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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, PH.D., 1978
THE SENTIMENTAL MOTHER SONG

IN AMERICAN COUNTRY MUSIC

1923-45

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
William Carson Ellis, B.A., M.A.

*** ***

The Ohio State University

1978

Reading Committee: Approved By
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Daniel R. Barnes
Adviser
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This dissertation is dedicated
to the memory of my father,
William Robert Ellis.

Although the Depression ended his own scholarship,
he taught his children
the dignity and worth of an academic career.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Over the three years of my writing, many scholars have given me help and encouragement. Foremost among these are Dan Barnes of Ohio State, D. K. Wilgus of UCLA, and Norm Cohen of The John Edwards Memorial Foundation. Dan Barnes, this work's main adviser, boosted me when I was discouraged, pruned my prolix style, and, above all, convinced me by his enthusiasm that I was not, after all, exploring a "bizarre" topic. D. K. Wilgus, whose earlier work at OSU cleared the way to the serious study of country music, advised me on how to interpret my song texts while I was at work at UCLA, and also allowed me to participate in a seminar of his. His work on ballad classification made possible my own cataloging system, although its faults can in no way be attributed to him. Norm Cohen graciously threw open the doors of the JEMF's unique archives of country music 1923-45 and allowed me nearly free rein to listen, copy, and dub the songs I found there. Without his help this study would be far sketchier than it is now. Norm also shared his own ideas on sentimentality and kindly but incisively critiqued an earlier draft of my first chapter.

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INTRODUCTION

Various people—scholars, graduate students, folklorists, neighbors, family members, even a roving videotaper from a local TV station—have asked me why it was that I chose such a strange topic for my dissertation. They have been disappointed to learn that I chose it not because of some kinky personal attraction mothers have for me, but because I felt the topic genuinely needed serious study. Research on folk and popular songs in general, aside from the canon of British ballads, has been sparse over the years, and what we have tends to be either condescending or uncritical. American folksongs still await a sympathetic rhetorical analysis, and sentimental folksongs still await a second glance. And the extremely influential corpus of sentimental popular songs, still a strong tradition in country music today, seems never to have been considered a topic for study at all, even though these are the very songs that folk and early hillbilly performers held in highest respect. The genuinely "strange" topic, which I hope some sociologist will explore some day, is why such a song tradition has been ignored by scholars otherwise interested in popular and folk attitudes. Indeed, as we shall see, such scholars seem less ignorant of the topic than unwilling to give it serious study.

But serious study is long overdue. To illustrate the problems of today's scholarship, I will quote (anonymously, as I do not want to belittle an otherwise fine researcher) a typical comment
on a mother song. The piece in question is "When the Work's All Done This Fall" (Laws B 2), perhaps the single most popular cowboy song among real cowboys during the early part of the century.

Like "Don't Go Down In The Mines Today." [pct. sic] the piece was written with a particular sentimental audience in mind; although the audience has gone, the song remains. It is a precursor to such paeans to motherhood as "Mother, The Queen of My Heart" and "The Soldier's Last Letter." American song frequently will make the crossover between themes of religious and of family ties; Ralph Stanley, for instance, will include "The Fields Have Turned Brown" in his gospel segment although there is no religious connotation in the song. Probably the etime [sic] of this sentimentality was reached with Lefty Frizzell's recording of "The Mom and Dad Waltz" wherein he promises to "fight in wars, do all the chores, for my mom [sic] and daddy."

There are several layers of misinformation in this brief note, some trivial (Lefty Frizzell's name is misspelled and four of the five song titles are misquoted), and some more serious (Stanley's song does in fact contain explicit religious sentiments). But the more dangerous layers are the more general ones that control the way in which the song has been approached. To begin with, the researcher's attitude is openly scornful: the audience for such "paeans" has disappeared, and all that is left to be done is to quote some of the sillier passages from "this sentimentality" and silently chuckle. Yet the passage itself admits that the audience has not disappeared: Ralph Stanley still performs such songs and elsewhere the researcher observes that Doc Watson still includes "When the Work's . . ." in his concerts. Are both Stanley and Watson so blind to their audiences that they keep foisting material on them that they no longer wish to hear? Or is the researcher merely
assuring his scholarly audience that he, for one, does not want to be considered part of that disappearing audience?

This undercurrent of hostility, however, distracts us from the more basic level of misinformation, namely that this note tells us exactly nothing about the song it annotates. The researcher merely lists a series of songs, two of which have mothers as main characters, two of which split honors between mother and father, and one of which has only a father in it. He then asserts that they are all part of "this sentimentality," which, presumably, also afflicts the song in question. But the songs are never related in any coherent way, and even the perceptive remark about religion and motherhood is not related to the song it is intended to illustrate. The real fault of this passage, which is not a fault of the researcher, is that it relies on "sentimentality" as a key term, yet the points make it clear that there is no clear concept of sentimentality. Indeed, in research on folk and popular songs today there is no consensus on what the term means, yet it is commonly used to classify songs and even to dismiss certain texts as if it were graved in stone.

This study is intended to shed some light, however partial, on the conventional formulas, themes, and motifs in folk and early country sentimental songs. I will study what Roger Abrahams has recently termed the "praxa" of mother songs in particular—that is, the rhetorical patterns and tactics most commonly used by conscious artists in this tradition. Sentimentality is, of course, a huge topic, and in my opening chapter I make an effort at least to characterize it as a whole. But the bulk of my study will be limited
sharply by subject matter and by period. I have chosen to look most closely at songs that center around and praise idealized parents, in particular the sentimental mother. (One token chapter will be reserved for the sentimental father.) While I have tried to be as inclusive as possible in documenting this subject, I have not included songs that praise the little child or "home" in general, although both song traditions are clearly related to parent-child relations.

Further, I have limited my attention to the first twenty-three years of country music, from the first sentimental recordings by Fiddlin' John Carson in 1923 to the end of the Second World War. Following the usual practice of country song scholars, I will term the early years 1923-ca. 1933 the "hillbilly songs," and the music produced afterwards "country music." But when I refer to both traditions as a continuum, I will use the term "early country music."

I have also limited my approach to these songs to the type of analysis that I am most comfortable with. I stress the literary meaning of these songs, the messages the authors intended to send, rather than commenting on the psychological, sociological, or musicological implications of the songs. When possible, though, I will borrow ideas from these approaches to broaden and check my ideas, but my main argument will be based on rhetorical and literary grounds. I hope that my study will suggest ways in which the rest of American popular song can be studied in detail. Not only the rest of sentimental tradition needs close attention, but the broad spectrum of non-sentimental songs ought also to be examined and put in order. My study may give researchers a vocabulary of comments they can
use to describe particular songs without falling prey to ethnocentric judgments or fuzzy language. But it is, I hope, only the beginning of the comprehensive rhetorical study of American popular songs.
CHAPTER ONE
"THE 'BLIND' GIRL"
AND THE RHETORIC OF SENTIMENTAL HEROISM

Few scholars would deny that the American folksong tradition has adopted a large number of sentimental ballads, some directly from print or sheet music. Yet the few critical comments that have been made on the texts of these ballads have been brief, impressionistic, and usually hostile. One sign of this scholarly blindness is the fate of one such ballad, most commonly titled "The Blind Girl." Since 1906 the song has been collected from traditional performers in all sections of the country, but no scholar has given it more than a contemptuous glance. For example, in his Missouri collection Henry M. Belden offered only this tongue-in-cheek comment: "Whatever valuation one may place upon this effort to tear the heart-strings, it is clear that the author did not miscalculate." In his later notes for the Frank C. Brown North Carolina Collection, Belden added only that "The Blind Girl" is an "exercise in pathos...patently from print."1 From such comments as Belden's, one could presume only that the ballad is a simple, mawkish lament over an orphan's death. But a careful reading of the lyrics shows that this is not the case. The "blind and helpless child" of the ballad is not the self-pitying martyr that critics have suggested, but an active heroine as distinctively American as macho strong-men like John Henry. Her ballad is the story of how she overcomes the seemingly impossible handicaps of
bereavement, physical disability, and parental neglect to win a psychological and moral victory over her circumstances. If we understand the type of sentimental heroism that motivates "The Blind Girl," we will better comprehend the rhetorical principles that inform the many sentimental ballads and lyrics that entered oral tradition after it. Such understanding should also allow us to see why these songs have always been a vital force among folk performers.

