merchandise to a group of people who are trying to "invent themselves" as adults, but at the same time are living at home, free to spend their income as they pleased, not having to worry about rent, electricity and food budgets. At the same time Country Music, or "Country & Western", was marketed to a slightly older audience. Important to note here is also the fact that these new categories applied to the *white* Americans, and that the records in question were released on "white labels" as opposed to the "race records" marketed to the African American population. For more extensive work on the South, race and music see Bertrand (2000).

[37] I will not engage in a discussion of genre here, but I do recognize that drawing lines between the blues, rock'n'roll and country music, is not just a difficult task, but hardly possible without recognizing that most music does not fall in orderly under these categories. While some might see rock'n'roll as an own genre, others see it as a sub genre of country, while others again see it as rhythm and blues, and even though Elvis Presley is the *King of Rock*, he was first marketed as a country singer, and in his early career he toured together with Johnny Cash (and Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis). Artists like Wanda Jackson (who also toured with Elvis) performs both country songs and rockabilly, and still today the lines between rock and country seem easy to cross. Many have joked that when a rock artist gets old she can always return to country (as Kid Rock recently did). What we do have to recognize is that many people use genre categories uncritically, and though that could and should be addressed, it is not within the scope of this thesis and I will leave the genre discussion.

> Hillbilly music (a once universal designation for country music) evolved primarily out of the reservoir of folksongs, ballads, dances, and instrumental pieces brought to North America by Anglo-Celtic immigrants. Gradually absorbing influences from other musical sources, particularly from the culture of Afro-Americans, it eventually emerged as a force strong enough to survive, and even thrive, in an urban-industrial society (Malone 1993: 1).

Country music is often seen as springing from the rural area known as the Appalachians, and is viewed as a *white* form of American folk music, but we should recognize that the music does not let itself be stigmatized so easily. Odd Skårberg (1997: 16-17) and Gammond (2010: URL) state that British and Irish immigrants brought with them ballads and dance music which were almost unaltered in the isolated rural areas until the 1920s with the emergence of the radio barn dance format. This music then is divided into *Bluegrass* and *Country & Western*; the former is perceived as folk art while the latter is perceived as commercial popular music. This latter music has, according to Skårberg (1997: 17), elements of the blues, jazz, work songs and Swiss yodel, while the first is "traditional"[38]. The argument that country music arose from these isolated areas in the mountains is not particularly accurate, nor did bluegrass music escape "unharmed" from other popular music. Bluegrass music as is heard today is influenced by minstrel shows and blues records and most significantly by some of its earliest performers; Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys[39]. Country music has also undergone several changes, and in addition to spawning and being tinted by its little brother, rock'n'roll, and borrowing from it's cousin jazz, the notion of what "real" country music sounds like has changed too. Bill C. Malone explains:

> Folk isolation was never complete. No southern are (nor any other American area for that matter) has ever been totally isolated from the world at large. The currents of change has that have swept over the United States, making it the most advanced, industrially oriented nation in the world, have also moved across the South. The South, though changing slowly, and often with dogged resistance, has indeed changed (Malone 1993: 5).

Central to the aesthetics of country music is its simplicity. Not only does it have simple functional harmonics and rhythmical patterns, but also the lyrical content and the overall themes seem to follow a guideline of simplicity. In Peterson and McLaurin's (1992: 2) words, "Country music has a strong sense of the narrative, the chord structure is simple and predictable, the melodic range is slight, the rhythms is regular, and the orchestration is sparse or at least clearly in the background, so that the words can be understood". They argue that

[38] This "folk music"-label might be one of the reasons why bluegrass music is recognized as more *authentic* than country music.

[39] Bluegrass began to take form in the mid-forties and was not named until a decade later (Malone 1993: 323).

the lyrics are the focus, and that the music is therefore subordinate (the lyrics are unambiguous, without double meaning and allegories), but as Dr. Stephen Shearon at MTSU suggests[40], it might very well be that simplicity itself is the ideal, therefore making *everything* else subordinate. If simplicity is the ideal, that not only explains the musical simplicity, but also the lyrical simplicity and the thematic simplicity. Malone suggests another explanation which is more practical, namely that the musical simplicity is due to the way urban songs were appropriated.

> [E]ven the most urban songs and styles were radically transformed into country songs. That is, melodies were altered to fit the tastes of an audience that had little formal musical training and was accustomed to learning songs orally rather than from printed scores. Complex chords were eliminated, melodies were flattened, and words were often forgotten or unconsciously changed. As the years passed the social conservatism of the rural South not only influenced the modification of urban song structure, it also encouraged the preservation of such songs and styles long after they were forgotten or scorned elsewhere (Malone 1993: 9).

Which came first, the ideal of simplicity or simplicity as a result of necessity is very hard to tell, but that simplicity holds a high position aesthetically in country music is evident.

The performance of country music is often referred to as "pickin", which both refers to a style of playing the stringed instruments and to the music itself. A picker is, according to *The Songwriter's Handbook*; "[i]n the Nashville vernacular, any musician, regardless of the instrument or type of music" (Hall 1987: 16). Just as you pick a peach, the word implies a certain physicality associated with rural life, and it also has a quite playful feeling, as advocated through the TV show *Hee Haw* (1969-1993) where one of the recurring segments was "Pickin' and a'Grinnin'". Pickin' implies a certain informality or amateurism, and as such also corresponds with the aesthetics of simplicity in that it implies music played "for fun" as opposed to formal music which is "art", or maybe even more important; schooled[41].

Atlanta was the first major center of country music, but today most people will associate country music with Nashville, Tennessee, aka "Music City, USA". The site of a massive

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[40] In conversations I had with him in the fall of 2009.

[41] The use of the apostrophe instead of the g in picking also signifies class belonging. It is ironic that the Nashville studio musicians were operating at a high level of professionalism and, at the same time, were *pickers.* While skeptical to formal classical training, the musicians employed in the Nashville machinery were not amateurs in the negative sense, but had through training and practice reached a high level of musical abilities. Much of the musical know-how was learned through playing with other musicians, picking up ideas and licks, taking private lessons and through practice. Skepticism towards formal education can also be viewed in relation to a skepticism directed at the Government.

musical output, Nashville was (and is) in many ways a great machinery[42]. Because the record companies used their own musicians when making studio recordings instead of using the artists' own bands, they were able to have effective recording sessions, but as a result of that, most of the music would also sound the same. This was the start of the "Nashville sound". "The Nashville sound" refers to a means of production as well as the sound, not *created* by one producer alone, but was developed through a process that involved certain central people:

> [T]he Nashville sound developed by influential producers such as Chet Atkins, Don Law [head of Columbia Records' country music division through most of the 1950s and 1960s] and Anita Kerr [arranger and performer central to the use of vocal harmonies], combining acoustic guitars with echoes, sophisticated string sections, rippling pianos and smooth back-up singers (Miller 2008: 69) [43].

The Nashville sound later evolved into *Countrypolitan*, which is where we locate Dolly Parton. Commercially oriented, the "pop" countrypolitan country sound brought country artists to the mainstream audience, while closer to MOR (Middle of the Road) country music is distinct from adult pop music.

The musical ideal of country music is simplicity. Country music is simple, straight forward, preferring a clean acoustic sound over a "modern" technological one. Still today, after country-rock and the growth of MOR, a sound that Dolly Parton embraced from the 1970s onward when she "went pop", mainstream country music has a strikingly clear sound. Distortion is used generously in rock, punk and metal. In pop, R'n'B and electronica vocoders are more often the rule than the exception. For all of these genres, technology is a symbol of modernity which gives the music a certain edge, a valid contemporary voice. In country music

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[42] To make the process of recording songs more effective, the studios used their own musicians (Lewis 1988: 41) "Music Row" is streets lined with studios and record companies which have attracted performers, producers and songwriters for decades. A handful of men (and a few women), known as "The Nashville A-Team" developed their own way of notating music, where they substituted the chord letters with numbers signifying function of the chord (in the key of C; C is 1, Dm is 2, G is 5, etc.), as well as many other symbols that indicate dynamics, phrasing and the likes. In addition to make it easier for the musicians to transpose music, the system they developed for communicating also served to exclude other musicians who had not been initiated. For a thorough explanation of the Nashville number system, see Chas Williams (2005).

43 Other people worth mentioning is Owen Bradley (producer), Steve Sholes (manager and recording executive at RCA Victor), Bill Porter (sound engineer) and Bob Ferguson (songwriter and records producer) and performers like Jim Reeves, Patsy Cline, Eddie Arnold and Skeeter Davis. The role of producers like Chet Atkins can be compared to that of Phil Spector, inasmuch as they both have a critical role in how the music sounds, making evident the importance of studio production for the finished musical product. The Nashville sound was a move towards commercialism, towards pop music, away from the nasal vocal timbre towards crooning, from The Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers' towards Patsy Cline and Jim Reeves. In the 1960s the "Bakersfield sound" challenged the smooth Nashville sound. The Bakersfield sound was heavily influenced by honky-tonk and rock music, and had a less polished sound production. Bakersfield in California had a very large population of Dust Bowl migrants, people who migrated to California from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, and other parts of the South, and who brought with them their music. The Bakersfield sound was represented by artists like Merle Haggard and Buck Owens and the Buckaroos.

the ideals are not the same as in these genres. The country music industry is very clearly divided (Lewis 1993a: 165, 1988: 38). The process from idea to finished product is a system of songwriters, song pitchers, producers, managers, performers, record companies and radio stations. This division is not candid, nor does it try to be[44]. This "production line-method" of music-making has several negative connotations to it, going back to Adorno's critique in 1941, and is still common in everyday talk about music. The idea is that music created and performed by one and the same group or individual is more "authentic", and that the result is somehow closer to "the truth"[45]:

> [I]f good music is honest and sincere, bad music is false – and technological changes increase opportunities for fakery (Frith 1986).

The mediation ideal in country music is transparent[46], which should be understood in relation to notions of authenticity. By not showcasing the technology used to create an album, the message is not perceived as "tampered with", thus closer to the truth[47].

Twang: Country music sound and vocals

A strong marker of country music is the instrumentation. Traditional country music instruments include the fiddle, banjo, guitar, double bass, dobro, steel guitar, harmonica and the mandolin[48]. Even though not all country songs employ all of these instruments, and while other genres might employ these instruments, the use of some of these instruments, like the fiddle or the banjo[49], imply country music (or bluegrass), and also the stereotypes associated

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[44] Compared to the production of rock music, where a part of the esthetics is the band "go way back" (preferably to childhood) and the music (ideally) is created through collaboration between its members, country music production is more like a production line similar to that of Tin Pan Alley.

[45] The opposite of this is the constructed band or artist, like Spice Girls or Hannah Montana (insert any Disney "rock" artist), where the record companies analyze the market and come up with an idea how to cash in, creating a new product.

[46] I use the terms 'opaque' and 'transparent' (in Norwegian: opak and transparent) mediation, as developed by Ragnhild Brøvig-Andersen (now Brøvig-Hanssen) in her master thesis *Musikk og Mediering* (Music and Mediation) from 2007. Opaque mediation is the showing of the mediating authority and transparent mediation is when the representational medium is transparent, and our focus is directed at what is being represented instead of at the representational medium.

[47] Country music is located in the intersection between rock and pop when it comes to technology and authenticity. While the use of technology does not influence notions of authenticity in pop music, it does so when it comes to rock and country. Traditionally, pop and rock appeals to the younger generations while country is thought to speak to adults, but as I touched on in my discussion of genre, this has not always been, or is, the case. The lines which separate genres are re-drawn daily and the younger generations age into adults too.

[48] Although the electric guitar was common from the 1950s onward, electric instruments in general were largely avoided, sometimes even shunned, along with the drums for the better part of the 20th century.

[49] Because the banjo has such a distinct timbre, it is easily identifiable in the sound production, and since it has been used in so much country music and not very much in any other genre, it has also become an instrument that

with that music (such as region or class). There is an emphasis on acoustic instrumentation (acoustic guitar, fiddle and banjo) with few distortion effects. The chord progressions are predictable, and preferably in major keys, while the structure and the rhythm of the song is straight. These traits are not exclusively country, but are shared with other musics as well (notably folk), but country music's most easily identifiable trait is the "twang". Twang is:

> the short sustain and dynamic resonance of instruments like banjo, mandolin or dobro, the sounds of which are distinguished by an abrupt, relatively sharp initiation when plucked, which is followed by a quick, usually slightly ascending, muting. The sound is often fundamental to the material construction of these instruments; even if you cannot play the pedal steel, you can make it twang, and when you do, it sounds 'country' (Mann 2008: 79).

The voice is an instrument with a potentially powerful emotional impact, maybe more so than any other instrument. From the moment we are born the human voice communicates, comforts and entertains, and through mastering the voice we can have a profound impact on our own surroundings – from the crying child getting food and comfort to the lawyer arguing a case in court. In addition to the speaking voice, which surrounds us every day, there is the singing voice, the vocals.

The production of the vocals; the mouth, throat, vocal tract and vocal chords, take place hidden inside the body, and as Middleton (2006b: 92-93) demonstrates, is associated with a range of sexual tropes, as well as being gendered. "[W]hen we hear music we inevitably 'hear a body'" (Dame in Hawkins 2002: 46). The timbre and range of the voice signifies gender (though some vocalists have androgynous voices), and together with phrasing is where we locate the *grain* of the voice. The grain is the encounter between a voice and language, in a "dual position, a dual production – of language and music" (Barthes 1977a: 181). It is the body shining through the vocals: "the body in the voice as it sings" (Barthes 1977b: 188). In country music the body is audible through the use of chest voice, of twangy, nasal vocals and the use of emotive signifiers like sighs and breaks, most notably the "blue yodel", created by making an abrupt switch between chest- and head voice, was made famous by Jimmie Rodgers[50] (and later by Hank Williams). In popular music the song is more closely linked to the performer than the composer. In classical music of the western canon the ideal voice is the

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has become closely associated with country music. The presence of the link between banjo and country music makes sure that other genres that employ the banjo will automatically have to deal with its country roots. Because of this link, the banjo is often used as an effect in movies or TV to imply a certain kind of person or place (signaling geographic belonging, class and lack of refinement in *The Beverly Hillbillies* or *The Dukes of Hazzard*).

[50] Rodgers supposedly heard Swiss yodelling in his youth and later used it to embellish his songs.

voice that is seemingly autonomous, split from the body, much in the same way the music it performs is thought to be. In popular music with a performer-focus, the performer's grain of the voice is what sets him apart from the other vocalists[51].

If anyone were to doubt the role technology plays in the emergence of a new musical style, one need only take a closer look at the importance of the invention of the microphone. The style of singing changed dramatically: when the vocalist no longer had to be his or her own amplifier, the vocals could take on a much more personally expressive sound. Crooning was by many viewed as an overt sexual vocal style, giving the listener the feeling of a lover whispering into his ear, and still today the microphone allows vocalists to play with extra-musical sounds;

> Often the intimacy set up between [Madonna] and the listener is regulated through the erotic underlay of her talking voices, with a range of variables, such as whispered words and seductive moans (Hawkins 2002: 46).

From an educational publication on vocals from 1907, we find that:

> '[P]ure quality of tone' required vocal chords that 'act freely and naturally', a 'loose, open throat', in general no body part that 'obstructs the free emission of tone' … When anatomy did obtrude, tone was inevitably 'bad'. In fact, anatomizing the voice signified it as bad: good tone was 'pure', 'resonant', 'sweet'; faulty tone was 'chesty', 'guttural', 'nasal' (Bates in Olwage 2004: 214-215).

"[T]wangs and 'throaty' enunciation were the bodily symbols of a vocal sound that transgressed the idea of a grainless bourgeois voice" (Olwage 2004: 215). The ideal of the trained voice is very different from the style of singing that Dolly Parton grew up with, and the style in which she now performs. The twangy vocals of country music can also be attributed to dialect:

> [I]n the US, country instrumentation and a voiced southern 'drawl' – particularly the process of 'diphthongization', i.e. gliding a single vowel sound to give it two audibly distinct segments…are so consistently paired as to give the impression that twang is the direct musical expression of a white southern accent (Mann 2008: 79).

In Parton's case she both sings and speaks with a twangy Eastern Tennessean accent, and she uses words and grammatical forms typical of the region and also of country music culture. Country music lyrics are characterized by grammatical forms largely derivative of Southern American English and an informal language which is by fans perceived as *authentic* (Malone

[51] Less concerned with the concept of high art, popular music performers need not use stylized codes to convey emotions, but are much more likely to use other vocal traits such as moaning, sighing, screaming, groaning, in some genres pushing the vocals to the extreme, where the pitch of the voice is absent or inaudible.

2002b: 15). “Most artists prefer ‘don’t’ to ‘doesn’t’ for third-person subject, and ‘ain’t’ to ‘isn’t’, and frequently employ double negation” (Horn 2009: 468). The lyrics are dialectic, as is the deliverance: “Twang and drawl is the result of singing with the diction and inflection of the South” (Mann, 2008: 79). By placing the voice far forward in the face (behind but not *in* the nose), it is much easier to twang the vocals of a country song. Country singers also pronounce almost all of their consonants, unlike other styles, something which is probably connected to the importance of bringing forth the message: in country music the singers are there, first and foremost, to tell the stories:

> A singer of country music does not use his or her voice as an instrument to be judged separately from the song; a country singer uses the voice to project a feeling toward the material…What is required to sing a country song is the ability to communicate a thought or feeling without distracting the listener from the message by calling undue attention either to artificial vocal techniques or to the inability to carry a tune (Rogers 1989: 17-18).

