

Song Analysis

It is said that “country remains more overtly loyal to the experience, desires, and language of a particular class & culture than almost any other major popular music genre” (Fox 53). *Blown Away* by Carrie Underwood released in 2012 and *The Thunder Rolls* by Garth Brooks released in 1991 can be analyzed through their consistent country features and willingness to discuss private matters in a poetic way. Though these songs are written two decades apart, both country tunes showcase the identity concepts of pain and family through the symbol of “storms.”

The country genre is one of the most notorious for discussing pain as well as family ties. These two concepts are also key identity topics discussed in Steph Lawler’s book *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, a reference that will be used throughout this analysis. As Webb Pierce stated, in country music “you sing about the things that people think about most, but don’t talk about” (Fox 56). Carrie Underwood’s emotional tune is about a daughter and an abusive, alcoholic father, while Brooks discusses the pain of a wife and cheating husband, but both are expressing the pain caused and the family, or lack of, ties that go with that feeling of loss.

In “*Blown Away*,” a clap of thunder is heard at 0:45 to begin the song. Carrie Underwood begins in an almost story-telling tone of voice to set the scene of a girl with a father who was a “mean old mister” and a no longer living mother. In a still ominous voice she repeats in the song how nothing in all of Oklahoma can “wash the sins” out of this household. This gives the listener the ability to infer that there is an abusive relationship between the father and daughter. This reference to Oklahoma is what helps give Carrie Underwood her passion to sing this song, as she is from Oklahoma. She would know firsthand the strength and destruction storms such as the one described in this song can produce. In the verses there is a combination of guitars, kick drum,

piano, and other stringed instruments such as a violin. In the chorus there is an eruption of emotion with Carrie's higher pitched intensity and echoes of her voice along with the constant bang of a drum, as if to reiterate the intensity of the storm, figuratively and literally. Auto-tune can be heard in her voice at a few select places, especially in the chorus. Possibly because a technological voice can at times have more emotion than human voice (Auner). As the tempo increases Carrie seems to let go of all emotion and sing about how "every tear soaked whiskey-memory" will be destroyed by this storm. These bits of lyrics along with the mention of "revenge" show how pain and family can shape who you will become. At 4:03 of the song, suddenly the cracks of thunder stop and the listener can faintly hear birds chirping and eventually the sound of crickets. This is to show that the "storm" is over and that the object of this narrative has moved on, proving the point that country is often "timeless" and constantly looking to the past (Fox 57). These narratives make us perceive the teller as a sort of hero for living through this pain, therefore giving songs such as "Blown Away" a lot of power and authority. Lawler stated that trauma narratives such as childhood abuse "appear to be enjoying an interest that shows no sign of fading."

Garth Brooks' emotional song, "The Thunder Rolls" shares many similarities to Underwood's tune including timbre, buildup, use of nature, and identity concepts although written 20 years prior. This song too starts with a crack of thunder to add an ominous feel, followed by acoustic guitars. Garth enters fifteen seconds into the song with a story-telling tone, including words such as "ghost town" and "moonless" to reinforce the pain that is soon to be told. After stating the object of the song has been somewhere he "never should have been," an electric guitar soon enters at 0:50 to begin a buildup of intensity into the next verse. He then describes a woman pacing who is "hoping it's the weather that has kept him out all night."

Without actually saying it, Garth implies to the listener that he is discussing the pain of a cheating husband or significant other. Before the first chorus and each one after that, there is a triplet of electric guitar chords that gives off the vibe that it is no longer a calm matter. Brooks has an emotional tone to his voice in the chorus as if truly feeling the pain himself. In the second verse there seems to be the climax at the phrase “a strange new perfume blows, and the lightning flashes in her eyes.” The music in the verse is the same as previously, but with this being said, the music and his voice begin to pick up, along with the addition of extra electric guitar runs before the next chorus. It is as if the listener can really feel at this point the pain of the wife and the husband’s fear of being caught. His slower, story-telling lyrics are as if to connect to the wife who is feeling what he is saying, while the faster pace music in the background connects to the husband’s heartbeat as he realizes he has been caught.

At the conclusion of the song, the sound of thunder and electric guitar fades into the sound of simply rain and acoustic guitar for roughly thirty seconds. Like the Carrie Underwood song, it is as if to state that the worst is over. Although not a robotic voice, this song does use the repetition of the phrase “and the thunder rolls.” In the “Sing It for Me” article, Auner, discusses how repetition can cause “disturbing effects” in our minds (Auner 112). In this case, it seems to reiterate the fact that the thunder rolling goes hand in hand with the husband committing adultery. This goes back again to how country takes private matters and inverts them into being intensely public (Fox 56). In fact, this song is so willing to bring private matters to light, that only on the official album or live performances, Garth Brooks will include the third verse telling of how the wife “reaches for the pistol” and plans to kill her cheating husband. This verse was censored out for radio purposes, as well as the official music video because it gave suggestive notions, and TV companies generally refused to air it. This third verse may tie into

the fact that, as stated earlier, “the worst is over” at the end of the song when the thunder simply turns into the sound of rain in the audio, symbolizing the wife has killed the husband and gotten rid of the “problem” and pain in her family.