"Sentimental ballad" has been the term used to describe "The Blind Girl" and its peers at least since Shearin and Combs placed it as a heading in their 1911 checklist of Kentucky folksongs, though they employed it only "in lieu of a better caption." In his 1925 dissertation, Combs retained the section for "Songs of sentiment and emotion," but explained only that "They represent no particular folk-song type, and are numerous." Since these captions referred to no specific element in the songs themselves, it is clear that they functioned as a sort of caste system, separating the songs "of emotion" from the more staid British imports and their American offspring. Certainly when critics such as Gordon Hall Gerould began to notice the sentimental ballads, they saw them only as a sign that "the communal discipline of taste" that had created the masterpieces of the Child collection had sunk into decadence in modern times. Gerould did not define what "sentimental" meant to him, but he did indicate that the "cheap and obvious emotion" of certain [unnamed] American ballads could not compare with the "restrained emotional tensity ... poignant with feeling" that he found in the Child ballads (pp. 263, 271). The distinction between "obvious" and "restrained"
emotion is a fine one to draw, but Gerould had more than aesthetic objections to the sentimental tradition.

Behind Gerould's rejection of "emotion" lies his romantic view of the grand dying tradition of "balladry." The folk's acceptance of broadsides, in both England and America, had been "the first assault of many in modern times on the integrity of the traditional art," but the broadside did not destroy the tradition. Their effect was to "lower the standards of taste," but balladry, however weakened, lived on (p. 243). The American sentimental tradition, by contrast, introduced songs into oral circulation that differed both in subject matter and in rhetorical strategies. The folk performers could accept them, but not the folklorists. It was natural for critics who shared Cecil J. Sharp's disdain for the music-hall ditty to place an absolute value on British and British-derived styles and to see recent sentimental songs as alien to "the" tradition. Gerould admitted that such songs circulated orally, but only, he supposed, because they "doubtless amused" the good folk (p. 270). In 1949 A. K. Davis had to apologize for including some sentimental ballads in a checklist of Virginia folksongs, adding that he limited his list to "only those songs which, in spite of their sentimental character, seem to have been appropriated by the folk . . ." [italics mine]. From this uneasy position—Davis was not even printing texts—it is not a large step to denying that sentimental ballads were "folksongs" at all.

In fact Maud Karpeles justified her refusal to note down the well-known sentimental lament "The Little Rosewood Casket," even when her informants offered it, saying "It is not a folk song; it is
not good music."^6

In 1950, when G. Malcolm Laws compiled his influential syllabus of native American ballads, he admitted some sentimental pieces, such as "The Dying Cowboy" ("Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie," B 2), but on the whole he confirmed the distinction between American and sentimental balladry. "American balladry," he asserted, "does not invent essentially false situations in order to weep over them," yet a carefully placed footnote at this place tells us that Laws did exclude a number of narrative songs current among American folk performers because "they combine a literary or pseudo-literary style with extreme sentimentality."\(^7\) Although Laws had quoted with approval Gerould's statement that "literary excellence" has no place in defining what is or is not "a ballad" (p. 6), it is evident that songs like "The Blind Girl" and "The Little Rosewood Casket" are not "ballads" in spite of their traditionality because they are literally inferior to "American balladry." Laws did not at once make clear what guidelines he used to segregate "The Blind Girl" from "The Dying Cowboy": both follow the same rhetorical pattern of the monologue ended by death, and the "American" ballad derives its style directly from a printed parlor song, "The Ocean Burial," which Laws banishes to the "Ballad-like Pieces" for its "literary or pseudo-literary style." We can, however, infer some of his editorial practices from the discussion that follows.

The "death-bed ballad," so popular in American tradition, suffers in Laws's eyes from one artistic shortcoming. This "mistake," he argues,
... comes not from the choice of subject matter, but from the attenuation of the death scene far beyond artistic limits. The event being recounted, however, is realistic enough; one encounters no difficulty in believing that these people are dying under the circumstances described. For this reason the sentimentality of the ballad is much easier to endure than is that in which both subject matter and treatment are unconvincing (p. 35).

"Extreme sentimentality," we can conclude, means for Laws a death accompanied by "unrealistic" circumstances, thus making the scene "unendurable" and "unconvincing." D. K. Wilgus, in his critique of Laws's editorial practices, commented wryly that some songs are "apparently less real to Laws than to [their] singers." In any case, Laws is motivated less by a desire to examine and define the artistic qualities of the whole of American folksong than by a need to get the "non-traditional" items out of the way. If the picture he gives of "American balladry" is neater as a result, it is also partial and falsified.

Recent years have brought two separate efforts to look at sentimental ballads more sympathetically. The first of these was Roger D. Abrahams and George Foss's account of "American songs of death" in Anglo-American Folksong Style. They characterize "sentiment" as "the elaboration of the most passionate and poignant moments of life ..." (p. 121), a statement that agrees with earlier critics that the distinctive elements is not content but style. But once they note that "songs of death" tend to focus on prolonged deaths of children and travellers, Abrahams and Foss offer no signs to show where simple poignancy stops and genuine sentimentality begins. Why is "Little Bessie" sentimental while "The Bonny Earl of Murray," presumably, is not? More seriously, Abrahams and Foss fail to
suggest a reason for this prolonging, other than an apparently unconscious sadistic desire to "place the audience much closer to the actual drama so that we may more fully savor the moment of death" (p. 122). The second of these studies was Norm and Anne Cohen's pioneering essay, "The Sentimental Ballad: A Neglected Folk Song Category." They attacked Laws's decision to exclude sentimental songs from "the tradition," noting that if one were to apply his criteria to the the Child ballads, few could pass as "realistic," while the excluded "Baggage Coach Ahead" recounts an actual incident literally (p. 12). The Cohens elected to seek the keynote of sensibility in the nature of the plots rather than in impressionistic comments on style, and they concluded that the true sentimental ballad properly describes not "action" but "passion" in the older senses of "suffering" as well as "self-sacrifice." In such plots, they argued, "feelings are described, often to the exclusion of action," while "the hero or heroine is usually a passive victim of circumstances." The ideal sentimental ballad, they suggested, "might be defined as a story of undeserved tragedy or suffering, with emphasis on the telling of the feelings of those so benighted" (pp. 7-8). The chief virtue of the Cohens' study is that they define sentimentality in terms of a continuation of folksong tradition, not as a corruption. While their main interest is American Tin Pan Alley songs, they make a case for considering broadsides like "The Cruel Ship's Carpenter" (Laws P 36) and even Child ballads like "Jellon Grame" (#90) as sentimental, at least in part (pp. 9-10). But, as with Abrahams and Foss's discussion, the Cohens' position does not suggest what function this
"passion" serves, presenting it instead as part of a larger cultural attitude toward passivity. Furthermore, the Cohens occasionally show some ambivalence toward their material. When they discuss sentimental-ity in the "murdered girl" formula, they note that in some versions of "The Cruel Ship's Carpenter" the victim returns from the grave to tear her murderer to pieces. "This saves the ballad from sentimental-ity," they conclude (p. 10). But if such a ballad needs to be "saved," then surely we are invited to prefer healthy, constructive revenge to passive, self-sacrificing suffering?