Rather than using the words to showcase the voice, the voice is supposed to deliver the words in a way that does not distract from the story. Because of this country music vocals are quite different from, for example, modern R’n’B music, as exemplified in Whitney Huston’s version of Dolly Parton’s “I Will Always Love You”, a version which many country fans found to be excessive. Dolly Parton’s original version is much simpler, with a more modest arrangement, with a classic Nashville sound, reminiscent of Patsy Cline or the Everly Brothers. In the mix, Dolly Parton is in the center, she switches between chest and head voice, the sound is quite dry, and no other instrument (or the backing vocals) steps into focus. In Huston’s version she is also in the center (there is also a saxophone solo in this version). Huston belts throughout most of the song, using some head voice in the a cappella intro, humming some, embellishing the melody as well as adding short phrases. The Whitney Huston version is fifty percent longer than Dolly Parton’s original 3 minute song, while not adding any extra verses. In terms of telling a story, Whitney Huston’s vocal performance of “I Will Always Love You” takes the focus away from the lyrics, while Dolly Parton (who in the third verse even speaks the lyrics) keeps the words front and center.

You Wrote My Life: Country Music Lyrics

A poor girl wants to marry
And a rich girl wants to flirt
A rich man goes to college
And a poor man goes to work
- Charlie Daniels

Most writing on country music stresses the importance of lyrics (Lewis 1993a, Mann 2008, McLaurin and Peterson 1992, Rogers 1989). "Although the history is important and the performers are interesting, the lyrics are the key to country music" (Rogers 1989: ix). Country music lyrics are unambiguous, without allegories and double-meanings, and the lyrics are often an attempt at identification (of landscape, people, plausible situations, etc.) and attempt to elicit universally shared emotions (Buckley 1993)[52]. Because country music lyrics are barred of allegories and double meanings, fans (and performers) of country music have not had to make use of interpretive traditions from academia to find or give meaning to country songs. By and large, the meanings of country songs are easily available to a broad audience; the songs mean what they say. The availability of the message(s) situate country music in opposition to the musics more treasured by academics; Bob Dylan, Beatles, Beethoven. Several scholars, notably Susan McClary (2007e)[53], have argued that the system created around the creation and interpretation of music has come into place to put a distance between music and body to somehow bring it back to the masculine, rational realm. Focusing on lyrics or political concerns in country music has at the same time functioned to dismiss the validity of the music, thereby deeming it trivial. But does this mean the *music* trivial?

Country music sprang out of a culture where formal education is looked down upon, and academic approaches to country music have not been viewed as relevant. Musicologists have not been engaging seriously with country music until quite recently, and even in 2010 I have encountered many who do not understand why I want to study country music at all. Often, the interpretation of the music itself has been viewed as irrelevant for finding meaning in country music; "[t]he instrumental is subordinate to the vocal" (Buckley 1993: 199), but without the

[52] "Lyrical clarity and comprehensibility are highly prized in country music. Puns, alliteration and turns of phrase or wording that have slightly different connotations in different contexts are common" (Mann 2008: 81). One of the reasons for Dolly Parton's success as a songwriter stems from her ability to play with words; "I'll Oilwells love you", "Something Fishy", "In the Good Old Days (when times were bad)", "He's a Go Getter".

[53] "to identify strongly with a particular style is to take it as representing, quite simply, the way the world is" (McClary 2007e: 205). When referencing the articles from *Reading Music* (McClary 2007) the page numbers are as they appear in the 2007 edited book, not in the original.

music, country music would just be poetry. I believe that it is the way the world and music work together which makes pop music popular. In the lyrics of pop songs, sometimes the words are a meaningless combination of random sounds (just think of the lyrics for Roxette's "She's Got the Look" or the Beatles' "I am the Walrus"). While this might be the extreme, it indicates the role of words in a pop song. The lyrics need to be catchy and work well with the backing instruments, but they need not be of high literary quality, they just need to work well together. While the importance of lyrics is stressed in most writings about country music, there might be a difference between *hard core* and *soft shell* country (hard core having a clearer focus on the story, while soft-shell is more adapted to mainstream pop and will be more influenced by the current style of pop lyrics). I employ Richard Peterson's (1997) theory of "hard core" and "soft shell" country, where the hard core fans are more traditional, constituting the core audience of country music, while soft shell country is closer to mainstream pop. Peterson also describes how soft shell country, over time, can be re-categorized as hard core as trends change[54]. While soft shell country is closer to mainstream pop, hard core country has conventions with regard to lyrics. In *You Wrote my Life: Lyrical Themes in Country Music* Peterson and McLaurin (1992: 6-9) list important pointers regarding country lyrics;

- the form a country song can take (how one speaks of wives, Texas, country life, work, guns, the South etc.)
- which topics to address and which not to address (racial attraction, fear, prejudice, discrimination)
- the song portrays the performer in a way befitted
- the massive technical apparatus, the industry (how will an audience receive it? Will it get radio play? Will it sell? Where will it sell?)
- mostly addressed to adult, working class from both rural and urban background (but not all songs to one audience).

While these conventions can be located in country music, not all country songs comply with them, but historically this is how country music lyrics are understood. Songs which break with some of these conventions might not be viewed as "country", but while soft shell country might be more likely to break such conventions, they still reflect the symbolic world of country music.

[54] This explains how Patsy Cline, who in her time was seen as soft shell (or "pop") today is regarded as one of the core country artists.

The symbolic world of country music

> …the lyrics of country songs reflect the values of its audience. The fictive world created by country music is not the same as the same as the real world of audience members, but it is one they can easily understand and with which they can identify (Buckley 1993: 206)

John Buckley (Buckley 1993: 199-201) lists eight basic themes which characterize country music:

- *Satisfying and fulfilling love relations*
- *Unsatisfying love relationships*
- *Home and family*
- *Country*
- *Work*
- *Individual worth*
- *Rugged individualism*
- *Patriotism*

Country music relationships are almost always depicted between adults within the framework of marriage[55], and sexual references are implicit, never explicit. When these relationships are unsatisfying, it is "most often associated with a marriage that is going, or has gone, wrong"[56] (Buckley 1993: 200). The ideal loving relationship is a heterosexual marriage that includes children. Ideally, these children should be raised in the country. Songs about the country are not necessarily set in the country side; often the narrator is longing to get back to the country. The idea of the country "may be a recognizable physical location…it is more than this; it is a state of mind, a way of life" (Buckley 1993: 200). The longed-for home is an idealized nostalgic past, but some songs do reflect on that nostalgia. Parton's "In the Good Old Days (When Times Were Bad)" came out in 1968[57] and it served as a comment on the romanticism that had become such a big part of country music[58], but she exposed the

[55] Most country songs are about love between adults, within the framework of marriage, which might be the main difference of country love songs compared pop love songs aimed at teenagers.
[56] This type of song is often referred to as "cheatin' songs".
[57] The song was written and performed by Parton, produced by Bob Ferguson and released as a single on RCA in November 1968. The album with the same name was released in March 1969.
[58] Porter Wagoner's "Green, green grass of home", "Coal Miner's daughter" by Loretta Lynn, "Coat of Many Colors" by Dolly Parton

naivety[59] of this tradition and told us that not everything was better "in the good old days", when she sang:

No amount of money could buy from me
The memories that I have of then
No amount of money could pay me
To go back and live through it again

Longing to go back to the country is often connected to home and family, and most often to the childhood home and to *mama*. This longing to be "back home" might also be read as an escape from the modern life. Often the protagonist will find that the big city or seemingly lush life was not the wonderful place she or he thought it would be, but finds it cold and lonely ("My Blue Ridge Mountain Boy", "Blackie Kentucky"). (Parton in Playgirl 1978: 64)

> [A] venerable impulse which persists in country music is the desire to go back home – to a place that is comfortable because it is familiar – or to a mythical community…where life and cares are simpler and more manageable (Malone 1993: 301).

The simple, manageable life often involves manual labor in the mines or on a farm (or he might work as a cowboy or a trucker) but while there are songs *about* work, there are few working-songs (as much of the call-and-respond music so common in African-American culture) The work is "dull, physical and unrewarding" (Buckley 1993: 201) and the worker is almost always a man. This is probably connected to the prominence of male protagonists in country songs (traditionally there are more male than female performers and songwriters), as well as the tradition (and ideal of) the housewife[60].

> Work in country music is almost exclusively a male purview. Women are mothers, wives, lovers, barmaids and truck-stop waitresses (Buckley 1993: 201).

The importance of individual freedom and individualism is central to the American Dream narrative as well as in the country music narrative. Some of Dolly Parton's popularity can be viewed in relation to her persona as an independent woman making her own money, spending much of her time doing business, travelling the road. Taking control of your own life and

[59] Later Parton has reflected over country life: "Country living makes you tough. You may have the most beautiful drop in the world – our own crop was tobacco – and there you are thinking, "Boy, it's gonna be my best year." and all of a sudden: the sky clouds up, there's a hailstorm and your crop gets beaten to the ground. Then all you can do in brace yourself, try to find a way to make up for what you've lost, and when it's all said and done all you know is that you're gonna have to trust in the good Lord to provide" (Parton in Playgirl 1978: 64).

[60] The housewife is the reliable love and comfort of the home while women who work as barmaids or waitresses are often the antagonists of the country narrative, and their main function is as temptresses who lure men away from the narrow road.

turning it around, not relying on the state or government to help you, is central: "In country music individuals are usually left alone to confront life" (Malone 1993: 301) and "[t]he quality of the man's life is not measured by his conventional accomplishments but by the content of his character" (Buckley 1993: 201)[61]. It is difficult to separate country from the political and cultural context in which it is produced and enjoyed.

Rootlessness of Modern Life: Country Music and Authenticity

What is it to sound "real"? This question, it seems, is not easy to answer. Its synonyms are "authentic" and "original", and its the opposite of "inauthentic" or "fake", most people seem to understand what music is authentic (eg. Bruce Springsteen is "real", while Vanilla Ice is not), but *why* or *how* can music be authentic? Much of what has been written about music and authenticity has its starting point in rock'n'roll and my work on country music and authenticity rely heavily on work done by Richard Middleton (1990, 2000b, 2006b, 2007), Simon Frith (1986, 1996), Johan Fornäs (1995), Philip Auslander (2008), and Allan Moore (2002). The main point of debate is the how the concept of authenticity ties in with musical performance, how authenticity is "created" and then ascribed to a piece of music;

> Taken on its own terms, rock authenticity is an essentialist concept, in the sense that rock fans treat authenticity as an essence that is either present or absent in the music itself, and they may well debate particular musical works in those terms…the creation of the effect of authenticity in rock is a matter of culturally determined convention, not an expression of essence. It is also a result of industrial practice: the music industry specifically sets out to endow its products with the necessary signs of authenticity (Auslander 2008: 82).

The label of "authenticity" is frequently used in the media in a positive matter. Authentic equals *good* in most magazine music reviews, but where does this *realness* come from? Authenticity is not something one can find as an essence, it is not embedded in the music. Cultural expression does not have a core of truth that you can locate and display:

> 'Authenticity' is a matter of interpretation which is made and fought for from a cultural and, thus, historicized position. It is ascribed, not inscribed…it is a construction made on the act of listening (Moore 2002: 210).

The fact that authenticity is used (uncritically) as a label by so many people does indicate that it should be explored further, but it is important to recognize that it is not the music that *is*

[61] "Barroom fights, time in jail, wild parties and getting drunk are seldom glorified as ends in themselves but, instead, as rites of the rugged individualist. They are actions emblematic of a life style" (Buckley 1993: 200).

authentic, music cannot "tell the truth" because it is not a language, as Fornäs argues: authenticity is not directly opposed to artificiality, because authenticity is necessarily a construction we place upon what we perceive (Fornäs 1995: 275).

> [A]uthenticity is not inherent in the object or event that is designated authentic but is a socially agreed-upon construct in which the past is to a degree misremembered (Halbwachs in Peterson 1997: 5).

In Allan Moore's (2002) article on authenticity, "Authenticity as Authentification", he offers a tri-partite typology explaining how authenticity is constructed: *First person authenticity, second person authenticity* and *third person authenticity*. First person authenticity is authenticity of expression and "arises when an originator…succeeds in conveying the impression that his/her utterance is one of integrity, that it represents an attempt to communicate in an unmediated form with an audience" (Moore 2002: 214). For country music, "first person authenticity" is important, as exemplified by the focus on the deliverance of the lyrics and the way songs are chosen if the lyrics reflect the performer in a way befitting their image (Peterson and McLaurin 1992: 6-9). After the invention of recorded music, the focus shifted from composer to performer (Frith 1986: 270). This shift is important for understanding the voice. If the singer is simply citing the composer, he or she is little more than the ink in a novel but, because of the nature of the voice, this is not the case. The voice is always embodied, produced through air from the lungs being pressed through the larynx, phrased, expressed, and emoted by the vocalist. When the focal point shifts from the composer to the performer, the music's meaning is sought through the performer.[62]

Image and musical performance is closely connected to first person authenticity. When an artist vocally and/or physically emotes through song, displaying vocal traits and bodily movements associated with a specific emotional state (sighs and sobs to display sadness, energetic gestures and giggles to show happiness), the performer lends his or her physical "realness" to the performance. Thomas Hylland Eriksen argues in *Normalitet* (2006) a theory of normality that allows slight deviation from the norm as long as the subject stays in accordance within the norm in other areas. Could this be one of the reasons why Dolly Parton's plastic surgery has not damaged her credibility as an authentic artist? Is this why Dolly, who encompasses so many masculine traits, is still viewed as (more than) completely female?

[62] This might also help explain the popularity of biographical narrative journalism.

Most people, and certainly anyone who has performed music, knows that an artist need not be blue to sing the blues, and when thinking rationally about it, the audience is aware of this (most of the time). So how does the masquerade work? Why do we believe the artist, or why do we not react when we know he or she is "lying"? The artist's voice is not the only one coming through in a performance, and as such, we might also view the artist as an actor (or actress). Much of fandom is concerned with finding "the real person" behind the persona, implying that the fan is aware of the performativity of pop music. Still, when at a concert the listener might be emotionally touched by the artist, and some of the answers to why we are touched by vocal music can be found in the way a vocal performance emulates those vocal traits that we recognize from our everyday experiences of verbal communication. We recognize people's emotional state by listening to their voice and watching their body language. Sobs, breaks, giggles[63] (and the body language that goes with) that might come naturally in conversation are reenacted in the musical performance, thus they echo some basic human behavior, and, therefore, authenticity.

Second person authenticity "occurs when a performance succeeds in conveying the impression to a listener that that listener's experience of life is being validated, that the music is 'telling it like it is' for them" (Moore 2002: 218). Because country music lyrics often are an attempt at identification of geographical location, people or situations, second person authentification in country music often has to do with lyrical recognition, class and geography through vocal performance[64]. Second person authenticity can also be expressed through the use of a southern drawl or twang. The dialect (or sociolect) reflects geographical (or class) belonging, and thus "tells it like it is" for their audience, the performer is "one of them": "Twang – lyrical and/or musical – is…self-referential in country music, it avers a song's authenticity like a badge or bumper sticker" (Mann 2008: 79).

Third person authenticity "arises when a performer succeeds in conveying the impression of accurately representing the ideas of another, embedded within a tradition of performance" (Moore 2002: 218). Moore's third person authenticity can also be viewed as "roots authenticity", and is tied to heritage, be it people, values, language, political or religious beliefs. This is often tied to a linear way of seeing history, inserting oneself into a cultural

[63] As well as growling, shouting, whining, belting etc.
[64] Songs like "Thank God I'm a Country Boy" performed by John Denver (1975), Gretchen Wilson's "Redneck Woman" (2004), "Long Haired Country Boy" by Charlie Daniels Band (1975), are typical songs that have a strong second person authenticity.

lineage. Auslander states that "authenticity is often located in current music's relationship to an earlier, "purer" moment in a mythic history of the music" (Auslander 2008: 83). This form of authenticity becomes vital in discussions about revival, and also about guest stars in songs or cover versions. It can be a matter of learning from "The Master" (such as visiting a "real blues guitarist" as The Rolling Stones did), but it also works the other way around. The fact that Dolly Parton has had her songs covered by so many artists with artistic credibility and has been cited as an inspiration and has been awarded both as a vocalist, musician, and a songwriter, is a matter of third person authenticity; she is being validated through recognition.

Country music authenticity is dependent on several factors; the artist's skills at emoting a song, credibility in terms of lived and historicized background and the ability to voice the values and opinions of the audience. The country music audience is perceived as conservative[65] and with the emergence of the second wave of feminism, many people's prejudices seemed to be confirmed by the demure country housewife.

Stand by Your Man: Country Music and the Women's Movement

But if you love him you'll forgive him
Even though he's hard to understand
And if you love him, oh be proud of him
'Cause after all he's just a man
- Tammy Wynette

When Tammy Wynette's "Stand by Your Man" came out in the middle of the second feminist wave, it caused a stir.

> Wynette set back the gains made by Patsy Cline and Loretta Lynn by being a doormat. Wynette was "cynically" and "callously" packaged (Dorothy Horstman in Malone 1993: 321).