Both country songs show the identity concepts of family and pain. Lawler states that family is often seen through the orders of either blood or law. Carrie Underwood’s song shows the tie of blood between father and daughter while Garth Brooks shows the tie of law through a wife and husband. A general sense of identity is brought out by who our family is, and we become ourselves through what has happened with family in the past. This can be related to a story told in Lawler chapter 2 about how a girl’s mother was always very strict and uninviting, leading the narrator to want to live in a house full of people and friendliness at all times. Though a generally negative vibe is portrayed in both songs’ lyrics and music, both give a somewhat positive sense in the end of the music that the “storm” has passed and better things are to come. This connects to the pain concepts as well. “The subject of pain is almost to guarantee authority” (Lawler). This cannot be denied, that chart toppers generally tend to be trauma narratives that we find an urge to connect to. There does not seem to be any relationship of Carrie Underwood to childhood abuse or Garth Brooks to experiencing a relationship with cheating involved, but their voices portray a sense of connection whether it is their pain or not.

A general characteristic of country music is the puns, word play, and general country stereotypical references, which can be found throughout these two songs. Referrals to whiskey, a pistol, and a “faded flannel gown” are both items that can usually be linked to a “country” way of life. The two show eerily similar lines when describing the visual pain of the women. The “storm clouds gather in her eyes” in Carrie’s song, and the “lightning flashes in her eyes” in Garth’s. Both subjects of this tension in the eyes are women, which can even be attached to

stereotypes within society of how women are portrayed as the more emotional of the two sexes. This also goes along with the fact that in both narratives the men are at fault, though for different reasons. Carrie, as a woman, sings about the woman's trouble in a more positive way as if connecting to her own strength and femininity. Garth sings in a much darker tone, as if connecting the fact that he is a man and the man in the song is the guilty one. They both use word play about the storms to discuss the topic figuratively and literally. In Garth's song for example, the storm comes in as the husband returns home from cheating: "There's a storm moving in. He's headin' back from somewhere that he never should have been." In Carrie's song, she sings about hoping the storm will "rip the nails out of the past." The titles of the songs are both repeated throughout, as they are the main message or theme. In one sense, everything from the pain, bad memories, and even the actual father are "Blown Away." In the other case, "The Thunder Rolls" in the sky as well as in the heart of the wife who knows her husband is cheating.

Both "Blown Away" from just two years ago, and "The Thunder Rolls" from over 20 years ago portray identity concepts we still acknowledge today: pain and family. These two concepts shape who we are as individuals. The music brings the concepts to light through a more emotional sense with heartbreaking voices and ill-omened melodies. The artists portray their songs as narratives, which is obvious through the lyrics, but more meaning lies within the timbre of their voices, the background music, and references. The storms in these songs symbolize the storm that private matters can cause within ourselves, but the country genre finds a poetic way to showcase these everyday life private matters. Music will constantly change and adapt to find ways to tell stories about people and cultures and the struggles among us that make us who we are.

"Blown Away" by Carrie Underwood

Dry lightning cracks across the skies
Those storm clouds gather in her eyes
Her daddy was a mean old mister
Mama was an angel in the ground
The weather man called for a twister
She prayed blow it down

There's not enough rain in Oklahoma
To wash the sins out of that house
There's not enough wind in Oklahoma
To rip the nails out of the past

[Chorus:]

Shatter every window 'til it's all blown away,
Every brick, every board, every slamming door blown away
'Til there's nothing left standing, nothing left of yesterday
Every tear-soaked whiskey memory blown away,
Blown away

She heard those sirens screaming out
Her daddy laid there passed out on the couch
She locked herself in the cellar
Listened to the screaming of the wind
Some people call it taking shelter
She called it sweet revenge

[Chorus:]

Shatter every window 'til it's all blown away,
Every brick, every board, every slamming door blown away

'Til there's nothing left standing, nothing left of yesterday

Every tear-soaked whiskey memory blown away,

Blown away

There's not enough rain in Oklahoma

To wash the sins out of that house

There's not enough wind in Oklahoma

To rip the nails out of the past

Shatter every window 'til it's all blown away (blown away)

Every brick, every board, every slamming door blown away (blown away)

'Til there's nothing left standing, nothing left of yesterday (blown away)

Every tear-soaked whiskey memory blown away,

Blown away, blown away, blown away, blown away, blown away

Lyrics from AZ Lyrics <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/carrieunderwood/blownaway.html>

"The Thunder Rolls" by Garth Brooks

Three thirty in the morning
Not a soul insight
The city's lookin' like a ghost town
On a moonless summer night
Raindrops on the windshield
There's a storm moving in
He's headin' back from somewhere
That he never should have been
And the thunder rolls
And the thunder rolls

Every light is burnin'
In a house across town
She's pacin' by the telephone
In her faded flannel gown
Askin' for miracle
Hopin' she's not right
Prayin' it's the weather
That's kept him out all night
And the thunder rolls
And the thunder rolls

The thunder rolls
And the lightnin' strikes
Another love grows cold
On a sleepless night
As the storm blows on
Out of control
Deep in her heart

The thunder rolls

She's waitin' by the window

When he pulls into the drive

She rushes out to hold him

Thankful he's alive

But on the wind and rain

A strange new perfume blows

And the lightnin' flashes in her eyes

And he knows that she knows

And the thunder rolls

And the thunder rolls

The thunder rolls

And the lightnin' strikes

Another love grows cold

On a sleepless night

As the storm blows on

Out of control

Deep in her heart

The thunder rolls

[3rd Verse:]

She runs back down the hallway

To the bedroom door

She reaches for the pistol

Kept in the dresser drawer

Tells the lady in the mirror

He won't do this again

Cause tonight will be the last time

She'll wonder where he's been

Lyrics from AZ Lyrics <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/garthbrooks/thethunderrolls.html>

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