Although both Abrahams and Foss's discussion and the Cohens' paper approach sentimentality from a fresh perspective, seeing it as a tradi-tion in its own right, not a corruption of something better, yer both perspectives are incomplete, since neither offers us a sympathetic hypothesis about what purpose the tradition serves. To sum up the criticism to date, scholars have suggested that sentimentality satis-fies some deeply felt need in folk audiences, but they have tended to dismiss this need either as a superficial "junk-food" craving for raw emotion or as an unconscious, even sociopathic desire for sadism or self-destruction. Neither critical attitude leaves students much leeway to discuss sentimental ballads without at the same time admitting that they are artistically third-rate or that the culture that produced them is socially "inferior." There is still a need to characterize sentimentality according to the ballads themselves and the explicit messages they present, not according to the implicit attitudes a scholar may find or project in them.
One way of approaching these messages is to take a well-known sentimental ballad and examine its rhetorical tactics closely to see what the song was designed to communicate. Despite the arguments of New Criticism, rhetorical (or "literary") criticism has primarily concerned itself with the conscious, deliberate intentions of an author, who designs a literary work to present some sort of specific statement. Such criticism involves a painstaking look at the words of the work to determine, as closely as possible, what the controlling design is. The interpretation that emerges must satisfy two requirements: it must make sense out of every part of the work, and it must take into consideration the cultural (or biographical) background out of which the work came, as well as the designs of similar works from the same background. In the American sentimental tradition "The Blind Girl" seems the choice for such an analysis. The ballad has circulated orally at least since the 1860s with minimal aid from printed texts. The first collector of the ballad told Belden in 1906 that "it was not brought [into Missouri] in print, as it is best known among unlearned people." Although Belden and Laws assumed a professional origin, extensive searches by Norm Cohen and myself have turned up neither author nor printed source. Were it not for "extreme sentimentality," "The Blind Girl" would be as traditional, narrative, and anonymous an American ballad as we might demand. The essence of its plot is as follows:

A little blind girl tells her father that she has found out that he will remarry tonight. She wonders if her new stepmother will be as kind and good as her own mother, now dead. Refusing to
greet the new bride in the room where her own mother died, the blind girl instructs her father to let her new mother kiss her only after she has fallen asleep. After praying to God to guide her new parents, she becomes weary and suddenly dies, uttering a cry of joy. She is buried beside her mother.

This song fits previous critics' definitions of "sentimentality": the blind girl expresses her sorrow at great length, appealing to the raw emotions of pity and bereavement, then dies a gratuitous and "unconvincing" death. The ballad focuses on a child's death, and makes the suffering figure not only passive, but virtually helpless. Yet after we have identified all these elements in the ballad, have the shown that the text contains nothing more? It is at this point that we need to take a closer look at the ballad's design as well as commonplace techniques from other ballads in the same tradition.

To begin with the Cohens' main concern: how does the blind girl respond to suffering? Is she "a passive victim of circumstances" or does she react in a constructive way? At first we might side with the Cohens, since the child admits that she is "helpless" and begins the ballad by lamenting her tragic plight: "They tell me, father, that tonight/You're to wed a new-made bride . . . ."

(*You're to/You've K) Critics have overlooked the fine economy, characteristic of the British tradition, with which this ballad opens. Within two lines it introduces the two main characters and dramatically places the audience in the "fifth act." We discover, for example, that the child narrator is faced with three emotional hardships in addition to her physical disability. First, she has been separated from her mother, and ballads from this period stress that mother-child bonds are far more painful to break than any other.
Second, she is faced with having to live with a stepmother, who, however kind and affectionate, is still no replacement for the child's natural mother. Third, we find that the father has not even told his daughter about his remarriage, since she has had to find out from an unnamed "they" on the very day of the ceremony. Folk performers find this subtle detail worth preserving: one might expect the first line to vary to "You tell me, father..." but I have never seen this variation in any printed text. It seems, then, that the father either has not bothered to tell the child or has deliberately concealed his plans from her. In either case the child is "helpless" in more than a physical sense. So far as the first two lines go, then, we could see the blind girl as "a victim of circumstances," victimized both by death and by her father's negligence.

The fate of motherless children whose fathers remarry is a sentimental motif preserved in more detail in another ballad from the same period. "The Stepmother" (also known as "I Could Not Call Her Mother") was composed in 1855 by Harry Harrison, and it too passed into oral circulation, though not so widely as "The Blind Girl." (Three texts are printed in Randolph, 4:196-196.) Its story is as follows:

As his father's marriage ceremony ends, the narrator, a small child, hides his tears as he and his brother greet their new mother. Although she is beautiful, the child cannot call her "Mother." When he hears her sing a song once sung by his own dead mother, he sorrows. His mother's picture is replaced by another's, and her old room becomes the new bride's boudoir. The father, living in new happiness, forgets that his children must live on as orphans, for God gave them only one mother.

This ballad describes in more detail the things that make step-children suffer as they mourn their real mother's death. Both
"The Blind Girl" and "The Stepmother" present the new bride not as a witch-like "terrible mother," but as a beautiful woman much like the child's native mother. The blind girl's stepmother bears the same name as the first wife, while the new mother in Harrison's lament sings the same songs the original mother sang. But both children are inconsolable: the stepmother represents both the loss of a natural mother's instinctive love and the loss of a father's sympathy, and the closer she comes to the original, the deeper the sense of permanent loss.

Almeda Riddle sums up her attitude toward this situation:

... I had the feeling that a stepmother was the very worst thing that could happen to a child. I don't know that I'd been worried so much about losing my mother. But I think maybe that was why it appealed to me. I've always had a very lively imagination and I could imagine how terrible it would be to be blind. And then to be blind and to be helpless and to have a stepmother too; I thought that was just too much. I think that's why it appealed to me then and I learned it.

In the face of this statement earlier critics' definitions of sentimentality seem more problematic than helpful. If the situation described is "just too much," then why does the ballad appeal to performers like Riddle? The answer is that "The Blind Girl" is not content to describe "the very worst thing that could happen to a child," it shows how such a situation can and should be handled by a so-called "helpless" child.

The first stanza does more than place the audience in the fifth act of an undeserved tragedy—it quickly creates a dramatic scene. The ballad is a dramatic monologue, in which the child confronts her father with his deeds and attacks him in an outspoken, if respectful manner. The opening lines make the rebuke obvious:
They tell me, father, that tonight
You're to wed a new-made bride,
That you will clasp* her in your arms
Where my dear mother died,
*That she will lean her graceful head
Upon your loving* breast,
Where she who now lies down in death
In life's best* hour did rest.

Given the context of the blind girl's speech—the father's wedding night—it is surprising that she would refer not only to his first wife's death, but also to "where" she died. Assuming that the mother died in the father's arms ("where" has no clear subject), the blind girl is asking her father to picture the death scene in the most physical, jarring way possible. In addition, her comment that now he is about to embrace a new woman juxtaposes bride and corpse in an unusually graphic way. At very least she is accusing her father of disrespect for his first wife, and the references to clasping and embracing on a wedding night add a nasty aura of forbidden sex to the rebuke. Certainly this is no passive lament; it is the beginning of an as speech designed to stun the father and put him on the defensive.

To be sure, the blind girl does not follow up this salvo with direct accusations. On the surface, she merely asks about her stepmother and excuses herself from the marriage reception. But these stanzas do not drop the offensive. They show the child reminding her father again and again of the dead mother's angelic virtue, pointing to the keepsakes that should keep her memory alive. She emerges as the stereotypical domestic mother, who is "kind and true," with "steps . . . soft and low" and "voice . . . sweet and mild," and the catalog of her keepsakes—picture, books [K reads "Bible"], harp,
and chair—climaxes with a vignette of the mother as moral leader of the family, with her child kneeling beside her, saying her prayers. If the first wife is such a paragon of virtues, then the stepmother, however she may be "like" the first wife, can never be "kind and true/like the one you loved before." The child refuses to accept the new bride as her mother, except on terms that she carefully spells out:

And when I cry myself to sleep,
As now I often do,
Then softly to my chamber creep,
My new mamma and you

And bid her gently press a kiss
Upon my throbbing brow
Just as my own dear mother did.

These demands (significantly preserved in the same form in most texts) include two important provisions. First, the stepmother must try to act "Just as my own dear mother did." That is, she must agree to provide the same tender care she got from her natural mother. Second, the parents must recognize and accommodate the blind child's suffering. In order not to reawaken the pain that leads the child "often" to sob herself to sleep, the two must creep "softly" into her chamber. And it is to soothe her painful, "throbbing brow" that the stepmother must kiss her.