The song asks women to forgive their men for "doing things that you don't understand", to stand by them, nurture them ("give him two arms to cling to, and something warm to come to when nights are cold and lonely"), in short, be an unquestioning, thankful nurturer. The lyrics "'cause after all he's just a man" could be interpreted as a "condescending assertion of women's superior gender status" (Shuker 2001: 143)[66], but did women have a "superior

[65] The link between conservativism and country music was fortified in the 1970, with protest songs against protesters, such as "Okie from Muskogee" by Merle Haggard.
[66] Bufwack and Oermann (1987: 98) contend that Wynette is a masochist, aware of women's superior intellectual grasp, but resigned to accept their inferior status, but as Wynette points out in another interview there

gender status"? Not formally. Women are, according to Bourdieu (1995: 129), the judges of taste, and in many cultures, even though they do not have any formal or judicial authority, they have informal power, but in terms of religious belief, the woman was not superior to the man, but made of his flesh, born to serve him. The situation in some rural societies was that the men often consumed a considerable amount of alcohol, while the women would look after the house and children. In the ministries women would also be more active participants, and many were also involved in the temperance movement. Because of their responsibilities and active involvement in communities women might have been viewed as morally superior to men. Even though the song could be read as addressing "the dilemma women face of meeting their gender obligations" as Shuker (2001: 143) suggests, it does not necessarily mean that the song is ironic, nor that that is the only valid interpretation.

> On one level, the song seems to say that if a man makes a mistake, his woman should stand by him. However, when Tammy sings, "After all, he's just a man," she seems to be pointing away from the idea that a woman needs to be submissive, and toward one of two other possibilities: that women are morally superior to men, or that loyalty is paramount (Linehan 2003: 22-23).

Linehan's argument about loyalty might be the best defense for Wynette. The Nurturer is an ideal in country music that also symbolizes the home as a refuge from a cold, demanding world that is often difficult to understand. "Stand by Your Man" is a song that appeals to country music values both because it advocates women's role as homemaker, and also because it idealizes the home as a safe, nurturing environment. This is again connected to the romantic idea of the utopic past in the symbolic world of country music. The Nurturer is one of two main archetypes in western culture, where womanhood is roughly divided into two camps; Madonna and Whore. In country music, the female protagonist (if we can call her that) is the first, while the Honky-Tonk Angel is the latter. A Honky-Tonk Angel is a temptress in a bar who lures men into her trap. In the Kitty Wells song "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky-tonk Angels" [67], she asks that the blame not be put on the women, but on the men who "think they're still single"[68].

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is also a class aspect behind the song; "back home in Mississippi, women stood by their men because they had no choice. They had no education" (Guralnick in Linehan 2003: 23).

[67] Released as a single on Decca in 1952 by Kitty Wells, "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels" confronted the idea that women tempted men and led them astray, but placed the blame on men: "It's a shame that all the blame is on us women…From the start most every heart that's ever broken was because there always was a man to blame". The song refers to "The Wild Side of Life", a hit for Hank Thompson in 1952, where the protagonist complains about a woman who has left him (and the home life) and who's probably sitting in a bar somewhere, tempted by the lures of the night life. The melody is a common one in early country music and we find it in "I'm Thinking Tonight of My Blue Eyes" by the Carter Family and "Great Speckled Bird" by Roy

One has to ask why women's liberation never got a very strong foothold in country music, and I believe some of the answers can be found in questions of class. Feminism has been criticized for being elitist, for belonging to the white middle class, and I find it likely that many women did not feel the need to pursue the idea of female solidarity because they felt they had more in common with their fathers and brothers than with women of other ethnicities and social classes. The song "One's On the Way" describes the vast distance between academic feminism and working class realities:

The girls in New York City, they all march for women's lib
And better homes and garden shows, the modern way to live
And the Pill may change the world tomorrow, but meanwhile, today
Here in Topeka, the flies are a buzzin'
The dog is a barkin' and the floor needs a scrubbin'
One needs a spankin' and one needs a huggin'
Lord, one's on the way

Loretta Lynn spoke of the harsh realities many women faced. Her music addressed working class women's issues, and many of the songs have strong political messages. "The Pill", a song that celebrates the liberty many women found with the introduction of main-stream birth control, was viewed as politically controversial and was banned from several radio stations:

All these years I've stayed at home while you had all your fun
And every year that's gone by another baby's come
There's a'gonna be some changes made right here on nursery hill
You've set this chicken your last time, 'cause now I've got the Pill

"The Pill" was not the first song to be banned from airplay. "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels" by Kitty Wells, one of Lynn's musical influences, was also banned from airplay on several radio stations, and Wells, although the song was a great hit and launched her to stardom, was not permitted to perform it at the Grand Ole Opry.

The sort of feminism Lynn incarnates is very similar to the feminist idea of equality of the 1960s and 1970s which advocates that women can do everything that men can do, but there is also a very important aspect of class. While many might have felt alienated by the urban

Acuff. "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky-Tonk Angels" can also be viewed as the beginning of a tradition for gender criticism in country music, where stereotypical images of women and men were discussed in songs. The questions around women in country deserve more attention than I can give it here, and for further readings I recommend Finding Her Voice: women in country music (Bufwack and Oermann: 2003), All That Glitters country music in America (Lewis 1993) and Lonesome Cowgirls and Honky-Tonk Angels (McCusker 2008).

[68] Other female artists have followed that line, most famously Loretta Lynn ("Rated X", "The Pill", "Fist City", "Don't come home a'drinkin' (with loving on your mind)).

politicized feminism, Loretta Lynn's "down-to-earth-tell-it-like-it-is"-attitude might have felt refreshing and captivating[69].

> The essence of Loretta Lynn's enormous working-class popularity lies in her proud-to-be-country attitude and her assertive woman's stance. Both were tremendously appealing to a blue-collar America that was feeling embattled and embittered in the 1960s and 1970s. Loretta Lynn wasn't ashamed of being a woman. She wasn't ashamed of being from Kentucky. And she wasn't ashamed of having come from the poor (Bufwack and Oermann 2003: 270).

At this time, there was definitely a "women's movement" going on in country music. The 1970s saw many women as best selling artists. Loretta Lynn was the voice of the strong working-class woman, while Tammy Wynette was the faithful wife. Dolly Parton's role in this wave of feminism was a kind of sexual revolution, a debasing of what women's sexuality is, and also, through her appearance tapping into the artificiality of gender performance (I will pursue this further in chapter 3). Some of popular music's ability to represent contemporary political undercurrents lie in the special position pop music has as a commodity. For a pop song to get produced, the political views or sexual preferences of the artist are not as important as the "sellability" of the song. Therefore, the potential for political change through popular culture expression is noteworthy, and Dolly Parton's feminist stand against the double standards that regulate women and men's sexual activities in "Just Because I'm a Woman", might for many have had a bigger impact than official or academic texts. But, as Susan McClary (2007e: 206) points out, this does not mean that artists or fans control the "scenario"; "the ability of the industry to absorb and blunt the political edge of anything it touches must not be underestimated. And culturally visibility (or audibility) does not translate automatically into social power" (McClary 2007e: 206).

Redneck Woman: Country Music and Class

If it's real, it's simple usually, and if it's simple, it's true – John Lennon

Dolly Parton *is* country, but *being* country is more than the music she plays, it is also the values and the background she has, and how she communicates the values and the background to an audience. Dolly has always been aware and *proud* of her background, and this pride is something that *makes* her country. Labeled as *white trash, rednecks, trailer trash, hillbillies* and *backwoods,* there are many negative stereotypes attached to working-class

[69] In the 1970s and 1960s white working-class citizens felt "used, ridiculed, exploited and overlooked" (Mary A. Bufwack and Oermann 2003:230), resulting in an increase of "proud to be"-songs.

whites. Goad (1997) argues that poor whites have the only ethnic background in the USA that it still is accepted by the Majority to discriminate against (notably through the use of negative stereotyping in mass culture)[70]. Stereotyping underprivileged and working-class Euro-Americans as slow, stupid, ignorant and of a dubious moral nature, is sadly still very common in popular culture (as exemplified in the TV comedy *My Name is Earl*), and has resulted in a counter-reaction from within Euro-American working-class culture. Embracing the inner hillbilly requires an appropriation of demeaning words (the same way the word *gay* and *queer* has been embraced by homosexuals), and by doing so, we are in the process of changing the content of the word itself. Many musicians, comedians and also politicians and other public figures call themselves *rednecks*[71], and associating oneself with the working class involves incorporating other values as well; "down-to-earth, authentic, humorous, wholesome".

The idea of the working class as more closely connected to nature is based on the body/mind split, where knowledge is acquired through rational thought. The body, at best, is merely a vessel, and at worst deceives us through emotions and innate irrationality. Because the mind is knowledge and has rationality and the body is emotions and irrationality, the working class has traditionally been viewed as irrational and emotional and more closely connected to nature and to their body[72]. Physical labor is also a type of work that "belongs" to the working class, and because it does not require any formal education it is less valued than a job which is based on intellect. In the same way, music that does not require any formal knowledge and is accessible to (or through) the body is seen as less worthy by those who value intellect. One way of elevating music has therefore been to distance it from the body and connecting it to the intellect; many of the first popular musicologists have been interpreted as trying to give a rational explanation for their emotional reaction to music, and have put rock music above pop music in the process[73].

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[70] In popular culture, like *The Beverly Hillbillies* or *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, "rednecks" are portrayed as either clowns or monsters. "As a fictional stereotype, the poor white originally entered the national consciousness with a hillbilly clown puppet on one hand and a redneck villain puppet on the other, a cultural foreigner with a limited ability to achieve and a massive capacity to destroy…laughable idiot and horrifying villain." (Hunley in Goad 1997: 81). Goad wishes to address discrimination of the white working class in The Redneck Manifesto (Goad 1997: 86), and he proposes that it is a matter of classism.

[71] Interesting to note is that just as the N-word for African-Americans should not be used by people of other ethnicities, the word *Redneck* is not perceived as a compliment when spoken by someone who is not working-class white, quite the opposite: it is a derogatory term.

[72] This also means that the white upper-class is seen as stiff and formal, and cannot dance to "real" music, and that poor people (especially blacks) can dance and have better sex (!).

[73] Pop music has a very clear connection to dance and the body and is therefore less worth than "intelligent" music, music that you sit and listen to, trying to decipher the author's meaning behind the piece.

Pierre Bourdieu's argument in *Distinction* (1984, 1996) is that the accumulation of cultural knowledge and experience makes for a greater enjoyment of cultural texts. This knowledge is acquired through *habitus*[74] and through formal education in the school system:

> The educational system [is] an institutionalized classifier which is itself an objectified system of classification reproducing the hierarchies of the social world…maintenance of the social order (Bourdieu 1984: 387).

Cultural capital is what defines high culture, but as Sarah Thornton (2006) argues, this is not isolated to high culture, and pop music fans also invest time and money in the accumulation of facts and experience. Thornton develops Bourdieu's theories on cultural capital[75] through the term *subcultural* capital, arguing that "[s]ubcultural capital confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder" (Thornton 2006: 100). Subcultural capital is objectified (the look) and embodied (the act) and includes using the "right" words, having the "right" look[76] and manners, communicates the "right" values, and having the "right" knowledge[77]. Thornton suggests that in the case of subcultural capital "the relation between class and musical taste is much more difficult to chart" (Thornton 2006: 101). Thornton's theories can explain the wide appeal of rock 'n' roll in the 1950s, where the music engaged youth across race and class boundaries.

> The submission to necessity which inclines working-class people to a pragmatic, functionalist 'aesthetic', refusing the gratuity and futility of formal exercises and of every form of art for art's sake, is also the principle of daily existence and of an art of living which rejects specifically aesthetic intentions as aberrations (Bourdieu 1984: 376).

Bourdieu (1984: 376-379) describes the taste of necessity[78] as the governing force in working-class aesthetics. The manual worker wants surroundings which are clean and tidy

[74] Habitus is "internalized capital" (Bourdieu 1984: 114) which is beyond that which has been directly learned (Bourdieu 1984: 170). Different conditions of existence produce different habitus. "Each class condition is defined, simultaneously, by its intrinsic properties and by the relational properties which it derives from its position in the system of class conditions" (Bourdieu 1984: 170). "The adjustment to the objective chances which is inscribed in the dispositions constituting the habitus is the source of all the realistic choices which based on the renunciation of symbolic profits that are in any case inaccessible" (Bourdieu 1984: 379). The particular content of the habitus is the result of the objectification of social structures at the level of individual subjectivity, and is governed by internalized schemata, taste, sensibilities and dispositions.

[75] Bourdieu's cultural capital describes taste through the class structures of France (which are more rigid than for those in Norway or in the USA), where cultural capital belongs to the higher classes.

[76] Style of clothing, hair, make-up, jewellery etc.

[77] This knowledge is often acquired through acts like reading music magazines and biographies, going to concerts, watching concerts, interviews and documentaries on television or video, listening to, memorizing and/or analyzing songs and albums, collecting albums (official and bootlegs), being active on internet forums and in fan clubs.

[78] "resignation to necessity is the basis of the taste of necessity" (Bourdieu 1984: 380).

and easy to maintain and *value for money*[79], such as clothes that are simple and versatile or "obtaining maximum effect…at minimum cost, a formula which for bourgeois taste is the very definition of vulgarity". At the same time, Bourdieu argues that the working-class "accepts the definition of the goods worthy of being possessed" (Bourdieu 1984: 386) a definition that should not be understood as "created" by the bourgeoisie, but negotiated across the classes:

> [T]he working-class life-style is characterized by the presence of numerous cheap substitutes for these rare goods, 'sparkling white wine' for champagne, imitation leather for real leather, reproductions for paintings (Bourdieu 1984: 386)

Country music can be "learned and understood without the education and cultural training necessary to appreciate how classical music carries its meaning" (Frith 1986: 270). Bourdieu argues that the "taste of necessity" defines the working class, and influences them to refuse formal exercise and art for art's sake, and embraces "music whose simple, repetitive structures invite a passive, absent participation" (Bourdieu 1984: 386). This attitude is certainly similar to those of the Frankfurt school, but as many scholars have argued, this shows little comprehension of the audience's use of popular music and what progressive uses popular music can have.

> The low interest which working-class people show in the works of legitimate culture…is not solely the effect of a lack of competence and familiarity…[exhibitions, theatre, concerts or even cinema] are excluded…from working-class conversation, in which they could only express the pretention to distinguish oneself (Bourdieu 1984: 381).

Country music comes from a conservative culture and is not as uniform as some seem to believe. In the case of women's rights, different female voices have expressed themselves in different, often progressive ways, though maybe not in the same way as women from other regions or segments of the population. Country music seems to express certain values (such as individualism and patriotism), but not necessarily in a uniform way.

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[79] "Value for money" might also be a factor in Dolly Parton's performance. The flamboyant costumes are "obtaining maximum effect" which gives the audience a show very much out of the ordinary. Dolly is always *in character*; she does not want to leave the house without makeup and wigs, making sure that fans that see her feel like they have met *Dolly Parton*. In a way this is a display of respect of the audience, a way of giving the audience their money's worth when buying an album or attending a show, but at the same time wise commercially, because this might in turn assure future sales.

3: Dolly Parton:
The Curvatious Queen of Country Music

People don't come to see the shows to see you be you.
They come to see you be them and what they want to be
– Dolly Parton

Dolly Parton began performing at an early age, appearing as a regular on a local radio show at age nine. The day after her high school graduation, in 1964, she left for Nashville, Music City, USA. She had some minor chart success as a performer and as a songwriter, but it was her introduction to the Porter Wagoner Show, an "oases for "traditional country music" (Fiske 2004: 97), in 1967 that made her a household name to the country music audience. Porter Wagoner[80] hired Dolly Parton to replace Norma Jean[81] as a *girl singer* on the syndicated TV show, introducing her by referring to her biggest chart hit at the time: "Dumb Blonde"[82]

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[80] Porter Wagoner (1927-2007) was an established country artist when Dolly Parton joined his show. He was a regular on The Grand Ole Opry, and was also inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame (in 2002). For many; in his rhinestone western wear and bouffant blond pompadour. he was also a representative of all that was tacky about country music

[81] Also a nice looking blonde girl singer, Norma Jean left the show when she got married.

[82] It might be interesting to note that the song "Dumb Blonde" in many ways resemble Madonna's "Material Girl". These songs were viewed as autobiographical songs, describing the singers and both songs were written not only by someone else, but by men. Both Dolly and Madonna have been viewed as "dumb blondes", and both

> … and here's a little gal that I know you are gonna really learn to love because she's a fine singer and one of the finest little gals that I've ever met. Let's give her a great big welcome as she sings a song she's had a big hit on called "Dumb Blonde"… she ain't no dumb blonde, though… her name is Dolly Parton (Wagoner 1967, first episode with Dolly).

In these 60s shows Dolly was just a sidekick, reduced to a "girl singer" and a "fine gal", and is in many ways present just to contrast with Porter Wagoner's masculinity. She is foil. Interpreting Dolly in these early stages of her career is also an examination of the history of country music (the role of the variety show) and a cultural interpretation of these performances of a gendered identity.

After she left the Porter Wagoner Show (in 1974) she went on to have her own TV show: *Dolly!* The show was filmed in Hollywood, California and as a means to reach a mainstream audience the show featured country and pop artists as guests[83] (as well as other mainstream personalities). Dolly was in the process of "going pop" and becoming a nationally recognized star. The focal point was the musical numbers, many of which were duets between Dolly and her guest(s), some seemed very uncomfortable (like her number with The Hues Corporation, a black pop/soul trio from California, where she performed the country song "Today I Started Loving You Again"[84] in a blonde afro), most of them were mildly entertaining, but she had great success with her duets with Kenny Rodgers and with the collaboration with Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt that became known as *Trio*[85].

