

Marta Giersz

Wyższa Szkoła Gospodarki w Bydgoszczy

Themes of love in selected country songs

Country music songs are a rich reservoir of stories and memories of love, romance, and the people and times we miss. These songs take the listener into the world of unrequited love, loss and loneliness, misery, unfulfilled or satisfying relationships, courting, break-ups, missing times and people, and more. In this chapter I analyze the rhetorical and poetic tropes in representations of love and nostalgia in country songs. Nostalgia for places has been described in the chapter on the South and Southern Identity. "Writing about the South may be accurately described as 'nostalgic', but not in the contemporary sense of nostalgia as a means of escaping the trials of the present by retreating into pleasurable recollections of the past" (Cobb, 2005:240).

Tools of literary, poetic and narrative analysis

Country songs, as a genre of popular music, are an endless representation, reflection and reinforcement of the realities of life. The lyrics of country songs, thanks to their ability to both depict and influence the life and culture of the South, and their simple construction, are seen as "authentic", and the "texted songs", explore "complex relationships between sound and semantics" (Fox, 2004: 40).

The data for this paper is a selection of 45 country songs about love and nostalgia chosen from among the most popular ones in the last 40–50 years (according to Billboard charts) or the most well-known country "hymns" of love and romance. Fox called them the "two important tropes of sad country songs: immersion in an unforgettable past, and fixation on a unique and long-gone object of desire" (2004: 172).

I analyzed each song's content using the literary classification methods. This methodology, however, is not free from disadvantages, as country songs do not provide an opulence of stylistic means and it is really difficult to narrow down the number of chosen songs to about a dozen.

What I found central in this part of my research was the fact that country lyrics do not abound in stylistic figures, because their value renders in their content and not in their form. The purpose of these texts is not, after all, to encourage the recipient to an increased intellectual activity. So it is useless to look for sophisticated rhetoric and style in country lyrics. The most important here is “the relationship between a song, an extratextual story, and sociable feeling (which) is even more complicated and densely layered” (Fox, 2004: 167).

Literary classification of country songs about love

The review of selected figures of speech in reference to the examined topic is a complex task, hence my choice is to conduct the analysis on several rhetorical texts (songs).

Country songs are artistic in character, which gives us the opportunity for an in-depth analysis based on methodology taken from literary studies. If lyrics are made the starting point, even after ignoring the influence of sound and melody, there are a number of typological determinants that predispose the text to be assigned to various literary classes in accordance with the theory of literature (*An Introduction to Literature*, 2006: 22-24).

The analysis of the basic literary determinants of a particular genre typically includes such elements: the poetry-prose opposition, the prosodic, metric, and stylistic features and the rules of composition. Analyzing these components, we may form a fixed intersubjective group of indications which determine that country lyrics remain in a relationships with other genres. It is determined by the way of their expression, the creation of the *lyrical I*, the message, the imaginary world presented there and even the atmosphere and poetics.

The question of the literary genre is important, because each song lyrics are not only an act of literary, but also of social communication. Thanks to this feature text affects the audience, allows for the identification of the lyrical subject, it is the carrier of the imagery and fulfils a specified function in the cultural space. “Country’s wordplay with everyday language use (clichés, puns and literalized metaphors, for example) and its other speech-objectifying tropes [...] call attention to the arbitrariness and lack of “natural” authenticity-to-experience of everyday spoken language” (Fox, 2004: 43).

Genre identification is based on the rational study of these structures, and always refers to certain descriptive, imaginative and emotional aspects. While characterizing country lyrics, we can point to the presence of certain genres expressed in the realization of the lyrical subject and their linguistic character. Country lyrics meet particular standards of stylistic and poetic determinants. In poetry, this type of lyrics should clearly be assigned to all kinds of poetic creations, especially to literary references which have the character of stylization, making them even more distinct in terms of the genre typology.

Considering the determinants describing a particular genre and assuming that this classification adds semantic value to country lyrics, and referring these texts to a certain pattern, I tried to classify the lyrics in a normative way and came as closest as to the genre of a *ballad*. A popular ballad, is “a narrative song that has been transmitted orally by what used to be called “the folk” (*An Introduction to Literature*, 2006: 1815). Ballads have long been associated with love. “Faithless love was among the themes of the eighteenth and nineteenth century English ballads often considered to be the most influential of modern country music’s historical antecedents. [...] Cheating songs, on the other hand, often accept sexual unfaithfulness as a necessary and even celebrated part of living” (Fillingim, 2003: 33). Thus, I will proceed to describe the characteristics of a ballad present in country music lyrics.

The rules of classifying poetic texts on the example of country music lyrics

The issue of literary genre is crucial for the analysis and determines the way to read the text. The existence of the genre implies the existence of a type of convention, a way of editing thoughts, formulating verbal messages, which present the subject and fulfill some kind of purpose.

Before I compare country lyrics with the category determinants, I will briefly discuss ballad as a literary genre. First ballads were created in France in the 14th century in the form of folk dance songs. They were called *chanson ballade*, which meant a song to dance, a danced or a dancing song. In the late Middle Ages a ballad came to the British Isles, and later it was taken by the settlers to the American continent. In the 18th century the English ballad was very popular in various spheres of intellectual life, and its most prominent creators were Robert Burns and Walter Scott (*An Introduction to Literature*, 2006: 675–678).

Already in the late 19th century a *ballad* meant a slow tempo lyrical song. In time in America the word “ballad” began to be used for the so-called *love song*, especially in two musical genres – blues and country: “In white country music [...] the story is central, coming as it does through the tradition of the British ballad [...] the storytelling ballad” (Tichi, 1994: 7). Ballads often tell stories which are the central element of every country song:

terms like *story*, *stories* and *story line* all refer to a narrative with a plot representing certain actions in the world or in the minds of characters. To tell a story is to tell of an event or a series of connected events, often being a fictitious literary composition, something deliberately made and shaped in words, something of which the listener or reader asks (Tichi, 1994: 8).

From the early period of the formation of this genre, the dialect of the region it was performed in, played a very important role. Ballad songs in the South were marked by a specific mountain dialect, especially those originally existing in the cultural tradition

of oral communication. The region also corresponded to a particular imagery to which the performer of the text appealed, with which he/she associated positive ideas and experience (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 2001: 35). This in turn, influenced the level of the performer's authenticity.

This dialect is still present in contemporary country performance. Its aim is to emphasize the nature and authenticity of a Southern musician. A country artist "renaturalizes" the lyrics through two devices common to other country singers: the use of a vocal timbre close to that of a rural speaking voice; and the use of dialect, slang terms, and the tendency to drop 'g' at the end of words" (Brackett, 1995: 84).

The first aspect of my classification will therefore be the analysis of the dialect of the region, which refers to places relevant to the lyrical subject and is designed to arbitrarily introduce the audience to the world described in the lyrics. A *chronotope* the time vs. space configuration represented in language and discourse, it is:

an alignment of space, time, and subjectivity in a genre-bound narrative universe. This chronotope is implicated in ideas about the mimetic *space* in which social life and human movement happens, and in the way that imagined *places* come to occupy and organize the space. Space and experience align along different physical and imaginary scales, but the problem space presents to culture is always the establishment – the emplacement – of a knowable, narratively real locality (Fox, 2004: 81–82).

In the song performed by Johnny Cash, and originally created by Billy Edd Wheeler, called *Jackson*, such imagery is a fictional place called Jackson. Johnny Cash himself confessed that he did not mean any particular town of Jackson, but he liked the sound of this word, therefore he decided to use this word as a title and a fictitious place in real space.