This rhetorical tactic, which I term "conspicuous suffering," is one of the most widespread features of sentimental ballads. The Cohens noticed that such songs focus on "the telling of the feelings" of suffering, but they did not observe that such "telling" has a dramatic purpose. The sufferer makes it clear not only that he is in pain, but also that specific practices cause his pain and specific
remedies could stop it. In many sentimental ballads, especially those connected to the Prohibition movement, this conspicuous suffering serves as social protest, and even when it is not directed at a character in the song, like a drunkard father, it is often spoken to the audience, sometimes in an obtrusive moralistic way:

Oh if some temperance men only could find
Poor wretched father an' speak very kind,
An' if they could stop him from drinkin', why then,
I should be very soon happy again.

Is it too late? Men of temperance, please try,
For poor little Bessie will soon starve an' die.
("The Drunkard's Lone Child" (2), Randolph, 2:339)

The first portion of the blind girl's speech, then, is an act of protest, carried out mainly through conspicuous suffering, against what she sees as her father's moral blindness. By repeatedly reminding him of his first wife's angelic virtue and of her death scene, she forces him to recall his own bereavement and recognize that he is being unfaithful to his first love. The blind child also makes it clear that she is still in mourning and that she "often" weeps herself to sleep—that is, her grief is not a single night's act of jealousy. She also threatens to withhold her affection for the new stepmother until the newlyweds agree to respect her emotions and try to ease her sorrow, even as they begin their happy life together. The blind girl does not try to revenge herself physically, or try to halt the wedding (as does the young abandoned bride in "The Fatal Wedding" [Windom & Davis, 1893]), but we must nevertheless recognize that her "passion" is itself a subtle and many-sided psychological "action" that besieges the father's psyche—and successfully. "Oh, pa, you're weeping now."
Only now that she has broken down her father is the blind girl, in most texts, willing to show any return affection. But even this affection is partial and ambivalent. Some texts (among them M and P) have her admit here, "I know I love you, papa dear..." yet even this admission is followed by a heavy "But..." Even if her new parents agree to her conditions, she makes it clear, life with them will still be less enjoyable than if she were "Where God is light; and I am sure/There'll be no blind ones there." That is, she prefers to be back in the care of her natural mother, in a home-like place where she need not fear being "blind and helpless." But most texts omit this statement and show the blind girl offering only a prayer "That God's right hand may lead you both/Through life's long weary way." This act, however, is less one of genuine affection for her parents than a hope that they might prove more virtuous than they have to date. If it is an act of forgiveness, it is forgiveness on terms that clearly define the forgiver's essential Christian morality and the recipients' need to be forgiven. Those few versions (K, for example) that place the prayer before the father's weeping make the rebuke behind the charity more explicit. In fact, this act of what I term "vindictive forgiveness" is another of the pervasive elements in sentimental balladry. Through it, otherwise helpless victims can ensure their own salvation and their oppressor's punishment, either through bitter remorse or through more physical means. The duplicity inherent in Christian forgiveness, moreover, appears to have scriptural authority:
Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

(Romans 12:19-20)

Whether Saint Paul or the early church fathers intended kindness to enemies to be consciously two-sided, it is certain that this kind of subtle psychological (or even supernatural) revenge is central to sentimental balladry, in which the last words of suffering victims are designed to make their enemies' damnation a foregone conclusion.

With this act of vindictive forgiveness, in most texts, the blind girl concludes her monologue, and the ballad suddenly shifts into impersonal narration. To this point we must admit that she is anything but helpless or passive. She is the one who initiates the confrontation with her father, presses the issue of his misconduct, dictates terms for her future, and finally wrings tears from him. The father, actually a more passive figure than his daughter, tacitly admits his guilt and participates in at least a token gesture of penance. In one eccentric version printed by Stout, pp. 79-80, she has him "sing that song my mother sung/That night on which she died," and in all complete versions he participates in her prayer and song, then gently helps the child into bed. There may, in fact, be more than a hint of irony in the child's self-portrait as "blind and helpless," since in a moral sense she is neither. The effect of the ballad depends on seeing her as more than a match for her powerful and sighted father, who turns out to have been morally "blind" until the child made him aware of his sins. At this point we begin to recognize the outlines of a strong moralistic dualism that motivates these character types.
Sentimentality thrives on dualistic stereotyping of this sort, with plots acted out by idealized "heroes" and obviously culpable "villains." I use the term "villain" here, although I know it is often used to describe the demonic figures of the melodramatic state. In sentimental ballads, at least of this period, culpable characters are rarely demonic. True, the "jealous lover" in the murdered-girl ballads is totally evil, but a more common "villain" is a character like the blind girl's father, or the father in Work's "Come Home, Father," who is unconscious of the suffering he is causing until the moment of his conversion. We see no sadism, implicit or explicit, in "The Blind Girl," and for all we know the father may be guilty of no more than forgetting one of the items on his list of wedding preparations. But his inadvertent acts cause as much suffering as if they were deliberate.

And it is his tears that prove that he has been a "villain" (in the sense of not being an ideal father) and also that he has decided to reform. During the nineteenth century there was no more accurate way to judge repentance and nobility of spirit than by tears. William James, who steeped himself in every aspect of Victorian religious thought, described the emotion of religious conversion as being like

... those temporary "melting moods" into which either the trials of real life, or the theatre, or a novel sometimes throw us. Especially if we weep! For it is then as if our tears broke through an inveterate inner dam, and let all sorts of ancient peccancies and moral stagnations drain away, leaving us now washed and soft of heart and open to every nobler leading. We now understand why the blind girl's father must weep and then help the child sing and pray. This is the moment in the ballad that marks the dramatic turning point. The blind girl has won the psychological battle, and the father, hopefully on the road to repentance, is led
by "God's right hand" and the "helpless" hand of his daughter.

If "villains" in sentimental ballads are seldom demonic, heroes are often angelic. William Bridges has noted the strong sexist bias in nineteenth-century American popular poetry, where males appeared as frustrated and morally corrupt, while females acted as mistresses of the home and moral guides for the men. It is true that the heroes in sentimental balladry are culturally defined ones: little children (usually, but not exclusively female), unmarried girls (if virgins), and mothers. Unless these figures are "violated" by males, or adopt male sins like drinking and smoking, they are by their very nature moral spokesmen, destined for heaven. Once we recognize this, the blind girl emerges as a typical nineteenth-century American heroine, who suffers "the worst thing that could happen to a child," but who has the moral and psychological insight not only to overcome her afflictions, but to lead her villainous father back to virtue as well. The child's heroic triumph in turn leads to the ballad's brief coda, which contains the supposedly "gratuitous" death. After her father has tucked her to bed, we are told,

... as he turned to leave the room
One joyful cry was given.
He turned and caught the last bright smile—
His blind child was in heaven.

This scene, presumably, is the false situation that led Laws to class "The Blind Girl" as a "ballad-like piece" rather than as a true ballad. Yet when we place these lines in their context, we find that the death is far from a last-minute attempt to add one more pathetic element to the song. The blind girl dies uttering a "joyful cry" and wearing a "bright smile." And appropriately so, for the ballad tells us that
she has been translated into heaven. The ending is happy, not pathetic, since the child's heroism has been rewarded by immediate transfiguration.

This happy ending is the prototype for many other sentimental songs, and to read it merely as "an effort to tear the heart-strings" is simply to miss the point. Sentimental heroes, that is, children, young girls, and mother, normally meet this reward, which may be dramatized (as in "The Blind Girl") or merely forecast by the ballad's end. While such a commonplace ending is not obligatory, it clearly is the preferred ending to death scenes in nineteenth-century ballads, unless the victim is a villain "unprepared to die." Given the religious background from which these ballads come, it seems clear that this commonplace ending is no more "unconvincing" than the recurrent "rose wrapped around the briar" ending of so many Child ballads. Here we are to assume that the souls of two lovers transmigrate into plants and enjoy a union after death. Unless we choose to value pagan mythological survivals and downgrade their Christian cognates for ethnocentric reasons, we have no business calling the one "supernatural" and the other merely "unrealistic."