Albums released in this period also did well in the pop charts, but the first crossover albums were a strange combination of songs, some being clear-cut country while others were clearly pop. On the album *Jolene* we have the pop title track "Jolene" and "I Will Always Love You" (which were released as singles), while the other songs are more typically country and have more of a traditional country sound. This way of promoting an album is typical of mainstream pop, where one or two singles can help to sell an album. In the case of Jolene it seems like the

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have proved to be anything but dumb. For discussions about women being voiced by men, see Clément (1999) and McClary (2007b).

[83] Such as KC&The Sunshine Band, Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt (the first performance of Trio) and Kenny Rodgers.

[84] Written by Merle Haggard, originally released on the album *The Fightin' Side of Me* written by Haggard (1970), Capitol.

[85] Parton, Harris and Ronstadt attempted an album in the 1970s, but due to amongst others their busy schedules their first collaborative (and award-winning) album *Trio* was not released until 1987. The album has a traditional country sound, and is characterized by the vocal harmonies (of the likes of the Carter family) where their voices, though each being distinct, all melt very well together. When the Dolly narrative is told in albums, *Trio* is often hailed as the best to come out of the 1980s, a decade that otherwise is mainly marked by her pop albums and tabloid exploitation.

other songs on the album are just filling up the space in between the singles, but they might also be there to please the country audience, reaffirming that she "hasn't left country".

Dolly! aired for only one season, from 1976 to 1977, even though it had good ratings. Dolly, who wanted to pursue a mainstream career, was spreading herself too thin, and the 18-hour days were proving too strenuous on her vocal cords[86]. When *Dolly!* was cancelled, variety shows were going out of style and, after having brought Elvis and The Beatles into American homes, they were gradually disappearing off the screens. The show did help to bring Dolly Parton into the public consciousness, and when she posed for Playboy in 1978 her status as a sex symbol was apparent. The "fine little gal" from the *Porter Wagoner Show* had grown up, and a voluptuous vixen had taken her place – she had moved from passive to active, from foil to protagonist. After bursting onto the mainstream stage, Dolly also had to deal with a lot more attention, and her looks, especially her weight, was scrutinized by the tabloids. From the late 70s through the 80s rumors about her alleged affairs with celebrity co-stars and marital problems surfaced practically every week. Often Dolly would beat the press to the punch, being the first to make fun of herself; taking fake "caught in bed with"-photos with Burt Reynolds (her co-actor in the *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*), and making fun of her boobs on the Johnny Carson show. This self-deprecating humor has become a trait of her public persona and has seemingly functioned as her armor against the likes of The National Enquirer and is probably also the reason why she has had continued success across gender borders. Her self-aware humor seems to disarm critics and forces us to laugh *with* her instead of *at* her.

The part of "Doralee" in the 1980 movie *Nine to Five* was Dolly's first role in a movie and it was not only a very successful film, but Dolly was also nominated for an Oscar for the title track. "9 to 5" also gave Dolly her first no. 1 on the Billboard pop charts. The next no. 1 single was "Islands in the Stream" a duet with Kenny Rogers[87]. The 1980s saw Dolly breaking into the movies (*Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, Rhinestone, Steel Magnolias*),

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[86] She would continue having problems with her vocal chords for many years, resulting in cancelations of concerts and in bad press. At 31, with no formal voice training, it might have been bad habits that caught up with Parton. After the age of 25 the body does not heal as quickly, and bad habits you were able to get away with when you were younger might start to have a more serious effect. After the incident Parton started taking vocal lessons.

[87] Country music has a long tradition for the man-woman duo (Johnny Cash and June Carter, Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty, Dolly Parton and Porter Wagoner). The Rogers-Parton collaboration was first explored on the *Dolly!* show, and their great success in the 1980s as a duo has much to do with their chemistry on stage. Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton can be read as mature sex symbols for the adult MOR audience, the audience at whom their music was primarily aimed.

losing a lot of weight and having plastic surgery, having another go at the Variety Show (and failing), building the theme park *Dollywood* (which is celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2010), co-founding the Sandollar Productions film and television production company (producer of, amongst others, the Academy award-winning documentary *Common Threads* and the TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), having success on the pop charts, but most of all, becoming a household name across the globe.

Whereas the public in the 1980s had seen Dolly "go pop", the 1990s marked Dolly's "return" to country. She made several albums that did well in the country charts, but with little pop success[88]. Reaching her 50s Dolly seemed to be changing course, and in 1999 she released the first of three bluegrass albums. The function of these albums seems to be taking Dolly back to her Appalachian roots, giving her new credibility as a singer and a songwriter as well as reinventing her public image. From being slightly cheesy she became cool again. New country stars are citing Dolly as an inspiration and today she holds a position as one of the Queens of Country music.

When discussing Dolly Parton and her long career, it is important to remember Dolly's hard work and determination which has brought her to where she is today. Many talented people were drawn to Nashville – *Music City* – a place where recording studios were plenty and record companies were looking for new talent. Dolly and her uncle Bill Owens were involved with several of them both as songwriters and as musical acts, before Porter Wagoner brought her over to his own record company[89]. Dolly Parton is regarded as one of the most important and successful songwriters of our time, and she is also a highly skilled singer who is very competent and charming on stage and in public. She appears to be a kind-natured and generous person, and she is highly respected for her entrepreneurship and philanthropic endeavors. One of the reasons I feel the need to point this out is that it is easy to forget the person under that big blonde wig, as many of the critics have done. It is easy to get caught up in the ruffles and rhinestones that is Dolly Parton, and think of her as a product of an industry, and, granted, much of her success *is* because she makes a visual impact. Because she plays with stereotypes, it is easy to cast her as one, but as most people, Dolly Parton; the person, has

[88] One of the reasons these albums didn't sell as well as the 1980s "pop" albums had to do with air play. Dolly along with other adult country and pop artists criticized radio DJs for being too narrow minded when choosing songs, claiming that they were not getting air play on account of their age, saying you don't have to be young to innovative.
[89] With a personal risk one might add as he put out his own money as a warranty.

many layers. I do not wish to try to find "The Real Dolly Parton"[90], but rather, by looking at Dolly Parton's appearance, I believe it will reveal something about the ideals of our society. The way she stages herself speaks volumes about our stereotypes and prejudices. Dolly Parton's actions tell us something about our own.

The line between the public and private Dolly is sharply drawn and transparent at the same time. Dolly's private life is very private. Her husband, Carl Dean does not make public appearances and they are very reluctant to invite the media into their home (although it has happened on a few occasions). According to Miller (2008) Carl never addresses his wife as "Dolly", that name is for the public, but they use pet names for each other. Publicly, Dolly is always "in character", made up to look like Dolly Parton. For her it is a part of the contract she has made with the audience;

> When I'm home, of course, I don't wear a wig every day and I wouldn't be wearing rhinestones. I'd be wearing blue jeans. But if I was to go out to the grocery store, I'd wear the whole outfit, makeup and all, because I wouldn't want people to see me looking different and thinking, "Oh, you should have seen Dolly Parton!" (Parton in Playgirl 1978: 66).

Since her pop break-through Dolly has found herself a target of the popular press, all of whom have approached her from a different angle. While music magazines focus on her talent as a musician and a songwriter, mainstream news magazines focus on her financial management and position as a pop culture phenomenon. Women's magazines focus on her "ordinary" life as a woman and a wife who has ordinary problems (her weight, her marriage, her family and her inability to have children), while the tabloids focus on the star (and cook up) different crises and scandals:

- *DOLLY'S JEALOUS HUBBY EXPLODES: Marriage Crisis as He Demands: Stop Fooling Around – I'm Tired of Sleeping Alone!*[91]
- *We haven't had sex for 10 years*[92]
- *DOLLY QUITS COUNTRY MUSIC*[93]
- *TRAGIC: Loyal fans took a hike when she went Hollywood*[94]
- *DOLLY IN AGONY AFTER BREAST SURGERY DISASTER. She Risks Becoming a Crippled Old Hunchback, Expert Warns*[95]

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[90] It is not possible to strip off the layers and find the "core" of a person (as many others, I believe that our actions are what defines *us*), but mostly because it does not bring me any closer to uncover the truths I seek and therefore does not matter.
[91] *National Enquirer,* September 18, 1990
[92] *Star,* August 4, 1998
[93] *National Examiner,* September 16. 1997
[94] *National Examiner,* September 16. 1997
[95] *National Enquirer,* August 21, 1990

The articles published in these different magazines become part of the Dolly Parton narrative, and they show us how different audiences read the Dolly-narrative. Like a red thread running through her whole career her look has become her biggest gimmick; the boobs, the hair and the flashy costumes. Different parts of the public have been interested in (and have been fed information about) different sides of Dolly Parton. The contradictions in and around Dolly Parton's image allow the audience to make interpretation and appropriate Dolly to be what they want (or need) her to be. These contradictions are closely connected to her *look*, and are one of the reasons why I find it pertinent to take a closer look at her appearance.

Visual Aesthetics of the Backwoods Barbie

I'm just a backwoods Barbie, too much makeup, too much hair.
Don't be fooled by thinkin' that the goods are not all there.
Don't let these false eyelashes lead you to believe that
I'm as shallow as I look 'cause I run true and deep.
- Dolly Parton

Dolly Parton's image is fashioned in a way that accentuates her voluptuous curves, particularly her breasts. In tight-fitting clothes covered with rhinestones and fringes, her showy appearance is topped with an exaggeratedly sculptured blond wig and heavy make-up (on a nowadays stiff Botox-face)[96]. Although she has said in interviews that she does not see herself as a sex symbol (Linehan 2003: 31), her hyper-feminine visual impact seems to contradict her statements. Joyce Linehan argues that it is the openness about the "Dolly-act" that has eliminated "any threat a female listener might perceive from a hypersexual performer who trades in engaging male fantasies" (Linehan 2003: 31), and it is probably also the openness about the gender act that appeals to those with queer sensibilities as well. She crafted her image so that she would make a lasting impression on people, but she has also been very forthcoming about the fact that "Dolly" is an act[97], so she comes across as very

[96] According to Bourdieu the working class body is, with its strength and virility, both capital (power) and site of self-expression. Body-building and extreme plastic surgery belongs to the working class. "A defiantly grotesque, excessively strong body bears the values of class consciousness, for it is the political meanings of the body that matter" (Bourdieu 1984: 384). Fiske views the working class' body as a site of "the subjection of the proletariat in capitalism", and thus also the site of resistance to domination. Dolly Parton's plastic surgery has definitely been extreme, and she has not tried to hide it, but if she sees anything "saggin', baggin' or draggin'" she's going to have it "nipped, tucked and sucked".

[97] One of the main arguments about the performativity of gender can be found in a "Dolly Parton look-alike contest" in Los Angeles. As a joke Dolly Parton entered… and lost to a man. If Dolly Parton doesn't look like Dolly Parton, it seems quite evident that, more than anything, Dolly Parton is a character that she not only does not have ownership of, but that, evidently, someone else can do better.

honest which arguably is a case of meta-authenticity[98]. Through her self-deprecating jokes (about her famous bosom or her plastic surgery) Dolly Parton is being authenticated, explaining how she might be perceived as "real" when she is so "fake"[99].

There seems to be a governing thought that she has so much sexuality that "it has to come out". An archetype of feminine sexuality she is viewed as always ready. But hyperfemininity need not be hypersexual. Hyperfemininity might also be viewed as femininity camped up:

> [C]amp takes something ordinary – an object, a phrase, a person or a situation – and turns it into something ironic, exaggerated and seriously defensive. Performatively, camp is intended as an allusion – which means it is up to the reader or listener to forge the connection. 'Being camp' is about making fun of oneself in order to prove a point (Hawkins 2009: 146-147).

By camping up femininity, the hyperfeminine woman reveals the unnaturalness of the everyday gender performance. This part of Dolly Parton is an act. Dolly does not try to hide that fact. Hawkins (2002: 60) suggests: "the workings of gender through the performance of drag, masquerade, and camp in pop texts can be read as oppositional and subversive". Parton's performance is decidedly camp. Her look might be viewed as a parody of traditionally feminine aesthetics, a "burlesquing of femininity" (Wilson 2001: 284), heavily sexualized, but in a way that is so over-the-top that it (almost) stops being sexy and becomes a parody. Her look is in stark contrast with her down-home personality, where she passes as respectable, smart, wholesome and sincere[100].

> This persona is a caricature that juxtaposes the outlandish style of the country singer (in a predominantly male tradition of gaudy costuming) with the stereotypical self-display of the "painted woman", or prostitute, whose sexuality is her style (Wilson 2001: 283).

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[98] Fornäs suggests the categories "social authenticity", "subjective authenticity" and "meta-authenticity" (Fornäs 1995: 276-277), where social authenticity is tied in with legitimacy within a community, subjective authenticity with the individual, and meta-authenticity is connected with irony and self-reflexivity. While social and subjective authenticity fits into Moore's model of first-, second- and third person authenticity, the introduction of the concept of *meta-authenticity* might help explain the celebration of artificiality in pop music.

[99] For extensive work on irony in popular music, see Hawkins (2002, 2009).

[100] These contradictions are explored by Pamela Wilson (2001) article "Mountains of Contradictions: Gender, Class, and Region in the Star Image if Dolly Parton".

Her outlandish style did not look out of place next to her long-time business partner and mentor, Porter Wagoner, who, in his Nudie-suits[101], knew how to razzle-dazzle the audience. Richard Peterson's description of the differences in clothes and hair styles between "hard core" and "soft shell" country artists, place both Dolly and Porter in the "hard core" tradition (Peterson 1997: 153). In the "hard core" style, the image is a strong signifier of musical belonging, while "soft shell" artist tone down the look to better fit the mainstream popular style[102].

Dolly Parton and Porter Wagoner on the set of the Porter Wagoner Show

At the same time as Dolly's look signals compliance with norms of femininity in patriarchal culture, Dolly herself is very conscious about what signals she sends out and she used them actively as a strategy to become empowered from within the patriarchal structures of 1960s Nashville:

> When I started out in my career, I was plainer looking. I soon realized I had to play by men's rules to win. My way of fighting back was to wear the frilly clothes and put on the big, blonde wig. It helped that I had a small voice that enabled me to sing songs of pain and loneliness and love and gentle things like butterflies and children. I found that both men and women liked me (Parton in Wilson 2001: 285).

In interviews she has explained how she has used her feminine appearance to her advantage in business situations; charming business executives into letting her have her way. Using the "dumb blonde" stereotype to her advantage has earned her the nickname "The Iron Butterfly". This performance of gender is also a source of empowerment from within patriarchal power structures, and is one of the reasons for a feminist interpretation of Dolly.

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[101] Designer Nudie Cohn, crowned "America's undisputed king of Western wear", was supposedly the first tailor to add rhinestones to western wear, and designed suits for, amongst others, Elvis Presley. For further readings on the Nudie suit and western wear, see Nudie and Cabrall (2004) and Beard and Arndt (2001).

[102] In the late 1970s and the 1980s Parton's position as a adult pop artist also showed in the photographs, where her style was more mainstream, more like that of a soft-shell country artist. After the "return" to country of the 1990s, her style has become exceedingly extravagant, more so than the "hard core style" she had while on the Porter Wagoner show.

Dolly states that she has working-class tastes, rather shopping at Wal-Mart than at high-end stores (Wilson 2001: 293), but with her rather untypical proportions, it would be very hard for her to find clothes "off the rack". Everything she wears in public is tailored to fit her (snuggly) and also altered to fit her taste for the excessive. At the same time as Dolly sports the excessive country look, she also makes fun of it; at concerts she delivers lines like:

"You'd be surprised how much it costs to look this cheap"
"I look just like the girl next door…if you happen to live next door to an amusement park"
"I was the first woman to burn my bra…it took the fire department three days to put out the fire"
"It's a good thing I was born a girl, otherwise I'd be a drag queen"

Dolly is, as any casual observer will notice, quite the spectacle. Dolly supposedly modeled her look after the town tramp (a story that she often repeats in interviews), thinking, when her mother told her that that woman was "Just trash" that; "That's what I wanna' be… Trash!". Did the story happen like that? Maybe. Does it matter? Probably not. Deeply imbedded in the Dolly Parton narrative, these types of stories support a certain image, an image where Dolly is in charge of her own look, thus not a puppet to "the Patriarchy". Still, the look is molded for the male gaze and is evident in the press. She is objectified. At the same time the gaze reduces Dolly to a pair of boobs and a blonde wig, the gaze is not necessarily felt as a bad thing, and many women (and men) learn to control it, finding power through dressing and acting for the gaze. While the gaze is controlling, the gazed-upon are not necessarily completely enthralled. Through being desired the gazed-upon also has power. Dressing for the gaze and flirting might be both empowering and liberating.

> Dolly Parton, by managing and manipulating her sexual image in such a way as to attain the maximum response from the male gaze while maintaining her own dignity and self-esteem, is making patriarchal discourse work to her own advantage. She is keeping the upper hand and stage-managing her own 'exploitation' (Wilson 2001: 287).