Jackson appears in the text as a sacred place, permanently occupying a space in the consciousness of the singer and of the person to whom he turns with his message. It is a space associated by both of them with ideal bygone times, the times when the *fire of their feelings* did not yet start to fade. Jackson begins to play an important role in this particular stage of the relationship of the partners, where their emotions are not so strong, so it is like a reviver of the old passion and heat. Returning to a certain paradise lost (even if only in thoughts), could result in the renewal of desire to experience the sensations that belong to the realm of the past. The lyrical subject wants to reach the lost state of mind and stay in it forever:

I'm going to Jackson, and that's a fact!

Jackson is the lost space or feeling carefree and even frolicsome, it's the time of experiencing youthful excitement:

I'll be dancing on a Pony Keg

or:

I'll be waiting in Jackson, behind my Japan fan

Jackson is the place with which the couple felt assimilated. Johnny Cash performed the song with June Carter and this duet introduced another aspect to this song. As a result, the listener may find here an unhappy married couple who, *since the fire went out* of their marriage, have been talking of going to Jackson where they expect to find their lost love again.

A similar phenomenon of space vs. time can be found in the song called *All My Ex's Live In Texas* by George Strait. The singer declares that each of his four ex-girlfriends lives in Texas, hence his particular predilection for the place and the constant mental turns in this direction. He states (with a dose of humor) that the fact that all his "ex's" are in Texas makes him stay in Tennessee. Some places are more clearly defined, as he sings the names of the towns of Texarkana, Abilene, Galveston and Temple. In addition to more specific places, there are also general, almost mythical spaces, that relate to the lost sphere of youth and childhood. It is a river, in which the singer learned to swim. It grows to the rank of an event that clearly separates two periods, two spheres of life – the carefree childhood and early youth, and the present – a time unspecified, but standing in opposition to the past.

While in the previous text the lyrical subject concretized his visualizations of space, in most texts concretized places (with their proper names) do not appear, and their place is taken by the general space of pleasant memories or concretized in images close to positive sensations, full of charm, or even magic. Dixie Chicks in *Cowboy Take Me Away* visualize space with a specific *genius loci*. It is an unspecified place, but the associations with that space is still the carrier of electrifying and positive experience. The place is related to the fantasies of the singers and the person to whom it is directed in their lyrical discourse. The specifics of this place oscillate between those elements of reality that have a clear, positive psychological and experiential association and are presented from the general to the particular. The initial portion of the visualization of the space is suggested only by:

Something wild and unruly

to then concretize the descriptions that coexist in that perfect space.

Hard ground,

A pillow of bluebonnets,

A blanket made of stars.

The perfect space is here in opposition to the real world that is not associated positively with the ego of the singer. It is a space of unpleasant feelings and urban architecture, which is reflected in a clearly uncomfortable resemblance to a city building:

A building standing tall

It stands in opposition to the endless fields typically associated with the wildness and freedom:

*The wild blue
Closer to heaven above
For miles and miles*

So the ideal space here is associated with the desire to love, for freedom and positive experiences of the singer:

*Set me free, oh I pray
Closer to heaven above and closer to you*

A similar situation occurs in the song called *Then* by Brad Paisley. This text also refers to an ideal space – it is where the first dates of a couple in love took place. This is important in country texts because, as it turns out, the ideal space often coexists with emotions and feelings, mainly with love:

In country musicians' discourse, 'feeling' is often interlocked with the idiom of musical 'feel'. 'Feel' is an idea that aligns particular genres, rhythmic grooves, tempos, themes, individual performative idiosyncrasies, or, as musicians also say, 'styles'. [...] Both 'feels' however, can implicate embodied, cognitive and mnemonic 'feeling': they 'catch a listener's ear' with their different kinds of 'meaning' and 'make you think about something that's happened to you in the past'. 'Feel' is simultaneously a characterization of musical sound and musical meaning. (Fox, 2004: 169).

We can hear/read about a porch, where he first noticed the lady of his heart, or the place of their first kiss. This 'feeling':

articulates (i.e., it both connects and gives voice to, which is also the double meaning of the verb 'relate') verbal and embodied domains of experience. Feeling then adds something else, some 'meaning'. This meaning is often glossed with the idea of a 'story', or with an actual story, a 'memory', or a fixation on something that "reminds you of something (Fox, 2004: 171).

This is sacrum, and its visualization strengthens the feelings of the singer who emphasizes the rituals of the couple:

*I remember taking you back to right where
I first met you
You were so surprised
I got down one knee right there
And once again I thought I loved you then*

The romantic meaning of the song is emphasized by the piano and the string section opening. This is a mid-tempo ballad where the music and instrumentation is intended to pass the positive feelings to the audience and authenticate the message.

An interesting example of the description of the region is Trisha Yearwood's *She's In Love With the Boy*. Here, the detailed landscape elements typical to Texas and to forgotten towns or villages appear:

*Katie's sitting on the old front porch
Watching the chickens Peck the ground
There ain't a whole lot going on tonight
In his one horse town*

Often the perfect space is a sphere, to which the couple in love desires to escape or hide there from the world which seems hostile to them and their emotions. This theme has already appeared in the above *Cowboy Take Me Away* and it returns in Taylor Swift's lyrics of *Love Story*. Once again it refers to visualizing the perfect space, this time it is a sphere to which the singer (girl) wants to be taken to by a man (an unspecified Romeo):

*Romeo save me I've been feeling so alone
Romeo take me somewhere we can be alone
I'll be waiting all there's left to do is run*

The nominal feature of a ballad as a literary genre is the co-existence of the real world together with the mystical, imaginary one. This is what certainly happens in the examples presented above. The space of the ideal world is the sphere of the sacred connected with the emotions of the singers:

Like song titles, place names are used in song and verbal art as evocative metonyms for complicated, socially located affective dispositions. In the process, place names acquire the intertextual resonance of song titles, and like titles, they become transportable between songs and across performances. [...] The emotional power of these metonymic place names is extraordinary when they are effectively performed in ways that marry their poetic power to local landscapes of experience (Fox, 2004: 244).

This, in turn, determines the type and quality of formulating thoughts and conducting the reasoning process. This is a spontaneous description, strongly connected to the experiences and their nature. This kind of connection sets country songs among the *tear-jerkers*¹.

The tear-jerker effect is usually achieved in two ways, either by an exposure of emotions connected to something lost, or the description of newly felt emotions, for example of a new love. In the text of Charley Pride's *Just Between You and Me* the lost

¹ Tear jerker, dictionary.cambridge.org, DOA: 10.05.2016.

love causes a number of negative experiences, which the singer shares with the whole world:

*So I feel so blue sometimes I want to die
And so I've got a broken heart so what
They say that time will heal all wounds [...]*

The most meaningful observation appears in the verses of the chorus:

But between you and me you're too much to forget

And the next verses:

*So I've lost the only girl I ever loved
And so I've never felt so low so what
I'll just tell myself each time I want to cry
That someday time will dry the teardrops from my eyes*

A similar example of a tear-jerker may be obtained in country songs by the above description of the new experience, if it is presented with a corresponding intensification. Martina McBride's song *My Valentine* can be used as an example:

*All my life
I have been waiting for
All you give to me
You've opened my eyes
And showed me how to love unselfishly*

The tear-jerker here is the emotions connected with opening her eyes and the intensity in them.