The transfiguration of the blind girl effectively ends the ballad, which traces an unbroken line from misfortune to eternal bliss with God and Mother. The last lines of the song are absent in some abbreviated versions (such as K, which fits on one side of a 78 rpm recording), but they serve two purposes. First, they round off the plot by reuniting the child's body with that of her mother, reminding us that the two are spiritually united in heaven. Second, the epitaph "There'll be no blind ones there" provides the audience with
an epigrammatic moral. Most obviously the words confirm the blind girl's hope that her helplessness will be dissolved supernaturally in the afterlife, but since "blindness" is a double-edged concept in the ballad, the moral too is complex. If there will be consolation for the physically blind, there will also be punishment for the morally blind. The ballad thus ends by reinforcing not one but several moral lessons. We have been told, for instance, that the blind girl, like other small children, is naturally pure and her father is morally corrupt and in need of salvation. We have seen why husbands should remain loyal to their dead wives' memories, and certainly should have enough foresight not to remarry without respecting their children's right to mourn. Similarly, the emphasis on "blindness" and "helplessness" should have warned us that it is unhealthy for a child to be all but insignificant in a father's life. To neglect a child is, in effect, to abuse her. Finally, the divine favor shown the child contains an implicit threat that breaking these marital and parental taboos may be visited with divine sanctions: "There'll be no blind ones there."

At this point we begin to see what about "The Blind Girl" has kept it at the front of performers' repertories and at the back of collectors' files. Admittedly the psychological attack is so emotional a rhetorical form that it might repel scholars who prefer the "impersonality" of the event itself. Yet "Edward" and "Lord Randal" follow this form and are not, in themselves, far different from the psychological action we have seen in "The Blind Girl." Again we may turn to Laws for clarification, if not for sympathy. Another of the artistic shortcomings of the American tradition, Laws claimed, was that they
preferred to draw explicit morals from tragic stories. He then added, "Of course the American ballad maker may be quite sincere in drawing a moral from his sad story. He may feel that good will result from giving his ballad an obvious purpose" (p. 32, emphasis mine). It is difficult to assess what Laws meant by the conditional here, since he proceeded to quote prolific folk composer Blind Bill Day ("Jilson Setters") as stating in no uncertain terms that he was indeed sincere and hoped good would result from his ballads. But Laws himself, folk opinions aside, clearly found it difficult to take the morals seriously, since he suggested that the convention might represent only "attempts to mollify those who consider ballads worldly and sinful songs" (p. 32). He concluded, "It is unfortunate that advice-giving is inconsistent with artistry. The ballad-makers should realize that tragic stories can be made to carry their own implications, as the Child ballads do."

Instead of ending with his own moral for the hill-folk, however, Laws added two puzzled sentences: "But apparently such skillful construction is usually beyond their powers. Even if they resist the temptation to point a moral, the folk may take the matter into their own hands and supply one" (p. 33).

Laws, I believe, sees the distinction between sentimentality and the earlier traditions, but is observing it from the other side of the fence from the folk. Almeda Riddle, for example, defined a "classic" ballad not in terms of age or artistry, but as a song "That teaches something that's worth remembering, that's worth passing on," indicating how central "the lesson" was to American ballads. We might point to Child ballads that attach explicit morals to their
endings, such as "The Unquiet Grave" or "James Harris (The Daemon Lover)." but there is still a difference in kind. At the expense of some oversimplification, perhaps the clearest way to describe the difference is that the British-style ballad dramatizes the moral to provide a fitting end to a tragic story, while the American sentimental ballad tends to dramatize the story to illustrate a well-known moral. In brief, the Child ballad tends to be mimetic, a self-contained story for its own sake, while the American sentimental ballad is explicitly utilitarian.

This is not to say that this tradition alone is utilitarian in function, since Laws admits that "tragic stories . . . carry their own implications." Similarly, Bruno Bettleheim has argued that children's fairy tales carry implicit moral or psychological lessons. But both critics insist that these morals be unvoiced, and Bettleheim attacks those stories that do explicitly attempt to get an audience "to follow an imposed pattern of behavior . . . ." By contrast, the sentimental tradition is quite explicit about what it teaches and does attempt to impose its messages through whatever psychological appeals it deems necessary. Perhaps the main reason that the sentimental tradition has been neglected by scholars is because they do put us collectors and scholars in the position of the "blind father," confronting us psychologically like self-assured moral paragons, demanding that we either accept them or face the consequences later. Since few scholars are willing to sympathize with the nineteenth-century mores they advertise, our first reaction is to reject. But if we are to comprehend the totality of the American folksong tradition, we must
be able to look beyond our personal reactions to these ballads, see what rhetorical tactics are manipulating our emotions, and recognize the message, even if we do not accept it ourselves.

To summarize, we may characterize a sentimental ballad as a psychological attack that defends a pre-existing socially defined pattern of behavior. Normally this attack is made by a figure defined as "pure" or "heroic" against a "villain," that is, a character who is not actively supporting the ballad's moral code. To the extent that the "pure" figure succeeds in thwarting or reforming the villain, s/he is a sentimental hero. The attack typically employs "conspicuous suffering," in which the speaker points out the grief that results from the villain's actions in an effort to induce guilt, and "vindicative forgiveness," in which s/he pardons the villain in such terms that make manifest the hero's virtue and the villain's evil. Such an attack is usually validated by direct reference to the moral code, the supernatural forces that legitimize it, and the supernatural rewards or sanctions that follow obedience or rejection.

In addition, we may distinguish two types of sentimentality, depending on whether the intent of the psychological attack is to punish villainy or reinforce heroism. The first of these I term "moralistic sentimentality," since the category corresponds to what Abrahams and Foss described as the "morality mode" in American balladry. 28 These songs typically begin with the moral code violated (as in "The Blind Girl") and end with the villain punished or converted. The second type I call "elegiac sentimentality," corresponding to Abrahams and Foss's "romance mode." These songs tend to have slimmer
narrative content than the others, as they are dramatizations of a feeling of "lack": a hero who perfectly conforms to the moral code (in this study, the mother) is separated from the main character by time, death, or physical separation. The means of eliminating this lack and returning to the mother proves to be conformity to the moral code. Both groups, then, embody the same utilitarian rhetoric outlined above.

It remains only to clarify these definitions by illustrating how they work in songs from the period surveyed in this dissertation. "The Blind Girl" appears first in the 1860s, the very beginning of American sentimental songs, but numbers produced more than seventy years later followed essentially the same pattern. I have chosen two successful country songs, "The Mail Carrier's Warning" (1936, V164) and "The Picture on the Wall" (1927, C085), which not only present typical compositions in the moralistic and elegiac modes, but were also accepted and retained by the country music audience of the time. The first of these, "The Mail Carrier's Warning," was one of Red Foley's first hits when he recorded it in 1936, and it remained in country music tradition at least until 1957. As the text is not easily available, I transcribe an early recording of the piece below:

I'm just an old mail carrier, my work is nearly done
On a little rural route back in the hills
The neighbors there all know me just as I know every one
And I share with them their happiness and ills
Let me tell you all a story, in a plain and simple way
Just a story of a mother and a lad
Perhaps I'll reach some others who from home have gone away
So they'll stop and drop a line to make her glad.
It's been twenty years this winter since I last saw little Jim
When he kissed his loving mother at the door
With a hope that he is listening, this story's meant for him
For twenty years she's heard from him no more
Every day I've found her waiting by the mailbox by the road
But she never showed her sorrow at his shame
She just looked so sort of wistful as I watched her slowly fade
While the letter that she wanted never came.

[Spoken] You know Jim, twenty years is a mighty long time for a
man to wait at home. Longing, for her loving son who's always on
the roam. Whether it's a success or a failure Jim, your old ma
wouldn't care. If only you'd sent her just a few short lines.
But Jim, you failed her there.