Discussing her image it becomes apparent that Dolly Parton's hyperfemininity might confirm gender stereotypes for conservative listeners and at the same time serve as a model for female empowerment or a queer celebration of artifice. While some segments of the audience perceive Dolly as *authentic*, others do not. Some might celebrate the artifice of the "Dolly-act", and as Hawkins (2002) explores in his discussion on The Pet Shop Boys and irony; one of the delights of pop music can be found in its inauthenticity. Lawrence Grossberg (in Hawkins 2002: 152) suggests: "the only possible claim to authenticity is derived from the knowledge and admission of your inauthenticity". For Dolly it would have been very difficult to maintain an identity as a serious artist if she denied her artifice. If she did not tell all the

"dumb blonde/big boob/white trash"-jokes herself, they would be told behind her back, out of her control making her available as an object of sexist slur and undermining her integrity. She displays self-awareness and a celebration of artifice and style which in turn gives authenticity to her performance. She winks at us and lets us know that she knows she is doing an act.

For Wilson and others who want to embrace Parton as a feminist it is the control she holds over her own image which is the convincing argument, but at the same time she is a commercial artist who has shaped that image for her own financial success. Her look is modeled after a conventional ideal of white, blonde beauty, and she has attained it through extensive plastic surgery. The question whether Dolly Parton should be viewed as transgressive or subversive is one without a singular answer; the transgressive potential might be explored through the uses to which Dolly Parton is put by her audience. For a conservative audience Dolly Parton's hyperfeminine style might be received and appropriated in a subversive way, as a pop culture icon to be emulated uncritically. Whereas Parton's image might have caused some concern, her great success in the male dominated music industry has been easier for feminists to embrace. Her commercial success is unique, not only for a woman musician, but maybe for any musician, country or mainstream, but the Dolly Parton success story is one which is impressive for several reasons, for not only was Parton born female in a gender biased society, but she grew up in one of the most impoverished areas of the United States; The Appalachians. Parton's story is almost fairytale-like.

The Dolly Parton Narrative: "Following that American Dream" a Horatio Alger Story Signed in Pink Ink

The message of the American Dream is communicated in songs like "Coat of Many Colors", "Backwoods Barbie", "Appalachian Memories", "White Limozeen", "Light of a Clear Blue Morning" and "Wildflowers", but it is primarily the Dolly Parton *narrative* that corresponds to the Horatio Alger stories[103]. Central to the interpretation of the artist Dolly Parton is the

[103] Dolly Parton's songs primarily deal with the subjects of love and relationships, both going well ("Love is Like a Butterfly", "Sneakin' Around", "All I Can Do", "I'll Oilwells Love You", "Joshua",), going or gone wrong ("Something Fishy", "Down From Dover", "Blackie, Kentucky", "The Grass is Blue", "Shinola", "I'm Gone", "Daddy", "Jolene"). Many of her songs are very patriotic ("Red White and Bluegrass" and "Color me America") and religious ("Halos and Horns", "Hello God", "Jesus and Gravity").

narrative; the story about how her upbringing, her toil and her success have many similarities to The American Dream[104], or to the classic hero journey:

> *She was born into severe poverty, one of twelve children[105] she had a great talent as a musician and started writing songs at age five. Even though her peers didn't believe she could make it as a star, she had her mother's love and a strong belief in God. Through hardships she worked her way to the top and even though she could have laughed right back at those who made fun of her when she said she was going to Music City (Nashville) to be a singer, she was the bigger person and has today brought great wealth back to her home town. In addition to being a star and filthy rich, she is a caring, loving person whose greatest victory is giving books to poor children and being true to her roots.*

This is a story repeated in the public sphere, and is central to our understanding of Dolly Parton. The story has to be recognized as not completely accurate, as it is shaped not only by the way she wants to be seen, but also by the way she remembers it, and the media's involvement in retelling that story.

Dolly has always been good at telling stories, and through her songs she gives us a glimpse into her fantasy. She's very much aware of the codes and traditions in story-telling (though not formally educated, certainly experienced), and she tells her own life story as, basically, a fairytale. For the listener to root for her she needs to be the hero, and what story is better than the story about "The Underdog"? In the Dolly Parton narrative, some episodes stand out as particularly important. One of the most important ones is the one where she at her High School graduation is asked what she's going to be when she grows up and answers: a singer (in other retellings of the story she says she wants to be a songwriter, in others, again, she wants to be a star). When she gives her answer she is met with ridicule, her peers laughing at her "unrealistic" dreams. This story is important to the narrative because it show us that she has overcome prejudice and is victorious, and further, that you should dream big because you can succeed too.

While the story is captivating, what I find interesting is the way she retells that episode at her high school graduation. It might be true that some people sniggered when she at her high school graduation said that she wanted to be a singer, but interviews with teachers, neighbors

[104] "With hard work comes achievement, and with achievement comes the material comforts of the American Dream and sometimes even great riches and a place in history" (Marsden 1992: 135).
[105] The number twelve is coincidentally also a magic number in fairy tales.

and friends from school show that the story isn't that one-sided; a lot of people believed she could and would do just that. It is important to remember that not only had she been a regular act on a radio show at this point, but she had already performed at the Grand Ole Opry (introduced by Johnny Cash) and she already had a record out, so her goal to be an artist was not unrealistic. The myth, on the other hand demands antagonists, and she has to face great odds. Dolly Parton showed her musical talent at an early age, but as any musician will attest, it is not enough to be talented, being *the best* takes a lot of hard work. Dolly worked hard to get where she is today and I do not want to dwell too long on those men and women who helped her on her way to the top, but I want to show that she did not do it all by herself against all odds. Many people did believe in her, not just God and her Mama.

In the Dolly Parton narrative poverty itself becomes a character in the story; the antagonist. Poverty is something that plagued Dolly from childhood, something which she had to fight and overcome, allied with forces of nature, poverty stood between Dolly and success. By "doing good" she shall be victorious. When Dolly said that her family was dirt poor, some people were offended because they didn't feel that was true, but I do believe that Dolly thought of herself that way. The music might have been her way of escaping the poverty and the hard physical work and economic uncertainty that followed. Poverty becomes a character in the Dolly Parton narrative; a driving force (having learned at home to work hard and a wish to escape it), a source of certain values associated with poverty ("we did not have money, but we had love") and work ethics ("I've seen my father work till his fingers bleed"), and even though she retells specifics from a white, Christian, Southern upbringing, many non-Southerners can identify with those values.

I would like to argue that it is not the specifics of Dolly's own life that appeal to her audience, even though those specifics serve to authenticate her. It is the romantic *idea* of the working class that appeals. The idea is an imagined, idyllic past, where everything is better, where people's morals are good, where you can seek refuge from the modern world. The mother becomes a central part to this fantasy and can be read as a Madonna figure; a safe, nurturing woman. The Madonna can also be spotted in songs where men long for their woman's (or mother's) arms and it can also be interpreted as a retreat from the hostile, cold world against which the man has to fight each day, and has to escape the lure of the Honky-tonk temptresses.

Coat of Many Colors: Music as a Part of the Dolly-narrative

> [M]eanings are already concealed or held within the forms of the stories themselves. Form is much more important than the old distinction between form and content. We used to think form was like an empty box, and it's really what you put into it that matters. But we are aware now that the form is actually part of the content of what it is that you are saying (Stuart Hall in McClary 2007a: 68-69).

"Coat of many colors" has been Dolly's signature song for the last 30 years. She performs it at every concert, and will often tell stories about her mother, her family and her upbringing. This way of delivering a song tightens the bond between artist and message. Whether or not what she tells onstage to introduce the song is true, a captivating story, or a little bit of both, is not as important as the *fact* that she tells these stories. The lines Dolly delivers at concerts are seldom new to her core audience, but have been retold several times before with slight variations. She uses the songs to tell stories, or tell stories to flesh out the songs. These stories may vary from interview to interview or from concert to concert, but the stories are vital to the understanding of Dolly Parton.

> Poverty, typically set in a rural context, is [a] recurring theme [in country music] (Peterson 1992: 44).

The song "Coat of Many Colors" retells a childhood incident where Dolly's mother sews a coat out of scraps and pieces of fabric donated by neighbors and how the other children make fun of her. The message is one where Dolly Parton, the little girl, reflects over the concept of riches;

But they didn't understand it and I tried to make them see
That one is only poor only if they choose to be
Now I know we had no money, but I was rich as I could be
In my coat of many colors my mama made for me
- Dolly Parton

We know there is a coat made from rags that Dolly's mother sewed herself. We have seen the pictures, and the coat[106] is also a part of a Dolly Parton-museum at Dollywood. When Dolly tells us about the biblical story her mother told her while she sewed"[107] we are being provided with a picture of a home where a little girl still sits and listens to her mother doing household

[106] That is, one of the replicas.
[107] The story referred to is found in Genesis (37:3), and tells the story "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours".

chores and reading the Bible, a very strong religious and historical image in the western world, and a very important ideal for families from the area where she is from[108].

After Dolly has established this picture for us, we now know she came from a poor, but good home with wholesome values, she situates herself as an active participant in her own life when she has to confront her peers' teasing about her being poor. The way she confronts them is through the biblical references her mother has instilled in her, and referring to her mother's love that she "sewed in every stitch", thus situating herself in a Christian value system and appearing as an individual who is not dependant on peer acknowledgement. Her *coat of many colors* was "worth more than all their clothes", in other words; love was more precious than money.

There are several reasons for Dolly making this her trademark song. The first is the authenticating of Dolly Rebecca Parton Dean, the person behind the character as well as a testimony of the virtues incarnated in the character *Dolly Parton*. She has given us an image of a girl that grew up poor and ragged, but who had a strong sense of self and was able to battle peer pressure.

> She retains pride in the old coat as a symbol of love, Divine support, and nobly endured poverty. The non-materialistic values conveyed here are grounded in southern religion and strong family ties (Banes 1992: 103).

While the song does not have any verbal references to Tennessee, the geographical location of the home where her mother did her sewing, the music does. Harmonically and instrumentally it is very straight country music, with roots in the Appalachian ballad tradition and the white gospel music that most likely was performed in the church where her grandfather preached.

To reinforce the lyrics and the Christian message she uses an organ, an instrument with a clear reference to church and not a typical country music instrument. In the intro- and first verse where she "goes wandering back though the years", the organ is situated back in the mix with the volume down and plays chords on the eight notes. When she starts singing about the domestic situation where Dolly's mother is sewing and telling stories from the Bible, the organ comes closer in the mix and starts playing melodic lines, supporting the chord progression and complementing Dolly's vocals. The organ is situated in front of the mix until we, in the story, arrive at school. Here the organ moves into the background again, playing

[108] In Sevierville, Tennessee, USA.

chords. In the second chorus; “But they didn't understand it and I tried to make them see…” where the young Dolly shows her maturity and her wholesome values stating “one is only poor only if they choose to be”, the organ again moves to the front.

> 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” (Malone 1993: 10).

The organ’s heightened presence when Dolly sings about her mother and her home signifies a Christian home, and it’s movements from front to back, correlate to that of Dolly moving from the safe space of the home, to the worldly space of the school. That the organ moves to the front of the mix when she takes a stand against the bullies, the church reference is back, thus implying that Dolly finds her strength in her religious beliefs and wholesome family values[109]. Dolly herself grew up in a home where her mother used to sing old-time ballads and religious music, and her own music is strongly influenced by this. The safety and comfort of the home and her mother’s guidance is central in the song. In her article “Women Making Music. Some Material Constraints” (Bayton 2006), Mavis Bayton discusses gender and space. Arguing that private space is coded female and public space is coded male (Bayton 2006: 350). When Dolly sings a song about home, she is being encoded as female. When Kris Kristofferson sings “Sunday Morning Coming Down”, where a man walks down a street remembering what has been and feeling alone, he’s being encoded as a male. The values Dolly was given by her mother and the safety of her home is what empowers her, whereas the man in who is kicking a can on Sunday morning has only himself to rely on. This makes the encoding that much deeper; not only do the stories take place in different spaces, but the two ‘I’-s get their strength from those spaces too. The other reason why this is a signature song for Dolly is the message. “Be yourself” and “You are special”[110] are the messages the Dolly fans in the documentary *For the Love of Dolly* (Uhlmann 2008: DVD) embraced, and that message fits both her straight and her queer audience. It also fits the American ideology where the self-made man paves his own road, and succeeds.

Now, it is a fact that the Partons were poor, and it is a fact that the region where she grew up was an impoverished area, and it is easy to imagine this little girl with her big dreams, going through the mail order catalogues with her grandmother, looking at all the things she could not buy and feeling so very, very poor. In the eyes of those who did not have these big

[109] It might also make for a very interesting intertextual analysis to compare Dolly’s story to that of Joseph, but I will not pursue that further in this essay.
[110] That “you are special” also reads as a Christian reference, everybody being special to the Lord.

dreams, she probably did exaggerate her poorness, but knowing the power her dreams had when combined with her determination we can see the link to the biblical Joseph, the dreamer, for whom God had special plans. In conversations with reverend Colin Ambrose at the St. Paul's Episcopal Church[111], he told me that the story of Joseph is interpreted to be a story linked to that of Jesus. Through suffering Joseph prevailed and became a savior, a hero to his people. In many ways Dolly can be viewed as a savior for her Appalachian people, creating job opportunities (primarily through Dollywood), drawing tourists to the region, and doing charitable work in the region (grants for students, the Imagination Library, as well as other lesser known charities). The way Dolly has helped the region, a region that historically has been poverty-stricken, has also served to increase her star status. Dolly is by many Tennesseans regarded as a generous and kind woman.

Dolly Parton had to travel quite a bit doing the Cas Walker radio show, and because of that she could escape the harsh reality of country life, at least for a while. In that socio-economic class, music was a means to escape hard physical work on the farm or in the mines, and in *Race, Rock and Elvis,* Michael Bertrand (2000) explains how escape from physically hard country life motivated Elvis Presley to seek a musical career as an escape. For Dolly the escape was twofold; escape from poverty and escape from a patriarchal culture that kept women in their place:

> I've never seen much freedom in mountain women. Maybe that's one of the reasons freedom's so important to me. Most of the women that I knew, especially mountain women with lots of children, they had a great fear of their husbands, more fear, in fact, than love, and they just didn't know what to do (Parton in Playgirl 1978: 44).

The importance of personal freedom seems to be one of the main driving forces behind Dolly Parton's career choices. As Angela Davis observes in the African-American blues singers of the early 1900s: "sexuality and travel provided the most tangible evidence of freedom" (Middleton 2006b: 113), I believe this is true for Dolly Parton and poor Appalachian women in general. While many feminists have lauded Dolly Parton's success, others found her image hard to swallow. Dolly Parton's take on feminism is not a solitary approach, but a very American one with a slight "every woman for herself" attitude. Influenced by the ideal of "rugged individualism" that has shaped much of the US political system, and possibly trying not to alienate parts of her audience, Dolly Parton has not spoke publicly to support feminist causes, still, she has been lauded as a feminist icon.

[111] St. Pauls in Murfreesboro, TN.

Today Dolly Parton is one of the most beloved stars of country music. One of the reasons is the way she has fulfilled the American Dream. Another is her likability, the ability to make people laugh *with* her, and maybe, by not taking herself too seriously, she might be forcing us to do just that. She has proven to us that Porter was right when he introduced her on that TV show 43 years ago: she ain't no dumb blonde. To get a better understanding of how the public's reception of Dolly has changed through the years, we have to look at significant changes in attitude[112]. One of the most significant changes has been within feminism.

Dolly Parton's determination and drive resulted in her leaving Nashville and going to California[113]. She explains how money and creative freedom were the primary catalysts for the move:

> When I left to try and expand, when I was one of the *big* country women, I wasn't makin' any money (Parton in Bufwack and Oermann 1987: 318).
>
> I couldn't be creative since I was hearing my music differently than the way it was being recorded. It was affecting my creativity, and I was starting to lose the desire to write since somebody else [Porter Wagoner] was taking all the credit (Parton in Playgirl 1978: 66).

When Dolly went to Hollywood[114] in the late 1970s, she was "putting legs on her dreams" and at the same time signaling a move into mass media and popular culture. Dolly leaving the more rigid system of Nashville for the liberal industry of sunny California, can also interpreted as a woman leaving the safety of home to realize her potential. By realizing her own potential she has also influenced other country artists to do the same:

> Dolly Parton paved the way for other Nashville singers to expand their careers. And while she was at it, she brought country music new validity and respectability as an art form (Bufwack and Oermann 2003: 318).

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[112] One of these changes had been the emergence and popularization of the *queer*. Maybe the celebration and normalization of the queer (through amongst others television shows; *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, Will & Grace, The L-word* and movies; *Pricilla: Queen of the Desert, Brokeback Mountain, Boys Don't Cry*) in popular culture could have resulted in many more people having queer sensibilities, but this is of course dependant on many other factors as well. As it is not within the scope of this thesis to explore the queer interpretations and appropriations of Dolly Parton, I will have to leave these questions unanswered for now.

[113] She has later described the situation she was in when doing the *Porter Wagoner Show* as a relationship where she felt exploited, and her leaving the show resulted in a legal conflict and a big economic settlement to Wagoner for breach of contract. Wagoner has later described Dolly as a person without scruples who would walk over her friends to reach her goals.

[114] Hollywood is maybe the strongest image of show business success in the western hemisphere. Hollywood is "an iconic setting for the playing out of the American dream - a place where, by dint of determination, pluck, and luck, an 'average' Joe or Jane may make, or fall into, a fortune" (D. G. Hall and Hall 2006: 346).