A striking example of the intensification of emotions is the visualization of a turning point in one's life that enhances the experience and promotes both positive and negative valuations. Both of these qualities have been combined by the Carter Family in *Bury Me Under the Weeping Willow Tree*:

*Tomorrow was our wedding day
But, Lord, oh, where is he,
He's gone to seek him another bride
And he cares no more for me
He told me that he did not love me
I could not believe it was true*

Here, the emotionality of the lyrics is not only contained in the interpretational layer, but also directly verbalized by identifying one's own feelings and naming them using specific words:

My heart is sad and I'm In sorrow

If the subject of such an analysis is the determinant of a ballad that is highlighting one's experience, it should be stressed that the dominant emotion recorded in the lyrics are love and loss. The loss may be associated with a particular person or place that provided positive stimuli. The foreground in the text by Willie Nelson *Always On My Mind* is a sense of regret and the inability to turn back time and fix some mistakes of the past:

*Maybe I didn't treat you
Quite as good as I should have
Maybe I didn't love you
Quite as often as I could have
Although the desire for reparations is very strong:
Give me, give me one more chance
To keep you satisfied*

The reflection accompanying the feelings of grief and loss has the effect of tear-jerker:

*Little things I should have said and done
I just never took the time*

The ballad is, of course, as mentioned above, the presentation of the sensations connected with experiencing love or longing for the past and is a tool for direct exultation of the feelings of the singer through the text. Blade Shelton's *God Gave Me You* does not shy from a direct exultation:

*I've been a walking heartache
I've made a mess of me
The person that I've been lately
Ain't who I wanna be
Or further on:
I'll be the flattered fool
And I need you*

This song also represents the 'naturalization' of the Southern vocality. We can hear the untrained voice, and the pitch and nasality "emphasize the regional specificity of the voice" (Brackett, 1995: 91).

A similar exaltation can be found in the text of George Strait's *I Cross My Heart*:

*I cross my heart
And I promise to give all I've got to give
To make all you dreams come true
In all the world
You'll never find
A love as true as mine*

This exaltation aims at highlighting the emotions in the text, although its feature is to present emotions in a way that is not commensurate with the level of the situation – the level of the hypothetical emotional impression of the situation does not correspond to demonstrating the affection by the narrator. Exaltation is also intended to show the commitment of the singer to certain activities or relationships, the impact of impressions on him, his sensory and emotional perception. Here is an eloquent example of the exaltation in the song by Tim McGraw: *It's Your Love*:

*It's your love
It just does something to me
It sends a shock right through me
I can't get enough*

To sum up this part of my research, it should once again be emphasized that the interpretational dominant at the level of content in country songs is the creation of the ideal world, existing in a kind of imaginary paradise lost, the land of the ideal, bearing positive stimuli. The “wordplay” or pun is an “emblem” of country music, that is represented by literalization, juxtaposition, metaphors and “an orientation toward pithy and aphoristic condensation of “common sense” knowledge” about humans. “Embedded and frozen metaphorical tropes with long histories in English poetics are particularly elaborated and typically literalized in country lyrics”. The examples are heart, passion as burning fire, the road, etc. (Fox, 2004: 231).

These are the axis of the meaning that country songs convey, even if the topic of negative emotions appears – there is always a reference to the positive experience, even if they are only in the realm of the lost sacrum. Here, the:

country music yields to a deconstructionist account of textuality, fetishizing the “absent presence” [...] of the authoritative voice. But the double voicings and dramatized engagements characteristic of working-class orality also confound the authority of the voice, both across time and synchronically in the characteristically dense, high-involvement, and agonistic sociable style of performative talk [...] country music stages a struggle between textuality and performativity (Fox, 2004: 43).

There are two characteristics that are the structural determinants of ballads: the existence of dialogues, which meets one of the basic assumptions of the ballad genre,

(the generic syncretism, or the coexistence of three types of literature – epic, lyric and drama within a single genre), and the existence of syntactic parallelism, usually manifested in the form of common chorus².

The first structural feature subjected to the following considerations is the presence of dialogues or individual expressions, woven into the narrator's discourse. Such treatment makes it far more dynamic and the message aims closer at the listener's/reader's sensations, because even fictional words, supposedly quoted in the text, take on the characteristics of real paradigms that the recipient is able to visualize and to respond to them and refer them to their individual experiences. In other words, introducing dialogue or dramatization into the texts makes them easier to comprehend and acts directly on the emotions. Trisha Yearwood's *She's In Love With the Boy* will serve as an example text, in which the words of the girl's father, who is unfavorable for his daughter's lover, are woven into the love story over family preferences. This is possible due to the use of the indirect speech:

*My daddy said
You wasn't worth a lick*

It is even clearer with the use of direct speech and the polylogue:

*He says:
Young lady get on up to you room
Chile me and junior have a talk
But mama break in and says:
Don't lose your temper
It wasn't very long ago
When you yourself was just a hay-seed plowboy
Who didn't have a row to hoe*

At the structural level, in the text of Taylor Swift's *Love Story*, a similar rhetorical device appears as the inclusion of the spoken parts:

*My daddy said:
Stay away from Juliet
And I was crying on the staircase
Begging you:
Please don't go
And I said:
Romeo take me somewhere we can be alone
[...]
You'll be the prince and I'll be the princess*

² Literary Devices and Literary terms – A Complete List: literarydevices.net, DOA: 10.05.2016.

Corresponding formal procedures appear in *Kiss an Angel Good Morning* song by Tom Jones. The love piece is interwoven with some dramatic rhetorical questions:

*They ask me:
How does a man get to feel his way?
[...]
Every time they ask me: Why? I just smile and say:
You've got to kiss an angel good morning*

These examples confirm my suggestion that in order to dramatize the expression of country texts dialogues in direct or indirect speech are introduced. This procedure is one of the primary determinants of the ballad genre.

Another determinant of the structure of a ballad is the presence of the narrator. The singer can be called the 'engaging narrator', because he "makes his or her point by building toward an identification between the imagined [listener] and the situation being described [in the lyrics]." (Wyatt-Brown [in:] Cash, 1991: x). In the previous part of the discussion I consistently identified the speaker as the singer or the lyrical subject and it served to appeal to the lyrical features of described songs. With the structural analysis of texts previously classified as a ballad, we should, however, focus more on the presence of the narrator as a speaker or one of the speakers, because this phenomenon is characteristic for the structure of the ballad as a genre. Of course, it would be an abuse to classify all country songs as ballads with a narrator, but his or her appearance confirms the above-founded thesis. Trisha Yearwood's song *She's In Love With the Boy* uses the presence of the third-person narrator:

*Katie sitting on the old front porch
Watching the chickens Peck the ground
[...]
Her daddy's waiting up till half past twelve
When they come sbeaking up the walk*

Most texts are dominated by the first-person narration, which is associated with the previously discussed phenomenon presenting personal experiences and allows to classify songs as direct lyric. This is, by far, the predominant feature of country lyrics.

The stylistics of country lyrics

In the following part of the paper I have decided to enumerate several characteristics of the country style basing on the analyzed songs. These elements of the style make country music unique and if the artists follow them they sound authentic, especially as "country songwriters claim that they are inspired by overhearing such resonant phrases in ordinary talk, spoken by ordinary working class people [and are] quite aware

of this mythic connection between their speech and what they hear on the jukebox, and song acquires power and feeling precisely from this resonance" (Fox, 2004: 229). Familiar country tunes attract listeners and bring up symbols and associations that become multilayered.