Just a little helpless woman Jim she loved you to the end
And she never once let on you were to blame
Those twenty years alone Jim were too much for her to stand
While the letter that she wanted never came
Jim your mother isn't waiting, at the mailbox any more
And if I were you I think I'd kneel and pray
And perhaps God will forgive you part of what you have in store
When you meet your final judgment on that day.*

("The Mail Man's Warning," Smilin' Billy Blinkhorn, Regal

Although slightly complicated by the presence of a preacher-figure,
the dualistic stereotyping is still clear. The mail carrier fits
the standard embodiment of the code: he is an aged laborer whose
work is "nearly done." Thus he is a sage who possesses the moral
wisdom that comes naturally with proximity to death. For more
than twenty years he has faithfully carried out his duties "back in
the hills," loyal to the rural stereotype of "home." Finally, he is
a man who actively shares the common feelings of the community--every­
one knows him. Similarly, the mother loyally remains at home,
waiting for her son "Every day" and loving him until the day she
dies. In fact, the mailman and the mother represent the same moral
virtues (with one exception) and are, on a purely rhetorical level,

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the same character, since the mailman merely verbalizes the message she embodies. On the other hand, Jim is one of those "who from home [has] gone away," and his failure to write home is linked to his mother's suffering and death. The effect of the plot, indeed, depends on our seeing Jim as the villain—he "fails" his mother because he is "always on the roam," not because he perhaps has been run over by a truck on his way to the city. Likewise, the mailman's "hope that he is listening" must, rhetorically, be realistic.

This song illustrates the deviousness of sentimental rhetoric in a straightforward fashion, since the mail carrier is in a position to express the criticism usually implied by conspicuous suffering. The mother remains silent and passive during her vigil, but the wise old mailman is capable of seeing through her wistful look and recognize the sin that makes her suffer and fade. But her ultimate sign of virtue is that she remains loving "to the end," never once complaining or showing her sorrow: true to the code of motherhood she forgives her son even as he kills her of a broken heart. Yet the very terms in which this faithful love is expressed makes it a form of vindictive forgiveness. The heroic way in which the mother dies confirms the son's depravity and validates the mail carrier's unusually harsh judgment: "... perhaps God will forgive part of what you have in store ..." Even total repentance cannot save Jim now from damnation; the most he can hope for is an easy room in hell.

In this case the moral occurs close to the song's beginning, where the mail carrier tells the "others" strayed from home to "stop and drop a line to make [your mother] glad." This moral duty at first
seems too trivial to be punished by certain damnation; if there is an unpardonable sin, one would hardly expect it to be failing to write home to Mother. Nevertheless, the concrete act of "dropping a line to Mother" or "keeping in touch" is an obvious symbol for retaining moral ties with the social tradition she exemplifies. Jim's sin is less one of filial neglect than of rejecting traditional mores and letting them wither away in his life. Thus he leaves himself with no means of saving his soul once Mother and the moral code have faded. The same message—hold onto traditional morality or risk damnation—is symbolized in an elegiac manner in our second song, "The Picture on the Wall." Here, though, the literal act of hanging onto Mother's picture is equated with retaining moral standards that will ensure the narrator's personal salvation. The emphasis is on heaven, not hell.

"The Picture on the Wall" was written and composed by Bud Landress, leader of The Georgia Yellow Hammers, a prominent early string band which first recorded the piece in 1927. It proved their biggest hit and was covered by at least nine other groups before 1950, including an influential version by the Carter Family, the most influential performers of sentimental material during the hillbilly years. The Carters' version, in turn, was transcribed and arranged by Albert E. Brumley, a well-known hymn composer, and his version, reprinted frequently by the Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company, became a staple of pentecostal hymn tradition. The original version, as recorded by the Yellow Hammers, is as follows:
There's an old and faded picture on the wall
That has been hanging there for many years
'Tis the picture of my mother and I know there is no other
That can take the place of Mother on the wall.

Chorus: On the wall (on the wall)
On the wall (on the wall)
How I love that dear old picture on the wall
Time is swiftly passing by and I bow my head and cry
But I know I'll meet my mother after all.

Now the children all have scattered off and gone
And I have a little family of my own
And I know I love them well more than any tongue can tell
But I'll hold that dear old picture on the wall.

[Repeat chorus.]

Yes I lost that dear old mother years ago
There is none to which with troubles I can go
As my banjo makes this chord I am praying to the Lord
Let me hold that dear old picture on the wall.

[Repeat chorus twice.]

(Victor 20943 [8/9/27].)

This song defines the moral message not through an attack on the opposite, but through extended description of heroic behavior. The mother is uniquely pure—"there is no other"—and now she is in heaven no one, not even the narrator's spouse or children, can take her place. In childhood she soothed the narrator's troubles, and the repeated chorus assures us that she will be waiting beyond death to comfort the narrator again. She is, in fact, a transcendent being, and her picture becomes a religious icon to be worshipped at all costs.

But the portrait of the mother is vague compared with the view we get of the narrator, who himself embodies the ideal of heroic devotion. Like the mother, s/he is an ideal parent, loving his
children "more than any tongue can tell" and transmitting hir parent's morality to another generation. As s/he mourns the loss of a heroic mother, then, s/he proves hirself a hero as well. The conspicuous suffering of the song then has a typical double-edged function: while we sympathize with the narrator we admit that the ideal s/he mourns is worthy of devotion and that the narrator's tears prove hir own purity and make hir own ascent to heaven certain: "But I know I'll meet my mother after all." Like the mail carrier of the previous song, the narrator partakes of the same ideals as the mother and becomes, on a rhetorical plane, one with her. This function of the narrator's tears is reinforced by the textual variants present in many texts: where the original shows the narrator weeping, "but" knowing he will rejoin his mother, many versions show hir weeping "'cause they'll meet again." Performers, that is, saw the weeping not as suffering, but as a sign of rejoicing over certain salvation.

Still there is an indirect warning in the song's last stanza, in which the narrator alludes to hir "troubles," then says s/he is "praying to the Lord" to help hir hold onto the beloved picture. This detail keeps the narrator from being a totally transcendent figure like the mother, who is unapproachable by ordinary mortals. Hir heroic posture is sufficient to save hir soul after death, but it is a posture s/he must sustain, even as s/he tells us of hir own heroism, with the help of supernatural support. The role s/he plays, then, is one any listener, male or female, can play with the aid of the Lord, yet it is also a role from which even a heroic individual
can backslide if s/he does not "hold that dear old picture on the wall." The "moral" is one that the narrator applies to himself, but insofar as s/he acts as a role-model for his audience, the acts that s/he dramatizes become moral imperatives for each listener. "Villainy," as we have seen, is defined not as demonic action, but as failure to live up to socially defined role-models such as the one dramatized in "The Picture on the Wall." For just as the narrator chooses to remain loyal to the tradition represented by the mother's portrait, so the listener is implicitly expected to live up to the portrait of the devoted child. "The Picture on the Wall," that is, should be a mirror to the audience.

These discussions, although partial, demonstrate how the rhetorical tactics and messages defined by "The Blind Girl" pervaded the sentimental tradition well into the period 1923-45. They also show that by examining these songs by close rhetorical analysis, rather than by appealing to broad and possibly slanted notions of "artistry" and "passivity," we enter into their structures, messages, and significances far more deeply than before. In particular we see more clearly how such elements as "morals," "feelings," and apparently "contrived" deaths operate within the songs to unify them as utilitarian statements. Further, we can now isolate more precisely what the intended utilitarian purposes of such songs are, what taboos are presented and why, and what role-models are offered to the songs' audience. It is only through such an "inside" examination of the material that we can come to grips with the idealized moral universe described in the American sentimental tradition—something we must do before we can
compare it meaningfully with the empirical universe the songs attempt to explain. Only by gaining a clear perspective of the interplay of this moral universe and the social realities of those who keep the sentimental tradition alive can we begin to understand the significance of this phenomenon in American culture.
Notes to Chapter One


8. Wilgus, p. 252.


See also Anne Cohen's discussion of cultural "passivity" in Poor Pearl, Poor Girl (Austin: American Folklore Society, 1973), pp. 6-7.