Humor, Sexuality and Strength: Dolly Parton, The Feminist

Dolly Parton on the cover of Playboy October 1978

I really don't know what to say when people ask me about women's liberation. My life is a special kind of life. I mean it's MY life so I don't know what it has to do with the way other women live. I'm just trying to put legs on my dreams (Dolly Parton in Linehan 2003: 30).

I like to think that women are the equal of men in most things, especially here in America where equality is important (Parton in Miller 2008: 114).

Women by nature do have it easier because they were made to be a man's helpmate, so to speak…but if a woman is smart enough and she has the desire and an ambition to do something else, that's fine to. I would prefer to be a woman because a man has to get out and work because that is just the law of the land…a woman doesn't have to unless she wants to (Parton in Miller 2008: 167).

These seemingly contradicting statements might have caused much confusion for someone who wants to embrace the very successful businesswoman and entrepreneur as a feminist. The third statement, which she gave in a 1977 Rolling Stone (Flippo) interview might prove especially difficult to understand (and certainly follows the *Beauvoirean* argument that many women stay "in their place" because of the comfort of having no responsibilities), but I believe all of these answers display a woman who is extremely concerned with individual freedom, yet tainted by social structures in work at the time[115]. Second wave feminism has a heavy middle-class undercurrent, and many of the women leading the movement would not have been listening to country music or to Dolly Parton. With a look modeled after the town

[115] Perhaps afraid of alienating her audience, perhaps afraid of not being loved, Dolly Parton does not take public political standpoints. Politicians have wanted her to support their causes, but she seems to want to avoid politics altogether, in a way creating Dolly Parton as neutral ground, a place where people with different lives and opinions might come together and just celebrate music.

tramp, Dolly's look (and success) was by many thought to have been "made" by the Patriarchy and as such represented everything that was wrong with the constructed image of femininity. When asked about feminism she answered avoidingly; "Equal rights? I love everybody…" (Parton in Grobel 1978). Dolly Parton did not mesh very well with the feminists. At the same time, Dolly did fight for liberation in her own way, and primarily for individual freedom.

A self-proclaimed "Backwoods Barbie", Dolly addresses the visual aesthetics that are in play in sculpting her image as well as the similarities to the iconic Barbie doll. The plastic 12-inch Dolly doll, complete with country outfits, are now highly priced collector's items, and signify Dolly's position as an iconic equal of Barbie. Much of the feminist critique that is put forth concerning the Barbie doll is also applicable to Dolly. When thinking about it, there are actually many similarities between them. Both Dolly and Barbie have insane body proportions (especially in front), big blonde hair, and most often dressed in pink, shiny, and frilly costumes (and both have their portraits done by pop artist Andy Warhol).

Barbie was "born" in 1959, the year Dolly turned 13, and since both are made out of plastic (one wholly, one partially), both seem to be eternally young. They are both old enough to go clubbing and have a career, but too young to start a family. Some women felt that the Barbie doll was a liberator (Heinecken 2006) because, while baby dolls forced the young girls to play mothers and caregivers, the Barbie doll let them play with the adult world, as pilots, doctors, executives, figure skaters, paleontologists and rock stars, and instead of giving them a baby, they let them have friends and boyfriends. The Barbie doll is not domestic, and neither is Dolly. Dolly Parton is not a mother and she brings home a big paycheck to the household, to a large degree supporting both her husband and her extended family.

Dolly's choice not to have children has also been a topic for the tabloids. In magazines aimed at a female audience she is portrayed as a matriarch, taking care of her extended family and

other people's children, and when asked about her childlessness[116] she often highlights her position as a caregiver:

> Outsiders will still try to create drama (or guilt) where none exists. They will ask, "Why didn't you adopt?" They don't know how special and fulfilling my relationships with my brothers and sisters and their kids are (Parton 1994: 226).

Patricia Pisters (2004: 25) argues that the pop-star Madonna, "embodies female success in a male-dominated industry" and that she "often seems to present herself as hyper-feminine and as someone 'to be looked at'". The similarities between Parton and Madonna are evident. Madonna endorses in some ways the feminist position of equality because "she has gained access to traditionally male-dominated areas and is seen to be in complete control of her career", but that at the same time several of those feminists have "violently condemned many mainstream representations of women as passive objects of desire" (Pisters 2004: 25). "Radical feminists who are offended by Madonna's use of patriarchal iconography, values and pleasures can be led to underestimate, or even deny, the progressive uses to which she can be put" (Fiske 2004: 191)[117]. This is applicable to Madonna, Barbie and Dolly Parton. For many girls and women these iconic figures are being used and appropriated, constituting popular texts which we can position ourselves against and in relation to and "come to know ourselves as individuals" (Heinecken 2006: 54).

"Deconstructive feminism" is a form of feminism which argues that gender is not essential, but a social and cultural construct. Butler theorizes gender as performance and for deconstructive feminism Dolly Parton's appeal is in the way she reveals the constructedness of gender through a hyper-feminine performance. Some feminists promote difference, and from this position Madonna's and Dolly Parton's representation of female sexuality is praised. "This group of feminists does not struggle for equality, but wants to emphasize and value the differences between men and women" (Pisters 2004: 25). While Madonna might be

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[116] Ways Dolly answer questions about her choice to not have children include an active choice, an unforeseen illness, her role as caregiver for the children in the family, so that "all children" could be hers, and notably, that her songs are her children. She often refers to her songs as her "children", and to cover versions as "her children growing up".

[117] In his discussion of Madonna Fiske (1991: 95-114) describes how Madonna is viewed differently by different audiences; 1) by some feminists as the reinscription of patriarchal values, 2) by some men as a object of voyeuristic pleasure, and 3) by many girl fans [sic] as an agent of empowerment and liberation. Even though he is quite naive in his understanding of the different audiences the point is that people with different subject positions read Madonna differently. Instead of Madonna, we could just as easily insert Dolly Parton's name, which has also been read differently by different audiences. Readings of Madonna are not necessarily as rigid as to only include objectification or appropriation, and the way he believes "girl fans" read Madonna, are not limited to girls, but might also include women and men. Fiske also avoids the queer readings of Madonna.

criticized for being too aggressive Dolly Parton plays the role of feminine assertiveness beautifully; in control, but never in a masculine position, earning her the nickname *The Iron Butterfly*, while Madonna is simply a "bitch".

> If she had come on in an aggressive feminist way she would have undoubtedly riled many of the men she needed to work with (Miller 2008: 114).

Dolly Parton, the feminist, is somewhat of a "Spice Girl", and her accomplishments certainly echo the 1990s Barbie slogan "We Girls Can Do Anything"[118]. At the same time, she emphasizes choice. To an audience that has felt alienated by academic feminism that preaches gender equality, Dolly might represent their *reality*. Whereas some feminists have viewed the housewife as subordinate to the patriarch and a victim of that patriarchy, those women who inhabit that position might not feel that their subject position makes them a lesser being. In the Appalachian regions the women have had power:

> Although this culture is generally perceived as strongly patriarchal (a perception largely due to the work of early male "ethnographers", such as John C. Campbell), studies by women who have examined the culture challenge that assumption; they see instead a gender-based system of coexisting models for cultural practice, whereby Appalachian women maintain a great deal of power within and through a façade of patriarchal control (Wilson 2001: 291).

After being a target for feminists on account of her appearance for so long, she was in 1987 defended by well-known feminist Gloria Steinem, when she chose Dolly Parton as one of the *Women of the Year*:

> People who haven't listened to Dolly Parton or to feminism may be surprised to learn that they go together. In fact, she has crossed musical class lines to bring work, real life, and strong women into a world of pop music usually dominated by unreal romance. She had used her business sense to bring other women and poor people along with her. And her flamboyant style has turned all the devalued symbols of womanliness to her own ends. If feminism means each of us finding our unique power, and helping other women do the same, Dolly Parton certainly has done both (Steinem 1987: 66).

As one of the other icons of our time, the archetype of feminine hypersexuality: Marilyn Monroe, Dolly Parton's performance suggests simultaneously both childlike pleasure[119] and sexual delight. She might be a little naughty, but the limits are always very clear, not in an aggressive manner, but through humor. Playing the part of the "country gal", Parton is seen as

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[118] A slogan used by Mattel in the 1990s to market the Barbie doll.

[119] The combination of sexuality and innocence is voiced by Dolly in her 1994 biography where she retells stories from childhood about exploring her sexuality, playing with the boys, and her connection between sexuality and religiosity.

knowledgeable yet playful, and even though she is a sex symbol, she is not the *femme fatale* that Madonna is:

> Despite her naughty side, she did not wield the same threat as other sex symbols like Mae West and Madonna, women who one can imagine would not only be capable of but might even enjoy castrating a man (Hall 2006: 490).

"Much of Dolly Parton's power is drawn from her ownership of her own sexuality" (Linehan 2003: 31), and her image is carefully crafted in a way that simultaneously exploits male fantasies while maintaining her dignity *and* is in complete control. While Loretta Lynn positions herself "as a real woman with real problems similar to those of the women in [her] audience" (Linehan 2003: 32), Dolly Parton's star persona is just that; the Star. Many women do not put themselves in Dolly's place because she is such an over-the-top personality, but a lot of them admire her determination, success, generosity and her down-home demeanor. In terms of women's liberation, Dolly (in the song "Better Get to Livin'" from the album *Backwoods Barbie)* asks people to stop complaining about their situation and go out and do something about it:

You better get to livin', givin'
A little more thought about bein'
A little more willin' to make a better way

Fiske (2004: 191) asks if progressive use of popular art might be politically more effective than radical art, and in the case of Dolly Parton, she does seem to have caught the attention of some of the women who felt alienated from the "women's lib" movement. Wilson views Dolly's feminism as a feminism of difference, celebrating women's power through exploitation of the male gaze:

> Parton has made public what had previously been tacid or private strategies used by rural, working-class, Southern Appalachian women to negotiate power for themselves within patriarchy and the capitalist class structure…Parton is not an anomaly, but is instead drawing upon a model of feminine action in which women subvert, and gain strength from within, the dominant patriarchal system (Wilson 2001: 294).

Pamela Wilson employs Michel de Certeau's theories of resistance practiced by working classes within a capitalist class structure to explain how negotiation of power between genders can take form:

> De Certeau's model is one of subversion from within an order of power: not overthrowing or necessarily transforming it, but exploiting its resources (time and materials) for one's own purposes, constructing one's own space and strategies for action within the boundaries, and tactically identifying

> and exploiting the loopholes in the structure of dominance to acquire power for oneself (Wilson 2001: 294).

Through flirting and humor Dolly Parton takes control of her own situation. Telling self-deprecating jokes before anyone else has had the opportunity to make fun of her keeps the ball in her court. Dolly's feminist resistance is not political, not solidaric, not equality-oriented and not theoretic, but is concerned with individual freedom, righteousness and with lived lives. Some feminists promote difference, and from this position Madonna's and Dolly Parton's representation of female sexuality is praised.

> "Feminism, class, and regional/ethnic consciousness become personal rather than political, rhetorical, or structural issues for women like Dolly Parton. She represents a type of popular feminism that has little knowledge of or use for the political rhetoric of the women's movement" (Wilson 2001: 295).

Because her feminism is based on the American ideal of personal freedom, emotions, humor and a sense of righteousness, she is able to reach segments of the population that are beyond the reach of academic feminist rhetoric. While cultural visibility does not translate automatically into social power, as McClary (2007e: 206) argues, Dolly Parton's feminist rhetoric does voice the concerns many women have about sexual double morals, as well as celebrating femininity and *girl power*.

The Narrative Narrated:

I need my husband for love…and other men for my work.
But I don't depend on any man for my strength.
–Dolly Parton

Within the artist Dolly Parton the image, the music and the narrative come together to form a picture of the Star;

- An image that simultaneously attracts men and women, portraying an innocent sexuality which through humor disarms critics.
- A very talented singer, musician and songwriter who is strong and determined but not bitchy. Through songs she is telling who she is, showing values, history and attitude, which with a focus on romance and sexuality puts women in control.
- A narrative that through media is shaped and appropriated by the audience, avoids taking political stands, but advocates individual freedom and the American Dream.

Dolly's narrative in form reflects Horatio Alger's novels: that material success results from dogged individual determination and "doing well by doing good". The idea that personal success depends on "doing good" (being determined, working hard and making noble choices) has had a tremendous influence on American culture. This year president Barack Obama has made some important first steps to establish a universal health care system, but if we are to judge a society after how they treat their poor, the United States of America does not come across as very civilized. Problems with the assumption that "each American is a potential millionaire", and that *anyone* can become a success, has been explored in books, plays and movies, and the truth is that social mobility is low in the US compared to Scandinavia. Dolly's story is true, but, as Dolly says; it is *hers*, and for each Dolly Parton there are thousands of others who might have had the talent but not her stroke of luck. Pierre Bourdieu's writings on class address some of the mechanics that regulate social mobility, most importantly that power reproduces itself through systems that seem natural, and the American Dream is a manifestation of one such system. Goad (1997: 23) observes: "[w]hite-trash pathologies are almost never seen as a response to environmental factors". Goad argues that those who are viewed as "white trash" are thought to be lazy, stupid and as having questionable sexual morals, and that it is because of this that they do not succeed; they are not "doing good" therefore not "doing well". Instead of attributing this to lack of education and opportunities and negative stereotyping, the individuals who do not succeed within the American system are thought to have only themselves to blame.

4: Songs and Stories

In my songs, I can do and say almost whatever I want. I can live out my fantasies, and 'cause of this I'll be flying until I fall dead. I just won't give up, I won't be a'dyin' on the ground. No way. I just won't let that happen (Parton in Playgirl 1978: 76).

Through her long career her skills as a songwriter have been central to how she is seen as an artist, but she has both covered other artist's songs and her songs have been covered by other artists. The best known Parton song to be covered by another artist is probably Whitney Houston's 1992 hit "I Will Always Love You", but today, in her 7th decade as an artist Parton also refers to herself (her past and ideas of who Dolly Parton is and has been viewed as), and she also "covers" herself (rediscovering songs or re-recording songs). In 2009 the 1980 movie *Nine to Five,* which had been a great success for Dolly, both as an actress and as an artist, premiered as a musical (*9 to 5*). This musical featured new music written by Dolly Parton and the character Doralee Jones, played by Dolly in the original movie, was given a signature song, "Backwoods Barbie", which Dolly made, interestingly enough, the title track and first single off her 2009 album. In her autobiography (Parton 1994: 228) she describes the conversation that she had with her manager Sandy Gallin:

> "But I'm not an actress," I argued, not at all sure.
> "Then don't be an actress," said Sandy, "be yourself. This part is exactly like you. Just be yourself."

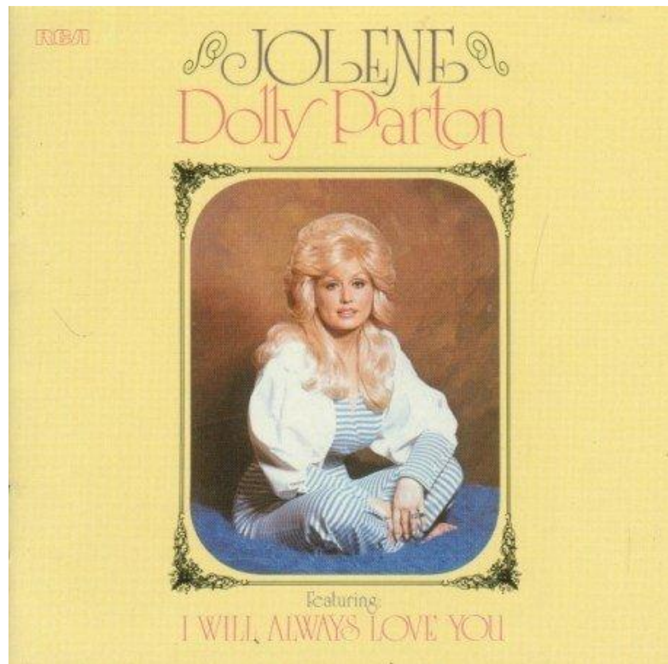
The fact that "Backwoods Barbie" was the signature song for the character Dolly originally played and a self-biographical first single of her 2009 album indicates that she views herself as an act, and that "Doralee" was the Dolly act under a different name.