Country lyrics and the southern style of conversations "embody an epic modality. Events are introduced, mimetically or diegetically, in temporal sequence, and have a casual, cumulative unfolding (and) are established through careful description, dialogic elaboration, and layerings of direct and oblique discourse and phonetic icons" (Fox, 2004: 233). The following are the most important elements of country style:

Dialogues

They appear in the earlier mentioned *Jackson* by Johnny Cash, and other examples are: *Highway Don't Care* by Tim McGraw and Taylor Swift, *We Were Us* by Keith Urban and Miranda Lambert or *It's Your Love* by Tim McGraw and Faith Hill, *Whiskey Lullaby* by Brad Paisley and Alison Krauss.

These conversation duets make the meaning deeper, they add new layers to it by blending voices and the male vs. female perspective. They sound richer, deeper and more authentic.

Regional accents, the use of names

Many country songs use proper names of towns, regions, and other geographical areas to put the song in a real spatial context and also to make the song Southern. Other Southern names and accents are presented in Chapter VI, but just a good example to put here is George Strait's *All My Ex's Live In Texas*:

*Rosanna's down in **Texarkana**
Wanted me to push her broom
Sweet Eileen's in **Abilene**
She forgot I hung the moon
And Allison's in **Galveston**
Somehow lost her sanity
And Dimple's who now lives in **Temple's**
Got the law looking for me*

Regional landscape

This again aims at showing the romantic South and its idealized depiction. Like in *A Little More Country Than That* by Easton Corbin:

*Imagine **a dirt road full of pot holes***

With a creek bank and some cane poles

Catching channel cat

I'm a little more country than that

Picture a small town with an old hound

Laying out front of the court house

While the old men chew the fat

I'm a little more country than that

Regional color

As I have already discussed in the previous chapter on musicological analysis, country music sounds real and sincere when it sounds Southern. The Southern elements of the song are the dialect, the nasalization, the skipping of 'g', and the enumeration of typical Southern associations (plants, tastes, brands) etc. A satisfactory number of examples can be found in *What country is* by Luke Bryan:

*There's a house fly **swimmin'** in my sweet tea*
*Hey **darlin'** pass another Kerr jar to me*
*Butter **drippin'** off a biscuit, baby better take a bite*
Cantaloupe thumps like it's finally ripe
*Box fan on a lawn chair **suckin'** in swamp air*
Two hundred mile marker signs from nowhere
That's what country is

Others can be traced in *Sweet Southern Comfort* by Buddy Jewell:

Carolina down to Georgia
Smell the jasmine and magnolia
Sleepy sweet home Alabama
Roll tide roll
Muddy water Mississippi
Blessed Graceland whispers to me
Carry on, carry on
Sweet southern comfort, carry on

Grammar

Grammar errors in country music make the songs sound easier to digest, make the singer more familiar, real "flesh and blood" just like the listener, so they sound authentic too. "Country is an articulate, public poetry, but it purports to reveal the inarticulate and pained interiority of subjective experience. Country serves up poetry when "ordinary" speech fails. (Fox, 2004: 241). Some good examples are:

- *Country state of mind* by Hank Williams Junior:

*Me, I'm laid up here in a country state of mind
Catchin' these fish like they're **goin'** out of style
 And **drinkin'** this homemade wine, all the time
 If **the sun don't** shine tomorrow*

- Whistlin'Dixie by Randy Houser:

*I like catfish, **cookin'** on a creek bank
 Kind **ya** can't find in the city, **y'all**
 I **ain't** just **whistlin'** Dixie*

Language register

Diglossa or swear words are often used to make the song sound harsh but real. Hank Williams once said: "The hillbilly singer sings more sincere than most entertainers because the hillbilly was raised rougher than most entertainers. You got to know a lot about hard work. You got to have smelt a lot of mule manure you can sing like a hillbilly. The people who has been raised something like the way the hillbilly has knows what he is singing about and appreciates it." (Brackett, 1995: 86). I can only explain that country music is simple music, sung by simple people for simple people, with simple music and simple words in the lyrics. They make the music real. Like in *If That Ain't Country* by David Allan Coe:

*If that ain't country,
 It'll hair lip the pope
 If that ain't country, it's a **damn good joke**
 I've seen the grand ole opry,
 And I've met Johnny cash
 If that ain't country, I'll **kiss your ass***

The syntactic structure of country lyrics

Assuming that the country lyrics are the closest to the features of a ballad, I have examined the parameters of the syntax of these pieces in order to establish analogies in their structure.

The most important feature of the construction of a ballad is the syntactic parallelism, which is manifested in the repetition of certain syntactic structures in the construction of an expression. This is one of the most important tricks in oral and literary works. Parallelism can be found in different layers of expression, starting from the structure and the semantic content, just to arrive at syntactic constructions.

In the syntactic layer, parallelism is mostly revealed as the repeatability of the same syntactic structures. In country texts, as well as in most of the songs thought as a literary product to be associated with a particular melody, this manifests itself as

the so-called. “chorus”. The chorus, or the construct that consists of an identical piece repeated after each segment of text, is one of the syntactic determinants of ballads, and its existence is an important feature of the genre. Functions of the chorus in country songs may be associated with the expression of a message, and specifically with its intensification, as is the case in the song by Blake Shelton *God Gave Me You*:

*God gave me you for the ups and downs
 God gave me you for the days of doubt
 For when I think I've lost my way
 There are no words here left to say
 It's true
 God gave me you*

A similar convention appears in *I Cross My Heart* by George Strait:

*I cross my heart
 And I promise to
 Give all I've got to give
 To make all your dreams come true
 In all the world
 You'll never find
 A love as true as mine*

Or in Tim McGraw's *It's Your Love*:

*It's your love
 It just does something to me
 It sends a shock right through me
 I can't get enough
 And I find you wonder about the spell I'm under
 Oh it's your love*

The chorus is an essential component of the lyrical texts especially those that are based on folk and regional traditions, with a clear dialects marked by them. Country texts are based in their dialectics on the traditions of the region, which is revealed not only in setting the place of action in a particular place, the origin of the characters or the lyrical I, but also in the local naming, entering of certain proper names, and finally in regionalisms. Chorus can also be the structural component, which in addition to its syntactic function, also represents its semantic features. “Rhetorically powerful songs and narratives should announce their ultimate import in such a lyrical image that bears repetition and earns attention” the refrains or choruses “signal rhetorical closure and universal import, drawing out the ideological conclusions of concrete narratives.

Cyclical, repetitive lyric images ‘freeze’ narrative time, as they point out to the timeless truths enshrined in detailed and contextually specific narratives” (Fox, 2004: 235).

Regular repetition of the same syntactic structures emphasizes the content. Therefore, very frequently, these two functions coexist in the chorus and its syntactic function makes the semantic content more assimilated. Thus, in the examples cited above, the parallel structures are adopted to express the feelings of the lyrical subject and to highlight the significance of the expressed content. An interesting example is the song by Randy Travis *Forever and Ever, Amen*, in which the parallel parties are used not only for the expression of the lyrical subject, but they also introduce a new semantic content, contribute to it with additional information.

The syntactic parallelism refers not only to such obvious constructs as the chorus. It may also appear within the stanza structure. An interesting example of such device is the initial part of Loretta Lynn’s *The Pillow*, which appears in the same terms after several statements forming a stanza:

*Send me the pillow that you dream on
Do not you know that I still care for you*

Then by Brad Paisley is a song in which the parallelism appears both within the chorus and in the syntax within stanzas. It involves constructing the strophic expression in such a way that the initial part of the stanza is built by a syntactic analogy by the parallelism of the “I remember” part. This is an example of an anaphora within the syntax. This poetic device was extended by an additional epiphora within the syntax. This stylistic device is based on repeating the same lines in the final parts of stanzas:

And I thought I loved you then,

then comes the proper chorus:

*Now you’re my whole life, now you’re my
Whole world. And I just can’t believe, the way
I feel about you girl.
Like a river meets the sea, stronger than it’s ever been.
We’ve come so far Since that day.
And I thought I love you then.*

These quotations contain examples of extensive syntactic parallelism, there is even a device of parallelism used within another parallelism, because the chorus contains the key verse, repeated after other components of the text.