I am here following the methodology outlined by E. D. Hirsch, Jr., in Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), especially Chapter Five. I have also been influenced by John Cavelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). For my own discussion of the problems of fitting a rhetorical approach to folksong, see my unpublished paper, "Folksong as a Subgenre of Popular Literature," delivered at the 1977 meeting of the American Folklore Society.

Norm Cohen has seen a text of "The Blind Girl" in The Heart and Home Songster, printed in the 1860s, and I have seen listings of titles like "The Blind Girl" and "The Lament of the Blind Orphan Girl" among sheet music advertisements of the 1850s. None of these references cite an author, and in any case publishers of songsters and sheet music of this time were fond of picking up songs from oral tradition and arranging them for a popular audience. "The Gypsy's Warning" (Randolph, 4:219-20 [see first bibliography for full citation of sources]) is one example of such an "anonymous" song that became a popular hit on sheet music in 1864.

The text quoted here is from Brown, 2:393-394, where Belden terms it "one of the fuller and more correct texts" in the collection. It was contributed on June 3, 1915 by Prof. I. G. Greer of Boone NC, who was later to make commercial hillbilly recordings for Paramount in 1929. To keep from making hasty readings based on possibly idiosyncratic variants in this text, I have compared Greer's version with four other texts and noted the most significant textual variants in the margin or directly after the quote. The four additional texts are these:

1) Bradley Kincaid's commercial recording, made ca. February 1930 and issued on Melotone 12349, Conquerer 7983, Vocalion 02685, and Decca [Irish] W4148. (This text abbreviated "K".)
2) A manuscript ballad made by Benjamin Harrison Mullen at or around Ozark, Arkansas on May 1, 1907 and reprinted with biographical data by Mullen, pp. 60-61. (This text abbreviated "M".)
3) Riley Puckett's commercial recording made with the McMicken-Layne String Orchestra in 1928 and issued on Columbia 15333. The same session, incidentally, also produced a handsome version of the British-derived "Rambling Boy." (This text abbreviated "McM".)
4) Loye Pack's ballet, printed in his folio, Old Time Ballads and Cowboy Songs . . . , pp. 77-78. (This text abbreviated "P".) Pack was a traditional performer and cowboy who broadcast radio programs of "old-time songs" from 1929 until his death in 1941. This folio was published somewhere in Nebraska, ca. 1934[a].
In particular, see "What Is Home Without a Mother?" (Septimus Winner, 1854, version in Western Kentucky Folklore Archive at UCLA), and "Why Did They Dig Ma's Grave So Deep? (J. P. Skelly, 1880, in Stout, p. 94).

Although stepmothers are not often witch-like in sentimental ballads, Bruno Bettelheim, in The Uses of Enchantment (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), has noted that they are nearly always evil in folktales, perhaps because they represent projections of the child's repressed anger toward his "good" mother (pp. 66-70).


In this respect, compare "The Old Arm Chair," Eliza Cook and Henry Russell, 1840, reported from tradition in Rosenberg, no. 1057.

The text quoted is again from Brown, 2:392; it is a sample verse from a manuscript ballet written around 1912 by Miss Lura Wagoner of Vox, NC. Greer's text, K, and McM all do not include this stanza, but the lines in M and P are virtually identical with Wagoner's.

Anne Cohen, pp. 85-90.


R. Gordon Kelly, in Mother Was a Lady (Westport, Ct: Greenwood Press, 1977), has traced the dying child formula back to Puritan-influenced religious propaganda in the early part of the nineteenth century (pp. 5, 90). Many such ballads like "Little Joe" (Charles E. Addison, 1876, in Randolph, 4:173-176) and "Little Bessie" (untraced, in Abrahams and Foss, pp. 122-123) show the blest child consoling a grieving parent and predicting the glories of heaven. But even orphan children left to die in the cold become transfigured by ballad's end. The "Two Little Children" (Brown, 2:394-395) find room with the angels "In heaven with mama that night," while "The Orphan Girl" (Belden, pp. 277-278), refused hospitality by the rich man, still finds "room and bread for the poor" in heaven. Texts in Brown, 2:390-391, and A Singer and Her Songs, pp. 96-98, also provide hellfire for the rich men. In fact, "The Drunkard's Lone Child" (Henry C. Work, ca. 1870) originally ended with an unanswered appeal to "some temperance men," but the folk provided a supernatural consolation along the way. In this version (e.g., Randolph, 2:399), the mother appears in a dream to tell the child "sleep on, I'm a-watching you now."

26 A Singer and Her Songs, p. 20.

27 Beettleheim, p. 25.

28 Abrahams and Foss, p. 93. These terms are borrowed, ultimately, from V. Propp's distinction between fairy-tale plots that begin with villainy and those that start with the realization of some "lack." See Morphology of the Folktales, 2nd ed., trans. Laurence Scott, rev. and ed. Louis A. Wagner (Austin: American Folklore Society, 1968), pp. 75-77.

29 These catalog numbers refer to my own classification of sentimental songs in American popular and folk traditions, an abstract of which is given as an appendix to this dissertation. The initial letters refer to my four main categories, Celebration, Assistance, Violation, and Parting; each of these will be discussed in chapters to follow. I also give the date of composition, when known, or else the earliest date on which the song was reported sung.

30 This song was first recorded by Foley as "The Mailman's Warning" on March 31, 1936 and issued on the ARC labels 6-06-59. When it was copyrighted in 1941, however, it was given the new title. Biographical information on Foley may be found in Bill C. Malone's Country Music, U.S.A. (Austin: American Folklore Society, 1968), pp. 266-267 and passim.

31 A full biography of the members of the Georgia Yellow Hammers, including an account of the composition of "The Picture on the Wall," is given by Gene Wiggins, "Hell Broke Loose in Gordon County Georgia," Old Time Music, no. 25 (Summer 1977), 11-16.

32 The original folio version, a poor transcription the New-York-based United Publishing Company put out, was the first to make this change, mistaking the vocalist's vehement "But" for "'Cause." The Carter Family's version (Victor 23686 [2/23/32]) also has "'Cause" here, though the rest of the lyrics do not seem to derive from the folio. An unrelated recording by J. E. Mainer's Mountaineers (Bluebird B-6479 [6/15/36], titled "The Old and Faded Picture") replaces "But" with "For," and I have even seen "And" here.
CHAPTER TWO

THE AMERICAN DEIFICATION OF MOTHER

1830-1923

A comprehensive study of sentimental mother-worship during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is beyond the scope of this study, but to ignore the cultural trends that occurred before 1923 would be to approach the mother stereotype in country songs in a vacuum. It might then be tempting to assume that this song tradition's attachment to mothers was abnormal, an anti-social clinging to the home circle and a refusal to grow up and face the "real" world. But a survey of earlier periods shows that such attachment to Mother was in fact the cultural norm in America during the late Victorian period. This norm was abandoned by popular culture at large after World War I, but retained much of its force within the more conservative enclaves of the rural south and among recent emigrants to the cities. At the heart of this cultural norm was a deep anxiety about an increasingly impersonal society and the need to preserve human values and ideals in the face of bureaucracy. From its beginnings the figure of Mother exemplified the desire to see the world as "a collection of families, not . . . a collection of paternalistic businesses." To cling to Mother, then, did not imply immaturity, but rather refusal to surrender humane priorities for the sake of being part of a well-oiled social machine. It was only late in the stereotype's history that it became a symbol of restrictive moralism,
after it had become clear that America would never again be a "collection of families."