Because of her long career she continues to reference herself in her own work and her (often humorous) references to herself as portrayed in the media are an important tool for my musical analyses in intertextual readings. Through her frequent appearances in the press, her image has been shaped, interpreted and re-interpreted in a dialogue between Dolly and her audience. All of this along with knowledge of her philanthropic endeavors is constantly reflected when we listen to her songs, whether performed by Dolly or someone else. This self-reflexivity is especially at play in "Backwoods Barbie", where the lyrics tell us something about Dolly Parton's own thoughts about her "trashy" look:

I've always been misunderstood because of how I look
Don't judge me by the cover 'cause I'm a real good book
So read into it what you will, but see me as I am
The way I look is just a country girl's idea of glam

Country songs are closely tied to their singers, and the songs are carefully chosen (or written) to fit that artist's image. Dolly Parton has had a very successful career as a singer, but for many her great success as a songwriter is a secret. As one of popular music's greatest wordsmiths, her songs have been recorded and performed by many artists, across country, rock and pop genres. The biggest selling Dolly-song recorded by somebody else is Whitney Huston's version of "I Will Always Love You" from 1992. Every episode of the *Dolly!*-show ended with Dolly singing "I Will Always Love You" looking into the camera, sending a message of love to her audience sitting at home. Originally written as a declaration of her affection towards her long-time business partner, Porter Wagoner, after they went separate ways in the mid-70s, many people do not even know Dolly sang the original version, but believe that it was written for (or by) Whitney Huston. The main reason for this is that Whitney Huston had a huge international success with her recording. Another major reason (which is tied in with the first) is the genre Whitney operates within. Country music has recently reemerged on the pop charts, but we need not go further back than to the beginning of this first decade of the new millennium to see that country music isn't always *popular* music. Modern R'n'B (which Whitney Huston represents) has a much more prominent position as *pop*. Compared to Huston's version, Dolly's "I Will Always Love You" might seem simple, or even *boring*. If your ears are used to hearing a certain version of the song, it is not only the vocals or the lyrics that you remember, even though they might be easier to recollect and express. The *sound* is more difficult to explain, and is therefore often overlooked. If an R'n'B production, a genre known for an opaque mediation, is your point of reference, the country music production which has a transparent mediation, might very well come across as "boring". For a country fan, on the other hand, Dolly's version might come across as more sincere, as the message is not being masked by the performance, a trait highly valued in country music. These differences of opinion are matters of different aesthetics, not necessarily of the different versions' quality, and should be understood as such. Still, growing up with Whitney Huston's version, it is not possible for me to listen to Dolly's version without having Huston's version mentally playing within the background. This is a case where one version of a song rubs off and stains another. I want to pursue this phenomenon, the phenomenon of intertextuality, in my analysis of "Jolene".

Jolene



Released on the album with the same name, "Jolene" became Dolly's first major European hit. Produced by Bob Ferguson, one of the creators of the Nashville sound, this song sits well within the tradition of well-produced, slick recordings. It is recognized as the first "crossover" hit for Dolly Parton, and along with top placements on the country charts, it did well on the pop charts in the US as well as the UK. "Jolene" is one of the songs recognized as a "Dolly-song" by a mainstream audience, and is a song that has become one of the *classics* widely referenced and covered by other artists. The song's commercial success opened the doors to the European market and also marked the beginning of Dolly Parton's venture into the pop mainstream. "Jolene" is a song that showcase Parton's talent for songwriting; it has a catchy melody and touching lyrics which work well together, and thematically it deals with issues that are universally human; loss, love and vulnerability. In concerts and interviews Dolly tells stories about how the song came about, often inserting it into the Dolly Parton narrative. I became fascinated with the way these stories changed when told to different audiences and wanted to explore them further. What I found was a narrative full of contradictions, which at the same time revealed different truths about Dolly Parton.

On the album, "Jolene" is the first track on the A-side, while "I Will Always Love You" is the first track on the B-side. One of the most striking things about the music on the album is that the first tracks on both sides have much more of a pop sound than the other tracks (which are more traditional country). In terms of thinking of the album as a *totality* (as many rock artists of the time did), *Jolene*[120] is more of a collection of Dolly-songs, and seems to be produced with the single in mind; a couple of successful singles would sell the album.

[120] Throughout the chapter I will differentiate between "Jolene" (the song), *Jolene* (the album) and Jolene (the character).

The instruments used in the recording are fairly typical of countrypolitan; two acoustic guitars, drums, piano, double bass playing alternate fifths with some fills, steel guitar and violins playing long lines, following each other, almost coloring the recording. The steel guitar, which enters on the first verse, is one of the most typical of all country music instruments, and together with Dolly Parton's twangy vocals, they signify the genre. The style of bass being played is very typical of country music, the piano is played in a honky-tonk style and the drums are played rock-style.

Overall, in terms of volume and intensity, there is no huge buildup, no great differences, but we are in a mezzo-forte landscape throughout, with minor crescendos and decrescendos. Dynamically the buildup of the song is based on the introduction of new instruments[121], and together with the even alternating fifths in the bass and steady drums, the syncopated guitar and the long lines in the steel guitar and the violins provide a rich rhythmical tapestry which supports Parton's vocals. "Jolene" sounds like the most thoroughly produced track of the *Jolene*-album, reminiscent of Phil Spector's "Wall of Sound". More syncopated than the average country song, there are no rhythmical breaks and deviations and the highlights are not found in the rhythm, but in the lyrics and the harmonics.

The song begins with two guitars, one panned to the left and the other to the right in the mix. The left guitar starts out playing a kind of tremolo, striking a chord seemingly as fast as possible; a sound similar to that of violins playing tremolos, but slightly more metallic. This creates a sense of tension and suspense, a mood which lasts throughout the song. After about 20 seconds, at the second half of the opening refrain, the guitar starts picking melodic lines. The guitar panned to the right starts off playing the catchy syncopated melodic hook:

It switches between playing melodic lines and the syncopated melodic figure, but always playing the figure (sometimes with another start note) at the end of each stanza of the verse. When Dolly delivers the lines of the first verse (at 0.32 minutes) the steel guitar enters, panned to the right, falling stepwise, creating almost a whining sound, before moving

[121] In the third verse the guitar panned to the left has been replaced by a piano, but it is, together with the steel guitar reintroduced between the third (and last) verse and the last two refrains, creating a crescendo.

stepwise up, accompanied by the violins, panned to the left. At the end of the vocal line the other instruments move forward in the mix, filling the space left by the vocals. In the second part of the refrains (at 0.22, 1.30 and 2.15) Dolly's vocals are doubled on the last two "Jolene-s" – by Parton herself. The vocal doubling, a third over the melody, is thin and airy, a type of voice associated with begging, where a thin, childlike voice is used as an attempt to get sympathy. The vocal line "please don't take my man" is syncopated, and delivered slightly behind the beat creating a feeling of effort, as if the words are hard to voice. The syncopated melodic figure in the guitar and the syncopated vocal deliverance create a rhythmic pull through the song, like a cartwheel turning, the events unfolding seem unstoppable. The song fades out after the fourth refrain, the backup voices escorting the instruments out with an airy "Jole-e-ene", providing no closure. Dragged by this rhythmical wagon, Dolly Parton's "Jolene" has a feeling of inevitability, of slowly being dragged to the end of the road, caught in a downwards spiral from which our heroine cannot escape.

Tonal ambivalence in a modern lament

The song is organized in periods of ten and eleven bars (two beats in a bar, ten bars in the refrain, eleven in the verses, repeated). This type of organization is not typically found in countrypolitan, but is not unheard of[122].

Intro	C#m	C#m	C#m	C#m	C#m	C#m	C#m	C#m
	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i

Refrain (repeated)	C#m	E	B	C#m	C#m	B	B	C#m	C#m	C#m	C#m
	i	III	VII	i	i	VII	VII	i	i	i	i

Verse (repeated)	C#m	E	B	C#m	B	B	C#m	C#m	C#m	C#m
	i	III	VII	i	VII	VII	i	i	i	i

Roughly, "Jolene" consists of three chords: C#, E and B, where c is the root note[123]. Unlike most country songs, the tonality of "Jolene" is not functional harmony. The seventh of the scale is lowered, but the sixth is never played, so though it has a modal feel, I shall settle with calling it a minor modality. The melody of "Jolene" might be read as pentatonic with an extra note, the d#. The d# in C# minor pentatonic creates suspense, and is introduced in the melody

[122] Johnny Cash would for example often have an open relationship with the number of bars in a song; this was especially the case when he performed live. In The Carter Family's "Keep on the Sunny Side" they drop a beat at the end of the verses, going into the refrain seemingly losing a beat.

[123] In the 1974 recording "Jolene" is in C#m, but Dolly switches between C#m and Cm when she does the song live.

at the end of the first phrase of the refrain. It is interesting to note that the d# also carries the message of the song; “don’t take my man”. The function of this is that the message is highlighted, indicating suspense and frustration:

C#m E B C#m
Jo - lene, Jo - lene, Jo - lene, Jo - lene, I'm
B C#m
beg-ging of you please don't take my man.
E B C#m
Jo - lene, Jo - lene, Jo - lene, Jo - lene,
B C#m
please don't take him just be- cause you can.

Throughout the song, from the tremolo in the guitar in the intro, the rhythmical motif in the guitar and the cries from the steel guitar, to the overreaching progression, there lays an almost tangible something which is never resolved. The root note is c#, but even thought the melody flows between c#1 and c#2, no tension is resolved. Instead of functional harmonics leading the melody from start to finish, there is never a conflict or a tonal resolution in “Jolene”. Throughout the songs the melody is conjunct. Within the verses the melody moves step-wise within a fifth, and when the melody reaches the fifth, it is drawn back by the tonic, creating a feeling of deep inbreaths and heavy sighs. The impression I get is one of a character who is sorrowful and borderline whiny, but does not want to confront Jolene face-to-face; a polar opposite to Loretta Lynn’s more assertive character in “You Ain’t Woman Enough (To Take My Man)” and “Fist City”, where the tonality is more typical of country music and the functional harmonics help support the melody, building it up in terms of conflict and resolution. When discussing the portrayals of women in country music, this corresponds with Dolly Parton’s and Loretta Lynn’s different performances of femininity. Dolly Parton’s “Jolene” is in many ways more like a traditional lament, a female song tradition (Wood 2006)

where the feminine is submissive and lacking agency, without any real influence over her faith she has no other option than to beg for herself.

While Dolly portrays a heteronormative femininity, Loretta has been perceived as more wholesome, more down-to-earth, hands-on and rugged, performing songs where the female protagonist is strong and in charge (of her reproduction in "The Pill", of her relationships in "Don't Come Home a'Drinking") and deals with the problems ordinary working-class women faced ("One's On The Way"). Loretta Lynn is herself a mother and has gone through a divorce, and is in many ways more of a traditional country music heroine. During the second wave of feminism of the 1970s, many working class women felt alienated. This alienation should, according to Linehan (2003), be seen in relation to the situations women from different areas and social classes faced. Where women in New York marched for rights in the work place, Working class women were forced to work to feed their families. Also, working class women would probably have felt alienated by the language of the academic feminists, women with whom they did not necessarily have as much in common with as they did with their husbands, brothers and fathers. Dolly's songs also fight for women's equality. While Loretta's characters move around in the public space, Dolly's women fight for equality in the home, and especially in the bedroom. "Bargain Store" and "Just Because I'm a Woman" both deal with the double standards in terms of women's and men's sexual experience. "To Daddy" is about a woman who leaves her husband in search of love and comfort he hasn't given her and in "Daddy" the protagonist, a 23-year old daughter asks her father not to leave her mother for a younger woman with the words "You've taken her best years, so don't leave her now". These songs, rather than advocating equality or civil rights, voice some of the practical concerns working class women meet.

Lyrics and voice in "Jolene"

In a pop song the voice is present "as a musical instrument; as a body; as a person; and as a character" (Frith 1996: 187). I want to look at these different aspects of the voice in "Jolene". As an instrument, the country music voice ideal is nasal and slightly twangy. Dolly is a soprano and in "Jolene" she keeps within the soprano range; she is not pushing at the top or the bottom, and sings with her chest voice throughout. Even though Dolly's style of singing has that nasal quality, her voice is very clear. Singing certain words, her voice has slight breaks and sighs, breaking on the word "green" in the first verse, and sighs in "crying" in the

third verse and “whatever” in the sixth verse. This way of coloring the vocals creates a vocal performance more similar to spoken language and more alive, providing Dolly with a better power of persuasion, making it seem more authentic.

In the refrain, Dolly’s voice moves between c#1 and c#2, and the melody visits all steps of the scale except the sixth. The name “Jolene” is sung four times in a rising order; first the keynote, then the third, the fifth, followed by the figure d#2-c#2-d#2-g#1, before the melody is drawn back to the keynote with the words “I’m begging of you please don’t take my man”. ‘Jolene’ is then sung again with the same pattern, drawn back with “Please don’t take him just because you can”. The narrative voice is calling her rival’s name, each time with increasing volume and urgency, before she breaks the plea, not being able to sustain the d#2, her voice breaking, falling back to the fifth, where she delivers her message.

Throughout “Jolene” Dolly is slightly ahead of the beat, and in the refrain the first syllable of “Jo(-lene)” is delivered on the quarter note upbeat and the “-lene” on the first beat of the first bar. The feeling of the refrain is one where I am drawn down in the undertow, almost reaching safety with “I’m begging of you”, where “I’m” is delivered on the upbeat and “be(gging)” on the first beat, I am again drawn back with the almost chant-like “Jolene”, and am finally released when “Please” falls on the beat, the only phrase of the refrain to actually start on the first beat. The effect of this is that the word “please” gains clarity, is sharper, and the likeness of “Jolene” to a plea becomes more pronounced.

Dolly Parton is known to speak some of the lines in a song, such as in the fourth verse of “I Will Always Love You”, where she proclaims the words “I hope life treats you kind…” in rhythm over the accompaniment. The use of exhale, rests, breaks, sighs, dynamics and other effects is maybe the main reason why “Jolene” is a song that is experienced as true heartache. The effects employed are the same traits as we imagine someone with heartache would have expressed. In “Jolene” I interpret the breaks and sighs as signifiers of grief, melancholy, depression and emotional pain.

The theme of “Jolene” is quite common in country music, but the way the topic is being dealt with is not so typical. It is often referenced as a “cheatin’ song”, but in terms of Buckley’s account of lyrics in country music, “Jolene” is slightly different from other cheatin’ songs. We do not know the age, gender or geographical location of the people in the narrative. We just know that the narrative voice feels threatened by this beautiful “other woman,” and as

such deals with issues of "[l]oneliness, trust, suffering, insecurity, human weakness and personal dignity", which, according to Buckley (1993: 199) are "all constant, integral parts of the country idiom". At the same time, there is space for interpretation, and as such, it appeals to a much broader audience than many other country songs. In the story the protagonist begs the beautiful Jolene to leave her man alone. Other than the fact that the protagonist's *man* is attracted to Jolene, we do not know anything about the personal relationship between the characters, the events leading up to this conflict, nor are we given any hint of what is going to happen. We are only given a glimpse of an emotion, a moment in time, like looking at a still picture or listening to an aria, we do not know what Jolene thinks or what the *man* is going to do, and not even if the protagonist will find the courage to fight this or just let herself be caught in the maelstrom.

The song is a desperate plea - not confrontational, not aggressive – but emotional, weak and humble. The "other woman," Jolene, does not need to be a part of the conflict, but the conflict might rather be the narrative voice's inner conflict. Tonally, there is never any climax; there is no build-up to a point where the energy is released, where the energy explodes as the protagonist confronts Jolene. Lyrically, the phrase "I had to have this talk with you" indicates that the narrator is having a conversation with Jolene, but we never hear Jolene's side of the story. Jolene, the character is and remains passive in all aspects of the song.

Jolene, the character

"Jolene" might be experienced as authentic by way of first person authenticity, because of the way Dolly incorporates this song into the *Dolly Parton narrative*. There are at least five different stories about the real-life Jolene, retold in interviews and on stage, two of which situate Jolene as Dolly Parton's romantic rival, trying to take her husband, the media-shy Carl Dean. In the first story Carl is smitten by a beautiful Nashville bank teller, but there is never anything more than flirting. In the second story Dolly explains how she physically fought with Jolene and was beat half to death with her own wig:

> This is a story about a lil' redheaded girl who was tryin' to steal my husband back in the late 60's. And you know women do that sort of thing, right? Well, I want you to know, she didn't get him, I fought that red-headed woman like a wild cat. She jerked my wig off and almost beat me to death with it. She beat the tar outta me, but I kept my husband. I got that sucker home, and I beat the tar outta him. Her name was Jolene (Parton 1983: VHS).

These two stories serve to authenticate Dolly's song (and the Dolly Parton persona), grounding it in a real-life experience. We are already predisposed to hear the voice as "*personally* expressive" (Frith 1996: 187), and when we are provided with a story that gives life to the characters, the effect is reinforced, and we are more likely to hear the song as *truth*.

In other interviews Parton gives a more realistic account of the creation of "Jolene":

> It's not my own story, but it's a story I've seen happen over and over again, and I know that if I had to beg for the man I loved I wouldn't let my pride get in the way or stop me either. I love just as deep, see, and if I thought: the man I loved was gonna be taken away from me and I had any chance to save it, why, I'd get down on my knees and beg if I had to. (Parton in Playgirl 1978: 64)

> "There really was a Jolene…but nothing like this happened to me" (Waddell)[124].

> I was hitting the licks at the beginning of the song to fit the name and gradually the whole song was born. Then I realized that I'd carried that name around in my mind ever since meeting that little girl [a girl about 12 years old who gave Dolly a school picture to give to Porter signed; "To Porter, Love Jolene"]. I hope she knows she inspired the song, wherever she is (Waddell).

These stories, while probably closer to the truth, are not show material.

Dolly in Jolene

Dolly's voice as a person shines through in the way she portrays Jolene. Physically Jolene is very different from Dolly herself. Whereas Dolly is blonde, Jolene has long, auburn hair. Dolly's eyes are dark gray, Jolene's are emerald green. Jolene is a "beauty beyond compare", while Dolly Parton has a low self image, and according to Miller (2008) only started to feel good about herself until the mid 1990s after loosing a lot of weight. Jolene's voice is "soft like summer rain", but Dolly has a high, nasal voice; "a lot of people can't stand the sound of my voice" (Dolly Parton in Miller 2008: 78). Jolene might or might not be a real person, but she *is* in many ways the polar opposite of Dolly.