Versification

When considering the organization of the country lyrics I have analyzed the rules and methods of composition of the text and the sentence structure as components of a larger structure that is the whole song. Within the above, the stylistics of these structures and their syntactic structure have become the subject of my study.

The strophic construction of the country texts is not very complex. The songwriters' favorite device in the composition of country music lyrics is an organization of stanzas built of 4 verses. This rule appears in many texts of all generations of country music creators, since the 1920's to the present day. Such a device is associated with an elementary aim of a text or presentation to get the message across and the 4-verse stanza is usually a system of two or three parallel sentences, with the help of which the appropriate and specific message is conveyed. Two consecutive syntactic parallelisms are a sufficient carrier of the message introducing relevant content, after which the chorus appears most frequently, and it serves the role of commenting or summarizing the previous sentences:

A framing convention that has its probable origins in Anglo-American folk singing is still widely practiced in modern country music: songs often begin and/or end on a spoken word or line. Such boundary-marking gestures [...] serve to move vocalization gradually along a continuum from stage patter to full-throated singing and back again (Fox, 2004: 286).

Ever since the first generation of songwriters of country music, such treatment has gained mastery in the songs lyrical composition. For example, The Carter Family used this device, in *Bury me under the weeping willow tree*:

*They told me that he did not love me
I could not believe it was true
Until an angel softly whispered
He has proven untrue to you

Oh, bury me under the weeping willow
Yes, under the weeping willow tree
So he may know where I am sleeping
And perhaps he will weep for me [...]

Oh, bury me under the violets blue
To prove my love to him
Tell him that I would die to save him
For his love I never could win*

If versification of the above text is the subject to the analysis, the following syntax can be noticed:

- 1) They told me that he did not love me.
- 2) I could not believe it was true until an angel whispered softly.

3) He has proven untrue to you.

And successively in the following parts:

- 1) Bury me under the blue violets to prove my love to him.
- 2) Tell him that I would die to save him for his love I never could win.

Within stanzas, the author chooses two or three syntax- semantic segments and a similar situation appears in the chorus. Similarly, we are given two semantic elements, but written as a single sentence:

*Oh, bury me under the weeping willow
Yes, under the weeping willow tree
So he may know where I am sleeping
And perhaps he will weep for me.*

After the semantic analysis:

- 1) Bury me under the weeping willow tree.
- 2) He may know where I am sleeping
- 3) And perhaps he will weep for me.

So, the message is often stylistically developed, which is a natural (folk) device used in poetry, but the message can be generalized to two main sentences. Keith Whitley, a representative of the later decades of the evolution of country music and lyrics, often chooses the formal devices discussed above in his *When You Say Nothing At All*:

*It's amazing how you can speak right to my heart
Without saying a word you can light up the dark
Try as I may I could never explain
What I hear when you don't say a thing*

Which brings the following to a conclusion:

- 1) It's amazing how you can speak right to my heart.
- 2) Without saying a word you can light up the dark.
- 3) Try as I may I could never explain. What I hear when you do not say a thing.

A similar situation occurs in Randy Travis's *Forever and Ever, Amen*, in which four verses have three assertions:

*You may think that I'm talking foolish
You've heard that I'm wild and I'm free
You may wonder how I can promise you now
This love, that I feel for you, always will be*

or in Charley Pride's *Just Between You and Me*:

*So I feel so blue sometimes I wanna die
And so I've got a broken heart so what
They say that time will heal all wounds in mice and men
And I know that someday, I'll forget and love again.*

The examples of applications of two or three conclusions within the stanza can, of course, multiply, while it should be stated that this formal procedure is not the only one in the country lyrics. There may be other versification solutions, i.e. those in which one verse is one conclusion, or one stanza is equivalent with the sentence.

Content analysis

Country songs analyzed in this paper have been divided in to a few categories basing on the subjects they present in the lyrics. The ones selected are about love and its various colors, about nostalgia and missing times, and about the ideal of the road and the contradictions of the Southern mentality. I would also like to emphasize that these songs both derive from a rich reservoir of literature and movies about the South, as well as support the ideal, romantic, and imaginary South:

regardless of the medium the image of the American South (is) consistent. Southern belles and gentlemen, mammies and uncles, white columned mansions, fields of cotton and, literally, moonlight and magnolias were employed to suggest *Dixie*. One could certainly find such icons within the post – Civil War mythology of the Lost Cause, but southerners were not responsible for marketing and disseminating this imagery for national consumption. On the contrary, Madison Avenue's advertising agencies, Tin Pan Alley's music makers, Chicago's radio stars, and Hollywood's filmmakers were the ones who found profit in selling the romantic South to American consumers (Cox, 2011: ix).

There are many assumptions about the Southern kind of love that both country artists and their fans share. The ties and connections of country lyrics to the real world are connected and accommodated to the listeners' experience so that they can identify themselves with the stories in the songs. Country artists design their songs to relate to what their fans already know and feel.

Chivalry, courtesies, attitude to women

The *topos* of love is one of the most essential to the myth of country music. Women play a special role in this theme. They are often perceived as angels on Earth, the ladies, the inspiration, the pretty ones, whose lives were not ruled by passions and instincts, but they were gentle, spiritual, etheric, made for higher things in life and pure, who are supposed to work for the good of their home and children. "In addition to symbolizing the New South's ties to the old chivalric order, the pedestalized and protected purity of southern white womanhood was in some ways also a symbolic

assertion of white southern manhood as well” (Cobb, 2005: 174). Cobb, citing Catherine W. Bishir, states that:

the social model [...] and literary portraiture of the Old South and the Lost Cause provided a blueprint for the gender, class, and racial hierarchy envisioned in the New South Creed. At the top of the pyramid, the planter represented both patriarchy and deference to upper-class white authority in general. Subservient to him was the much celebrated mistress of the plantation who had stepped forward to meet the challenges of war without ever straying from the feminine ideal of dedication and obedience to one’s husband. The totally virtuous, kind, gentle, but quietly strong plantation mistress had shown her husband ‘the utmost confidence in his manhood and valor’ before and during the war and had enjoyed in return ‘the devotion that one pays to the soul’s idea of pure womanliness’ ([in:] Cobb, 2005: 82).

Among all the singers and musicians of country one person deserves a particular interest. Dolly Parton, with her distinctive voice, was one of the first female country singers whose career burst out not only as a musician but also as an actress, a TV show host and a celebrity. “Dolly Parton is the most famous, most universally beloved and most widely respected woman who has ever emerged from country music, a role model not only for other singers and songwriters, but for working women everywhere” (Bufwack and Oermann 1993: 360). With the way Dolly Parton manipulates people with her artistic image, she puts in contradictions all the associations connected with social categories of gender, class and ethnic or regional identity. She is described by the media either as a very gifted musician and talented songwriter or as a sexual icon for men. She embodies *excessive womanliness* (Wilson [in:] Tichi, 1998: 100) which she expresses both by her appearance and her emotions.

Parton creates a very interesting image of a woman, which in the traditional male perspective fetishizes women with big breasts and hourglass figure. This vision of exaggerated or even excessive womanliness implies that “there is an implicit assumption that since she appears to be hyperfeminine, she must be hypersexual” (Wilson [in:] Tichi, 1998: 103), but in the contrary, in women’s magazines, Dolly Parton becomes “Everywoman”. She would still bear and produce songs which recalls the Appalachian folk tradition of women who collected large amounts of ballads and shared them, exchanged them and passed them onto new generations. It was important for a woman’s social identity to produce songs, just like to produce children (Bufwack and Oermann 1993: 7).

Parton is a symbol of the “Southern” rural, Appalachian, working-class female. She is an embodiment of the heritage of the Appalachian women whose culture has been long maintained. “Historically and culturally, kinship has been the central organizing principle of Southern Appalachian society, and a matrilineal orientation has resulted in strong affective ties among women” (Wilson [in:] Tichi, 1998: 108). Every woman’s domain was her household. She gave birth to children and raised them, she passed all the important values on them, she took care of her man but also worked outside the house as a part of the wage-labor force. In her songs, Parton expresses her heritage, the

rural environment, in which she grew up, poverty and the working-class culture. For example her 1991 song *Eagle When She Flies* tells about the strength of womanhood and mothers portrayed as the source of love and the rock of support (Bufwack and Oermann 1993: 320–321) with the lines as follows:

*She's been there. God knows she's been there.
 She has seen and done it all.
 She's a woman. She knows how to dish it out or take it all. [...]
 She's a lover, she's a mother, she's a friend and she's a wife. [...]
 Gentle as the sweet magnolia, strong as steel, her faith and pride.
 She's an everlasting shoulder, she's the leaning post of life. [...]
 And she's a sparrow when she's broken.
 But she's an eagle when she flies.*

Women bring peace, solace and consolation and “longing for solace from the troubles of life with the longing for female companionship, consistent with country music’s tradition of marking romantic love as the locus of the experience of the divine [...] the desire to transcend the limits of mortality by living in a lover’s memory after a relationship” (Fillingim, 2003: 87). They are attained with the sense of the universal, the good, the values of home and with the image of the home-makers and country music only induces and incites these evocations.

Types of love

The number of country love songs is endless. Love in country music is intense, committed, it releases hormones (dopamine, oxytocin) and brings one to a “neurological high” (Levitin, 2008: 232). Many scholar and popular articles have been written about love in country music. One of the most interesting and rich summaries of this subject is the work of George Peterson entitled “‘He Treats Your Little Girl Like a Real Man Should’: The Re-presentation of Conventional Love in Country Music³” (2010), where he categorizes 30 country love songs into several themes of (to name the most often present):

- a) Love: Missed Opportunity
- b) Parental Love, Family Love
- c) Enduring Love, Strong Love
- d) Formation of Romantic Love, Romantic Connection
- e) Heartbroken Love, the “love-gone-wrong songs”
- f) Getting Married
- g) Casual Sexual Encounter

³ Minnesota State University website, www.mnstate.edu, published 13th Dec 2010. DOA: 23rd June 2014.

- h) Obsessive Love
- i) Morally Developing Love
- j) Recollection of Past Relationships
- k) Love Affair

The themes of love in country music are analyzed in various ways. Very often love is “depicted as the prize at the end of a long spiritual journey toward self-realization” (Fillingim, 2003: 88) where “the idea of relationship’ is remembered and amplified by emphasizing the figure of the singer as a metaphoric old friend or lover, an omnipresent other who is longed for and obsessed over” (Fox, 2004: 174). Love is not always described as romantic, as good, as a motivating and developing kind of feeling. Love can also be connected with infidelity, abuse and violence. It is often soothed and eased with some humor and irony. “The humor with which country music presents themes of adultery and alcohol abuse is usually a bitter irony – these are seen as the negative consequences of bad choices. Drinking and cheating represent a failure to carry out a fitting response to the difficulties one faces in life” (Fillingim, 2003: 148).

Love songs are essential when we discuss the authenticity of country artists. Love is one of the methods of establishing a relation with the singer and identifying with him or her. Fans listen to the songs and share the experience and emotions the singers present. That is why it is easier for country listeners to identify with the genre and they interpret the stories through their own filters. Love in country songs brings the feeling of belonging, of returning or of leaving – the most often repeated themes of songs I have analyzed. Other popular themes are the ones of nostalgia and feeling lonesome.

Nostalgia and loneliness

Music catalyzes emotions. The evocations of the romantic South, the Appalachian imagery and other associations with the Old South bring the feelings of nostalgia, of missing times long gone and places that one will never return to, they create “the nation’s nostalgia for the antebellum South” (Cox, 2011: 36)

As Cox further emphasizes: “The South was often described as ‘romantic’, and what made it romantic was its landscape and, very often, the region’s history. [...] This romantic image of the South in literature remained constant well into the twentieth century, as northern tourists sought to come face-to-face with antebellum mansions, where they might imagine chivalrous planters, beautiful belles, and faithful Negroes” (2011: 120). Why do they want to recall the “good ole’ times”, their parents, the places they grew up in, and all those fond memories? And why would they recall the painful ones too? Recalling the past recalls the charm and comfort in country songs that is luring.

Country songs praise the mythical way of life, the Southern way of life, and “the power of myth and symbolism in shaping the folk culture of the South and its music” is indisputable (Malone, 1993: 3). This is often the way of escaping from the unpleasant reality right into the peace and comfort of the good memories. As Malone suggests: “uncertain about their real identities, musicians and public alike often sought escape in presumed representations of a mythical past” (1993: 4). In uncertain times, times of fast-paced changes and uneasiness of life, the “Imaginary South” helps support the stability of the Southern Identity, the feelings of belonging to a group which supports comforts and brings solace. The themes of nostalgia and Southern affection survives and flourishes in country songs, in literature about the past and films portraying the Southern way of life. The roots of this trend reach far back into the 19th century:

Throughout this period, songs about Dixie never stay far from themes of a romanticized South. [...] the South served as inspiration for songwriters who saw a paradise in mythological Dixie, regardless of whether it matched reality (Cox, 2011: 10).

Many country artists take inspiration from the literature and films about the South. The list of novels, poetry and films is long so I will only name a few titles: 1980s *Coal Miner's Daughter*, *Your Cheatin' Heart* from 1964, *Nashville* 1975, or *Gone with the Wind* (first film was released in 1939). These films and books about the South “also perpetuated a romantic version of the region that northern consumers of the genre assumed they might still find in the modern South” (Cox, 2011: 96). The South of country songs seems a good place to live, a place of conservative values, of good people, of romantic memories, chivalrous gentlemen and beautiful belles. This ideal is one of the elements of the Southern Identity.

Nostalgic folk and country songs have long served as a kind of “soothing” medicine in times of trouble. They accompanied plantation work, helped survive the war turmoil, supported Southerners in times of Great Depression and the urbanization and northernization processes of 1950s. Good memories of the idyllic past made the changes of the 1980s and the dangers of the 2000s easier to accept. “The powerful impulse for rural nostalgia that accompanied the nation's transition to urban-industrialism also stimulated the American popular song industry” (Malone, 1993: 7).

Country music's popularity increase of the 1950's and 1980's shows this need of the nation to search for comfort, for the sense of security and the sense of belonging. “This more or less successful transplantation of Southern communities to Northern settings, maintaining down-home ways and some measure of ties to the home place, is characteristic of people who left the South for economic reasons. These are the men and women who sing the lonesome, homesick songs of country music” (Reed, 1993: 112). People need a safe and stable place to live. Sometimes this place is the one they keep in their minds and can take it wherever they go, especially that “distance tends to heighten and not lessen romantic nostalgia (Cash, 1991: 383).