Even though Dolly as a stage persona appears to be very self-confident, many things imply that she is, or at least used to be, very self-conscious. She is not comfortable being naked in front of people, even her own tailors, and used to change inside the bathroom of the women's wardrobe (two by two feet) on the Porter Wagoner Show. In a 1977 interview Porter Wagoner recalls:

[124] Year is not stated in the document. It is probably a marketing campaign promoting a new radio show in the late 1970s; "Country Crossroads". It is a part of the digital archives at the Country Music Hall of Fame.

> I just accidentally knocked Dolly's wig off. Her hair was matted down real tight to her head, and she did look pretty bad. Well, that just damn near killed her. It was just such a terrible, terrible thing; she cried about it. And of course, I felt awful, because I didn't mean to knock her wig off. But I learned then how sensitive she was (Porter Wagoner in Miller 2008: 103).

Having had so much plastic surgery done, and by using so much makeup and so many wigs, implies that she was not very happy with her own looks. Because Jolene is Dolly's opposite, it is not unlikely that the traits she gives Jolene are the ones she wishes she had herself. In this way Dolly Parton's personal voice shines through in "Jolene", a voice of a woman who has issues about her own looks. Even if Jolene is not a person of flesh and blood, she mirrors Dolly Parton.

> Because she had everything I didn't, like legs, you know. She was about six feet tall and had all the stuff that some little short, sawed-off honky like me don't have. So no matter how beautiful a woman may be, you're always threatened by certain…you're always threatened by other women, period (Dolly Parton in Vitale 2008: URL)

On the other hand, Jolene could also be a more general character, namely the *Temptress.* "Cheatin' songs" are one of the most common types of songs in country music (Buckley 1993), and the situation is usually that of another person breaking up a stable couple (preferably married, but this is not spoken explicitly in "Jolene"). In "Jolene" Dolly Parton voices a fear many couples have; the fear of losing a cherished other to someone better than you; someone younger, more beautiful, more talented, smarter, or richer.

"Jolene" in "Jolene": About Intertextuality.

Since Dolly recorded "Jolene" in 1973, the song has taken on many different values and also a life of its own. No piece of music comes out of a vacuum, and "Jolene" must be read from a social-historical point of view. "All texts make sense only through their relationships (explicit or implicit) with other texts" (Lacasse 2000: 62). In the introductory chapter to *Analyzing Popular Music*, Allan Moore (2003: 15) provides two statements; musical meaning is not stable, musical meaning cannot be discussed without referring to individuals who have meanings about the music, and these opinions should be explained with "close attention to matters of difference between related sounds."

While "Jolene" is connected to pre-existing texts, it has also become a text that is present in other texts, most notably, in cover versions. Two well known cover versions of "Jolene" were released in 2004; Norwegian jazz group Susanna and Magical Orchestra's, and American rock

band The White Stripes' versions of "Jolene". The two cover versions are stylistically very different. Susanna and the Magical Orchestra's versions are very tender and sensitive, with a minimal arrangement, capturing the childlike vulnerability of the narrative voice (and maybe also Dolly Parton). The White Stripes' version is much harsher, more desperate, Jack White more or less screaming the Jolene's name.

Jolene is the name of the woman that the narrator feels subordinate to. Looking at the lyrics, the narrative voice might be female or male. The lyrics "You could have your choice of men, but I could never love again. He's the only one for me, Jolene" does not reveal the gender of the narrator. In terms of the lyrical content it may might as well be a man who is in a relationship with another man, but is afraid to lose him to a woman (a fear often voiced in same-gender relationships where one or both is bisexual). Interpreted this way, Jolene might be viewed as the embodiment of womanhood itself, seen from the standpoint of the lyricist. Jolene is a feminine woman; a beauty with a soft voice, with enough sex appeal to get whoever she desires.

The White Stripes. Photo: Patrick Pantano

In The White Stripes'[125] version of "Jolene", the singer is male. In terms of timbre, he is rather androgynous (the part could just as easily have been a deep woman's voice, like Patti Smith). Jack's look is also quite androgynous; mid-length hair, slim, shaved, he looks the part of a 1960s British rocker, or an "Emo kid"[126]. Jack White's vocals on "Jolene" are high pitched, a common range in rock. High, grained vocals are a sign of authenticity, that he is "feeling" what he is

[125] The White Stripes is an American rock duo which consists of Jack and Meg White. Inspired by punk rock, country, blues and folk, they are often categorized as *alternative* rock. In terms of the rock tradition (and western performance tradition) The White Stripes are quite unique, because Meg White accompanies her former husband on the drums, a traditionally regarded 'male' instrument, while Jack White is the lead singer. Jack plays the guitar on "Jolene". It is also interesting to notice that The White Stripes, like Dolly, have had a distinct media strategy. They only use the colors red, white and black, strong signal colors. They have also created a lot of media attention around their personal relationship; whether they were siblings or husband and wife, and they have let the rumors about incest circulate unchallenged.

[126] "Emo" is short for *emotional*, and is a style of rock where there has been given room for negative emotions such as anger, grief, insecurity, to be voiced and explored. "Emo"-boys have been interpreted as feminine, probably due to their musical preoccupation with emotions, and their visual style (makeup, jewelry and long or stylized hairdos). In some ways "emo" is the private made public, emotions explored in song. For further discussion on "emo" and emotional authenticity, see Tongson (2006).

singing. In *Running with the Devil* Robert Walser writes on the heavy metal vocal timbre that; "[h]eavy metal vocalists project brightness and power by overdriving their voices (or by seeming to)" (Walser 1993: 45). This vocal ideal fits with The White Stripes persona, but whose voice are we hearing when Jack begs Jolene not to take his man?

Middleton writes on popular songs of the nineteenth century that "songs were identified as often as not with their most celebrated performers rather than with their composers" (Middleton 2000c: 60), a trend which has been continued in the West since. This influences the reception of Jack White's "Jolene". Even though the lyrics might create a space where gender bending could be done, and it could be a man who asks Jolene to stay away from his man, there is another voice present; that of Dolly Parton. Against Dolly's clear, clean soprano, Jack's vocals sound muddier, and rather nonchalant. Jack's subdued tone in the White Stripes "Jolene" contrasts Dolly's pleading, moaning urgency in the line "Jolene, Jolene, I'm begging of you…", and therefore tints Jack's performance with irony. I simply am not convinced that he is afraid of this beautiful woman stealing his man. In terms of questions surrounding his sexual identity, there are none. Dolly's voice, the narrative voice, is the one we hear. For Dolly Parton, this has been one of her biggest hits, and maybe the most popular of her songs. "Jolene" is first and foremost a "Dolly-song", and is tied closer to her than for example "I Will Always Love You". Because Dolly is both the songwriter and the best known performer of "Jolene", she is present in The White Stripes' version. "Jolene" has been a big hit for Dolly Parton and because she is such an iconic figure in popular culture, she is influencing the reception of The White Stripes' "Jolene" without being physically or referentially present in the music. At the same time as Dolly influences how we hear cover versions of "Jolene", The White Stripes' version might be present in other covers. It is therefore obvious that intertextuality becomes important when doing an interpretation of a song, and also when interpreting the original version of a song that has been covered later. The way The White Stripes is present in Dolly Parton's "Jolene" might yield some interesting perspectives. The way a song is appropriated by certain segments of the audience influences how we hear that song[127]. The way the lyrics are open for appropriation lends well to a queer audience. For the queer audience Dolly as a country music artist and as a gay icon are inevitably tied together.

[127] It is very difficult to listen to Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive" without thinking of the prominent position the song has as a *drag* song and a gay anthem. "Jolene" is also often used in drag shows, in a Dolly drag performance.

"You wouldn't believe how much money it takes to look this cheap" is one of the most popular and best known Dolly Parton quotes. By referencing herself as "white trash", a phrase that historically has been negatively charged, she is through a process of appropriation, changing the content of the term and creating another subject position from within the group that has been labeled. By referencing her look in this manner, she is also displaying her socio-cultural roots, making the appropriation of "white trash" a type of second person authentification. She is "telling it like it is", a popular voice for an "unpopular" class. The curious case of Dolly Parton is a complex collage of a woman with creative control over her output, and who pays conscious attention to image. As a songwriter she invokes a God-given talent; "A strange feeling comes over me, almost like being in a trance…When you are talented I think much of the inspiration is spiritual, from God" (Dolly Parton in Miller 2006: 163). Dolly is authenticating her musicianship by referencing religion; as such it is simultaneously a matter of second- and third person authenticity. By expressing that her musical talent comes from God, she is authenticating her own art through Him. At the same time she is expressing a belief in God, signaling a belonging to a segment of the audience which believes in God, as well as resonating some of the modern new-religiosity where God is thought of as a force which resides within all humans.

Before 1973, Dolly Parton addressed a predominantly white heteronormative American audience[128]. To earn credibility as a country music artist, she refers to her impoverished childhood, her strong family ties, her marriage, her femininity and her religiosity. As her career as a crossover artist bloomed, she has achieved a position where she can take a stand without loosing her audience, but still, Dolly does not openly support any political party and does not take any political stances. Dolly Parton seems to try and create an apolitical space where people who are different can live in harmony. This might reflect a need to be loved by all. In terms of values, she is viewed through European lenses as conservative, but through her openness she has also embraced sexual minorities and those who are "a little different". The documentary *For the Love of Dolly* (Uhlman 2008: DVD) explores the relationship Dolly Parton has with her audience. She supports controversial themes like the gay cause, but is

[128] The culture Dolly grew up in, which in Peterson's terms, constitute her *core* audience, uphold those same values that Dolly communicates. When Dolly performs "Coat of Many Colors", where the central themes are family, religion and individualism, it is a part of an authentification process. That night in January 1946, when Dolly was born, the doctor who delivered her was paid with a sack of grains, is today worth somewhere between 200 and 500 million dollars.

heavily influenced by the American ideal of individual freedom; everyone is free to do what they like.

Dolly Parton, the feminist, is maybe first and foremost an individualist. The songs she writes most often concern problems that befall women and children; “Down From Dover”, “Me and Little Andy”, and often fronts a feminist view; “Just Because I’m a Woman”, “Bargain Store”, “Eagle When She Flies”, and she practically always writes from a woman’s point of view. “Jolene” has been criticized for portraying a weak woman, and has been compared to the songs of Loretta Lynn, where hard-hitting-women (“Fist City”, “You Ain’t Woman Enough to Take My Man”) stand their ground, but I believe “Jolene” encapsulates that fear many women (and men) carry; that someday someone better looking will make him/her leave. By displaying vulnerability Dolly has won many fans, and the song’s open lyrics (both thematically; weighing the feeling of inadequacy more than the story, and lyrically; not stating any explicit gender) has made this country song more universally available, across borders of country-, gender- and sexuality. In the words of Gloria Steinem:

> All this has been accomplished with her country accent intact, and a populist taste for tight, bright clothes that emphasize, and never apologizes for, a body that is mythically female as the Great Goddess statues of prehistory…she has taken all the ridiculed modern symbol of femininity, from makeup and platform shoes to wigs and false eyelashes, infused them with humor and a conscious power” (Steinem 1987: 94).

Final thoughts

> [T]he interpretation of any single text is based on an understanding of the juxtaposition of a range of discourses. Above all, we need to continually remind ourselves that pop music is also about entertainment; it is abut fun, fantasy, play and self-irony. Any musical interpretation cannot avoid the consideration of these politics of *jouissance* that shape the text (Hawkins 2002: 28).

Using Dolly Parton as a platform for a discussion of music, gender and class, I have found many interesting answers to my questions, and as one often does I have found even more questions to ask. With an intertextual approach, I have sought to reveal some of the ways Dolly Parton constructs her identity; musically, visually and through the narrative, while the employment of gender studies in popular music analysis has made it possible to disclose some of the visual and auditory identity markers in our culture.

In chapter two, looking at musical- and extra-musical features of country music; I have tried to map out parts of the context surrounding Dolly Parton, especially concerning gender and social class. Questions of class have, for me, been pertinent to answer, and I have employed Pierre Bourdieu's theories on taste to find some answers to country music's working-class appeal. Country music and feminism is a connection that might seem strange for some, but through looking at gender, class, and southern culture, I have tried to explore how artists like Dolly Parton and Loretta Lynn might be interpreted as feminists, abeit in different ways. While Lynn's hard-hitting women have sought to move in on traditionally male territories, making her a more obvious choice for feminist tribute, Dolly Parton's preoccupation with love and relationships has voiced some of the concerns her audience has struggled with; sexual double standards, divorce, infidelity, abortion, as well as the sheer enjoyment and celebration of love. Because love songs are viewed as trivial by most the progressive ways in which they can be used by the audience is often overlooked, but I believe that her positive attitude towards sexuality and her attention to women's issues, combined with tremendous talent and success in a male-dominated industry has proved that she is anything but trivial.

In chapter three I have explored the visual and narrative aspects of the Dolly Parton performance. The connection between humor, sexuality and strength are to me essential for understanding the Dolly Parton performance. Joyce Linehan argues that "[m]uch of Dolly Parton's power is drawn from her ownership of her own sexuality" (Linehan 2003: 31), and I believe that she uses humor to stay in control. Dolly's use of humor and irony is a way to

disarm critics and a way of taking ownership of her own exploitation. Humor and irony also becomes a matter of what Lawrence Grossberg has called "authentic inauthenticity", and what Stan Hawkins refers to as the *jouissance* of pop music; the delight found in the celebration of its artificiality.

Intertextual in approach, the exploration of the construction of identity in Dolly Parton's music in chapter four has included a fair amount of non-musical aspects as well. My questions have especially been concerned with the way Dolly Parton portrays and negotiates aspects of gender, sexuality and authenticity; why she is perceived as "authentic" while investigating her feminist appeal as well as some of the reasons for her mainstream success. In my analysis of "Jolene" I have tried to show some of the ways in which the music, the voice, the gaze and the narrative is connected and negotiated in Dolly Parton's music.

Dolly Parton and mainstream country music has not been given much attention in popular musicology. I hope that my work on the Dolly Parton performance might inspire others to look at performances of gender in popular music, and that the theories I have presented in this thesis might be employed in the analysis of other hyperfeminine artists. The celebration of inauthenticity and the questions raised about the construction of gender in the Dolly Parton performance might also help explain Dolly's queer appeal. It has not been within the scope of this thesis to explore Dolly Parton as a gay icon, Dolly Parton as a *drag act,* or Dolly Parton as a Halloween costume, but I hope to someday be able to investigate it further.

I also hope that my theories on country music and class might be employed to country music produced outside of the USA. Norwegian country artists create new country music, both in Norwegian and English, and with countless country festivals and concerts, the music is widely popular. Why does American popular music have such a stronghold in Norway? Do we find "twang" in Norwegian country music as well? Is the symbolic world of Norwegian country music the same as the American? Answering these types of questions might shed some light on issues of globalization and appropriation.

> [B]y exposing the artifice and effort that goes into constructing a feminine identity, the socially negotiated category of femininity is gendered at the very same time that it is valorized (Oakes 2006: 49).

The *Dolly Parton performance* exposes the artificiality of the gender construct. The pink, frilly, sparkling costumes bring our attention to the girly style enforced by Barbie, adored by

millions of little girls across the globe. Although Parton is very open about the fact that *Dolly Parton* is an act, she stays within the safe boundaries of conventional and commercial attractiveness. While we might receive the knowing wink that this is a slightly ridiculous ideal, and might enjoy the *campness* of the glitzy show, it is hard to ignore the fact that Dolly Parton conforms to an existing ideal of beauty, arguably created for and by the male gaze, and even though she might ridicule it, she is also reinforcing that (unnatural) ideal; the whiteness, the blondeness, the (exaggerated) hourglass figure, the feminine voice and mannerisms, in short: the western commercial ideal of beauty. She openly and uncritically celebrates plastic surgery and good portion of money has been spent "nippin' and tuckin'" her face and body. She is not representing "the natural woman", but at the same time I cannot help but ask: what should we expect of her? She is but a child of "the times", no more in control of her surroundings than we are. She is a great musician with a talent for business, she has almost single-handedly brought country music into the mainstream, and through her mastering of the gender–biased music industry she has paved the way for other women artists as well.

Dolly Parton stands firmly within an American tradition of flashy costumes, but does she signal the end of that tradition? Maybe. The variety show to which Parton owes much of her visual and her performance style is out of fashion and might never return in the form successful for Porter and Dolly in the 1960s, but parts will probably live on. Will there be another Dolly Parton? An artist like Dolly Parton is hard to find, for she has that unique combination of talent, determination, intelligence and luck, and she seems to be the natural Star, always *in character*. It seems as if Parton's work ethics are founded on the *Bourdieuan* working-class' taste for "value for money": glitzy because she "owes it" to the audience to look the part of the Star. The audience has made her rich, and maybe she feels that they should get their money's worth when seeing her live, on TV, or in magazines. At the same time "Dolly Parton" is also a commercial brand, created to make money, and "giving the audience what they want" also means continuous commercial success. This illustrates one of the problems studying popular music; while Dolly Parton is a person making music, that music (and arguably also she) is at the same time a commercial product, designed to make money. Throughout her long career Dolly Parton has been able to adapt herself to the changing times, and she has been able to connect to audiences who are far apart, politically or geographically. There is no other artist like her.

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