Country music tells about nostalgia in simple, sentimental words. “It is a music of human stories, hopes and failings” (*The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 1998:

Introduction, page x). People need unconditional love and safety to survive. Our lives are influenced by the need to be a part of something, a family, a group, a society. Many country songs cover the subject of nostalgia and loneliness. Among examples are: *Mountain Music* by Alabama, *The Grand Tour* by George Jones, *Green Green Grass of Home* by Porter Wagoner, *Red Dirt Road* by Brooks & Dunn or *Small Town USA* by Tim McGraw.

Loneliness and “high lonesome”

To be lonesome means to be lonely: to miss your friends, your family or your beloved ones. It also means to miss the times and places that are difficult to return to. As Cecelia Tichi states, “this nation was founded upon loneliness” (Tichi, 1994: 87).

The ‘high lonesome’ in country music symbolizes “a lack of companionship or society, of being alone, isolated, solitary, desolate, standing apart” (Tichi, 1994: 86). High Lonesome has more than one meaning. It is a collection of three volumes of short stories, a film title, a genre of bluegrass music, a name of a band, and a title for many country albums and songs.

Lonesome songs are sad, they are about a broken heart and loneliness that is painful and hard to overcome. And as Tichi states, “the absence fosters feelings of loneliness” (1994: 80). This loneliness is unique for the South. One of the factors influencing its power is the Southern nature and landscape, where “the loneliness endemic to American space. Mountains, prairies, deserts, pine forests, topographical tracts of every kind, make the wayfarers feel displaced environmentally as they are dislodged personally” (Tichi, 1994: 90).

Country songs are not only joyful, positive songs about romance and love stories. They can be sad and emotional. They will sound real for the listeners who can identify with them. The South both buys and creates the music and it fills in the emotional needs of its consumers. Country thus has the privilege to sing sad heartbreaking, tearing apart songs, because they express longing for past times, the antebellum South, the pre-industrialized and pre-urbanized times of social order, conservative values, preserving nature and old traditions. If there is a connotation and familiarity between the singer’s image, the content of his or her songs and the realities and emotions of their fans, then country music becomes the tool of describing the world. A song, thanks to its lyrics, their metanarratives and the larger context, becomes an instruction, a secret code and a map of the world, “unrecognized by official versions of an American identity, country’s ‘high lonesome’ carves deep into the idea of what it means to be an American. In this case, country music becomes a secret map” (Tichi, 1994: 87).

Country music has almost not changed since its beginnings. It “has a special cultural license to express a feeling so deeply and profoundly disturbing that, elsewhere in society, it is muted, half-hidden, suppressed, treated like a kind of skeleton in the

American closet” (Tichi, 1994: 83). The genre allows for singing about the difficult and emotional matters, it deals with everyday problems and the burdens of life. It sings it all out loud and is not ashamed of it. In my opinion, artists of no other genre, represent such a wide spectrum of themes, especially the ones connected with everyday problems, longing for and sadness in such a straightforward way. Country sings about sadness, and the “deep sense of loss and isolation” (Tichi, 1994: 88) in simple words, because these feelings refer to anyone. Sorrow conserves energy and prepares us to deal with problems. Sadness releases prolactin, the “tranquilizing hormone”. Sad music influences our mood and consoles us. It connects us with the singer, who is similar to us, and shares our emotions, comforts us. This becomes an automated strategy and our reactions repeat. And this is what unites country fans and identifies them. They are not afraid to show their emotions and share their problems “with the world”.

Road songs

Road songs are a very important part of the rich repertoire of country music. The musician as a wanderer wanderlust, road trips, going on a tour, the life of a star, always on tour, migration, leaving the South, a train ride and railway are just a few motifs present in the song lyrics I analyzed during my study. Why is the road so important in the life of a Southerner? Why is this concept given such a wide interest? The answer is simple – it is the migratory lifestyle that Southerners adopted in the past and the influence it still has on the contemporary generation.

The harshness of everyday struggle, the life on the prairie or in the mountains, the Southern climate, hard work, economic conditions, poverty, the post-plantation conservatism, made Southerners leave his home and travel North or East in search for a better place to live, to earn and to survive. However, he has never really left his home, it will stay in his heart and mind forever and he will be torn between the loneliness and missing old times, people and places and the need to struggle for a better future. The “split personality” theme “haunts country music” (Brackett, 1995: 76) as it is a kind of “homesickness without remedy” (Tichi, 1994: 90).

Country music lyrics represent contradictions of a working-class white Southerner, and tensions between how things are and how they should be. It is more of a man’s perspective. Women usually stay home and take care of their family. (Fillingim, 2003: 41–63). The man knows that he must leave home in search for a better future, or if he is a country singer, he must go on tour because it is his responsibility to be with his fans and also to earn money and return home to be with and support his family. He feels the “ambivalence about the split between the road and the home” (Tichi, 1994: 65).

Americans are “the mobile nation whose population has been urged to move and move again, to continue journeying to every compass point of a huge continental

space” which “reveals in its country music the emotional result of this restlessness” (Tichi, 1994: 102). This restlessness and the need to be on the road stems from “the economic hopelessness of the rural home-place that prompted the song’s protagonist to join the hillbilly migration to the economically oppressive urban North, (where he) longs for a new home that will transcend both rural destitution and urban oppression” (Fillingim, 2003: 84). It emphasizes the American *topos* of the journey “toward the setting sun” (Tichi, 1994: 110) which suggests conflict between a man’s individualism and his need to return home. Journey become “eschatological more than nostalgic” (Fillingim, 2003: 84). The spirituality of the journey is best summarized by Tichi:

The idea of the voyage of life is entrusted to country music, as it has been entrusted to other arts in American culture. The symbols of this tradition appear uncomplicated, even simplistic [...]. Country music’s straightforward songs on wayfaring, journeying, sailing for better shores express the most profoundly spiritual beliefs many continue to hold and to find strengthening (1994: 193).

This paradox of contradictions in country music has also been researched by other scholars. Edwards (2009: 8) speaks about the tensions “between separation and community, rebellion and conformity”. These Southerners feel a deep sense of dislocation, even a culture shock, that is why they express their nostalgia, their yearnings for home, and what they left behind and “the friction between oppositions such as the rural past and the urban present, home versus rambling, and freedom versus restraint” (2009: 9).

There are many country songs about the road, to name just a few: *Red Dirt Road* by Brooks and Dunn, *Dirt Road Anthem* by Jason Aldean, *On the Road Again* by Willie Nelson, *Highwayman* by The Highwaymen, *Take a Back Road* by Rodney Atkins, *I’ve Been Everywhere*, by Johnny Cash, *East Bound and Down* by Jerry Reed, or *Country Roads (Take me Home)*, and *Roll On (Eighteen Wheeler)* by Alabama.

Roll On (Eighteen Wheeler) is a song in the style of ‘truck-driving country’. Trucks are “powerful cultural signifiers of rural and blue-collar life, with an implicit opposition to urban, white-collar life”.

We can see so much South here like in almost no other song. We have a father, who is a truck driver, and he is coming home. We have a truck, and not just a truck, a massive and respected eighteen wheeler, we have a wide highway and the sense of freedom, there is a woman waiting for her man back home. The father is lost, nobody knows what happened to him, all the worried family wait impatiently but they have faith that he is safe and sound. Eventually the police find the man and he calls his wife that he is coming back home.

*Roll on highway, roll on along
Roll on daddy till you get back home
Roll on family, roll on crew
Roll on momma like I asked you to do
And roll on eighteen-wheeler roll on (roll on)*

The repetition of the lines of chorus (or lyric refrain) is something worth mentioning at this particular point. This song is a repetition of the words “Roll on”, which “typically depart from the epic narrativity of verses, and yet they contain the crucial creative element that earns the evaluative characterization of a ‘song with a story to it’” (Fox, 2004: 161). Now, let us move back to the “story”:

*Well it's Monday morning, he's kissin' mamma goodbye
He's up and gone with the sun
Daddy drives an eighteen-wheeler
And he's off on a midwest run
As three sad faces gather 'round mamma
They ask her when daddy's comin' home
Daddy drives an eighteen-wheeler
And they sure miss him when he's gone (yeah they do)
[...]
But the driver was missin' and the search had been abandoned*

The road means progress and the search for a better life, development: “The road is the pathway of self-development and self-improvement” (Tichi, 1994: 62), and the need to move on with one’s life. Country music “celebrates the road [...] to praise its own rites and rituals. It really suggests that country music sustains a centuries-long tradition in which the road itself is central to American culture” (Tichi, 1994: 58). The symbolism of the road and journey is often connected with the “the Jeffersonian symbol of the road” (Tichi, 1994: 60), which dates back to the decision of president Thomas Jefferson to build a road (called the National Road or the Cumberland Road) which connected the East with the West of the USA. It emphasizes the importance of the road, its meaning and influence on Americans, who are “mobile, migratory, questing, surging, continually on the move” (Tichi, 1994: 72).

Literary stylistics – selected stylistic figures

To explore the literary style of country songs I have used a number of concepts derived from poetics, which relate to the means of artistic expression used in the literature to produce the desired effect in the recipient. Stylistic devices in the literature are often the equivalent of rhetorical figures in oral texts, hence to analyze the subject we can move within the nomenclature of both domains.

One of the most important stylistic means is a metaphor. Its popularity stems from the fact that it can be read in many ways, although each of them has to oscillate around the author’s original idea, because otherwise this figure could distort the meaning of the message. Metaphors bring to the text abstract *imagings*, but, in contrast to what they appear to be, they have a cognitive function, which facilitates understanding the image. Some of the metaphors used in the lyrics have become stock expressions (phrases), they have been repeated many times and eventually became idioms, like the *broken heart* or *I cross my heart*.

The poetic probing of conventional and hackneyed metaphors in song texts canonically involves a 'literal' extension of metaphoric entailments that undermine or extend a metaphor's frozen 'ordinary' figurative sense. Literalization is engaging and poetic in proportion to the dullness and ubiquity of the metaphor itself, and in proportion to the number of conventional metaphors within a single domain that can be swept up into a single denaturalizing image (Fox, 2004: 321).

I would like to focus on the songs that provide most popular and most important metaphors (and idiomatic expressions) that I have encountered in the songs I analyze. The most common metaphor in country song lyrics relate to the sphere of feelings and relationships. The *broken heart* idiom is well known, not only in the sphere of passionate love songs and not only in country style. The expression: *to have a broken heart* is popular and easy to understand. This phrase appears in the titles of many songs – a number of them can serve as good examples, *Somewhere In My Broken Heart* by Billy Dean, *For My Broken Heart* by Reba McEntire. The same is true with other metaphors and idioms concerning the feelings and the heart, for example, *cross my heart*, *aching heart*, *burning heart*, *bleeding heart*.

Metaphors used in country are often present in the song's title, like the one of The Carter Family's *Bury Me Under the Weeping Willow Tree*. The title can be read as metaphorical, since the type of the tree (the weeping tree) affects the imaging of the listener and directs them to specific emotions and actions. When the singer of the song dies, everyone will "weep", even the tree.

Imagery appears in almost every text about love, although its sophistication is of course of various intensity. Like in Charley Pride's *Just Between You and Me* – the wounds will cure with time, everything will be all right:

Time will dry the teardrops from my eyes
Time will heal all wounds

Or like in Keith Whitley's *When You Say Nothing at All* – you can speak about emotions that go directly to my heart, I know how you feel, I can 'read' it in your eyes:

You can speak right to my heart
There's truth in your eyes

The emotional sphere described in country texts is often presented using the *epithet*. Selected epithets of this type that often repeat in country songs are:

- *unconditional Love* (George Strait, *I Cross My Heart*)
- *divine conspiracy*, *lovely angel*, *great martyr*, *flattered fool*, *days of doubt* (Blake Shelton, *God Gave Me You*)
- *pepper sprout*, *big fool*, *big-talkin man*, *scalded hound* (Johnny Cash, *Jackson*)
- *weeping willow tree*, *wedding day* (The Carter Family *Bury Me Under the Weeping Willow Tree*)

Epithets are figures used to highlight certain features of a phenomenon, a person or an object. They increase the emotional coloring of the song, making it more artistic and the described content becomes more vivid. As in the case of the metaphor, epithets in country texts also relate largely to the emotional sphere, especially love.

In addition to metaphors and epithets, country authors often use *comparisons*. These are simple statements such as:

- *Love her like the devil* (Tom Jones, *Kiss an Angel Good Morning*)
- *Like a river meets the sea* (Braid Paisley, *Then*)

A common stylistic phenomenon present in texts devoted to love is also the *apostrophe*. The singer addresses the listener with vocabulary related to the sphere of feelings: *honey, girl, my angel, baby*.

In order to emphasize the described feelings of country authors they also use the *anaphora*. This figure is also used to give the rhythm to verses or words. Dixie Chicks in *Cowboy Take Me Away* often use the emphasis with the help of the anaphora:

*I said I wanna touch the earth
I wanna break it in my hands
I wanna grow something wild and unruly
[...]
Set me free oh I pray
Closer to heaven above and
Closer to you
[...]
I wanna walk and not run
I wanna skip and not fall
I wanna look at the horizon*

The stylistic devices discussed above are placed among the most popular in literature and hence their frequent occurrence in the area that is rather limited in terms of rhetorical means – in country music lyrics. However, in these short stylized texts we can sometimes find a rhetoric figure of sophisticated functions, for example a *synecdoche*. A synecdoche adds to the visual imagery and refers to the listener's experience. This stylistic device can be found in *Cowboy Take Me Away* by Dixie Chicks as one building means more, the image of a whole town:

*I wanna look at the horizon
And not see a building standing tall*

Themes of love in selected country songs

Abstract: The objective of the following paper is to identify the poetic and rhetoric devices of country songs about love, nostalgia and the road. Although the analysis has been made on a small sample (around 25 songs), it has revealed that songs about emotions use a direct language without the use of complex literary devices. Country poets reflect their emotionality and sensations resulting from relationships by using the colloquial language and a few epithets, because the task of the authors is not to surprise and amaze the recipient, but to tell a story in a clear and expressive way or manifest the emotions that tear his heart. Such message from the artist, sent to the people who listen to it, affect their emotions and behavior. The paper discusses the tools of literary, poetic and narrative analysis used in country songs about love.

I have decided to analyze the chosen songs and classify them according to selected figures of speech used in their lyrics, as well as to their stylistic features. Each theme analyzed in this charter suggests that country music is simple so that its lyrics can be understood by everyone. Country listeners can compare the song's meaning and story to their own lives and experience. These songs are good illustrations of the Southern state of mind and Southerners can thus be defined upon the ideals of love, nostalgia and road.

Keywords: country music, country songs, lyrics, love, macropragmatics

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