1. The Ring and the Revolver

The single most important change that separated the America of the 1830s from that of the 1920s was, as Robert H. Weibe has pointed out, the evolution of our society from a confederation of island communities to a complex system of bureaucracies and corporations. Where the individual was the central element in the small town, in the bureaucracy he was a tiny cog in a social machine which he could neither change nor fully comprehend. This evolution, occurring as it did over the space of half a century and longer in rural areas, placed a slow, sure, but rarely definable pressure on traditional mores:

In a manner that eludes precise explanation, countless citizens in towns and cities across the land sensed that something fundamental was happening to their lives, something they had not willed and did not want, and they responded by striking out at whatever enemies their view of the world allowed them to see. They fought, in other words, to preserve the society that had given their lives meaning. But it had already slipped beyond their grasp.

While Darwin and Higher Criticism made inroads on the religion of the upper classes, the most important danger to lower-class morality was more visible and immediate: "the city." This mostly symbolic world embodied the attractive lure of personal "success," proposed idealistically in Emerson's inspirational essays and by Horatio Alger's money-making match boys.

Yet however attractive the chances of becoming a mouse-trap magnate, the goals sought in the city by would-be businessmen proved emotionally unsatisfying. As early as the 1830s De Tocqueville had
observed that the American dream was "not to reach a certain grade, but to have constant promotion." Popular writers, as William E. Bridges has observed, were quick to decry this hollow dream:

One of the difficulties [they complained] with this approach to living is that it gives the person nothing by which to assess himself except the sense that he is, in fact, still moving. There is nothing ahead to be achieved for itself, and no levels along the way that are enjoyable for themselves. There are only vague road markers by which to measure the distance travelled, and far back there somewhere is the receding point at which one began.

Discussing Longfellow's sonnet "Mezzo Cammin," Bridges concludes that the "path of life," here as elsewhere, "no longer leads to something --only from somewhere, from the Past." While the path of individualism freed one from traditional constraints and offered self-fulfillment as reward, it could not satisfy two questions. Once old codes were abolished and the individual freed, what morality short of expediency could check self-fulfilling but exploitative acts? And if the individual alone was the source of his own code of ethics, how might he integrate himself into a society made up in equal parts of rival individuals and nagging traditionalists? Without abandoning its ideal of "progress," American society needed a moral code that would provide an ethic for individuals that would not rigidify into dogma.

Part of the answer provided by popular culture was the mother stereotype, virtuous, supportive, but non-authoritarian. Beginning in the 1840s and increasingly during the Civil War, popular authors portrayed the family circle as a microcosm of American society. The child, in this setting, was encouraged to choose his career for himself, expressing his individual talents, but from the cradle on he was also taught to treat everyone he met like his own brother. Originally
a mutual task, the job of moral training soon fell to the mother alone, since the father was necessarily tainted with the impersonal world of "industry." In popular fiction Dad suddenly and inexplicably vanished, appearing, if at all, as a villain, while Mother quickly became the moral center of the home. This new stereotype affected the ways in which women functioned in real-life society as well. While their place was restricted to the home ("mother"), to the hospital ("angel of mercy"), and to the classroom ("moral custodian"), as Bridges points out, this restriction was never meant as an attempt to repress woman's dignity. It was an attempt, however misguided, to extend their rights: "... it was the product—a new social type—created in that hopeful age's greatest utopian venture: the crusade to create a perfect society by creating perfect human beings, and to accomplish the latter by home manufacture." It should be no surprise that when women were granted the vote in 1920, one observer lamented, "Once Woman was my superior; now, alas, she is only my equal."

Popular literature was one of the means by which this new social stereotype was introduced and reinforced, and of the various genres one of the most important was children's instructional literature. Particularly during the period after the Civil War dozens of magazines were written for young children, containing stories that illustrated the ideals of family life and the need to restrain self-centered urges. R. Gordon Kelly has divided these stories into two formulas, the "ordeal" and the "change of heart." In an ordeal story, a child is temporarily isolated from the family circle, then is forced to act in a decisive but moral way. Having done the right thing, he returns
to the family and is rewarded. One story, for example, tells of a little girl who is left alone by her father on an island while he rows ashore for supplies. While he is returning, a storm blows up, and the girl at first is panic-stricken. But calming herself with a hymn her dead mother once taught her, she mans the lighthouse and guides her wandering father safely home. Kelly comments that such a story reinforces the child's independence, but only by presenting the mother's moral instruction as the thing that allows one to face danger without fear.\^12

The second formula, the change of heart, follows a similar pattern of disorientation and reintegration, but here the child isolates himself by his anti-social actions, which may range from merely annoying to genuinely vicious. Once he recognizes that he has lost the love and attention he once had, though, the child undergoes a "conversion," in a psychological, not religious sense. He recognizes others' suffering and his own alienation, and displays his change of heart through an act of penance. One such story tells of a boy who is given a box of doughnuts to take to his mother. Alone, he decides to eat one and then lie to her about how many were in the box, but after only one bite he realizes that he is on the brink of a life of dishonesty. He resists further temptation, carries the box home, and confesses the stolen bite to his mother.\^13 In this literature the moral code is pragmatic, not supernatural, though: the child avoids a life of distrust, not an afterlife of hellfire. His decision to confess and accept the family code of honesty is, therefore, an act of self-mastery, not self-denial. While the overall pattern of both formulas is
"a looping curve back to a family relationship of some kind," the code does not reject adult life in the bureaucracy. It merely insists that the individual live in it according to "an ideal of self-reliance moderated by concern for the welfare of others," the model for which is "the reciprocal obligations of parent [i.e., mother] and child."\(^{14}\)

Popular poetry, especially that of the Fireside Poets, likewise spoke to the psychological needs that motivated sentimentality. Bridges has isolated several important themes that focused on the adult's longing for childhood family relations and especially on the figure of Mother, the moral beacon guiding man back to "God, humanity and good." Whittier's "A Legend of the Lake," for example, told of a drunkard who redeems himself after years of debauchery by dying in a desperate attempt to save his mother's chair from a fire.\(^{15}\) But unlike children's fiction, popular poetry emphasized the darkness and impersonality of life outside "home." Even as the poet praised domestic life, he was contrasting it to a universe of rivals who waited to humiliate the male as soon as he left home. Implicit in this dualism, Bridges concludes, was a culture ruled by two conflicting but complementary figures: the independent and self-reliant new Adam, who realizes his unique potential at the cost of detaching himself from all other Adams, and the Mother, who embodies all the qualities the new Adam must lose in his quest—the capacity for rest, security, and human support.\(^{16}\)

If the children's fiction represents at least the hope of integrating these two figures and regaining the lost paradise of home, it also admitted that the world children must prepare for was one of eternal struggle and loss. While the self-awareness gained by individuals in
both poetry and fiction was an important achievement, still, in Kelly's words, "the achievement of character was simultaneously the loss of childhood."\textsuperscript{17} That mothers are ever dying and fathers ever slipping into alcoholism indicates that while popular writers advocated a return to the small-town family, they sensed that such security was already beyond reach.

One reaction to this loss of childhood, the moral crusade, generated yet another genre of popular literature, propaganda for the temperance movement. According to Weibe, reformers unwilling to abandon the domestic view of culture "looked for that one gear askew, that one fundamental rule violated, as an explanation for America's troubles." Once that rule was enforced, the evils of the city would vanish and domestic peace would once again reign.\textsuperscript{18} Many such reformers found this single violated rule to be sobriety, and increasingly during the century women crusaded in what one of them called "organized mother-love" to abolish male intemperance. Even though early accounts of alcoholisms in America observed that as many women drank heavily as men, propaganda invariably showed the wife or mother drawing the husband or son out of the wiles of sin. By the latter part of the century such propaganda, fiction and song, was being furnished by the WCTU to nearly every public school and church in the country.\textsuperscript{19} Here the male/female dualism grew most extreme. The wife or mother became the supreme custodian of virtue; endlessly combating sin in the males, she was incapable of fault herself. It was the father or son who must risk the outside world, knowing that the slightest moral slip would certainly lead to poverty, delerium tremens, and death.
The Victorian stereotype of the ruined woman is well known, but the fallen male was in fact just as prevalent in popular literature. While seemingly innocuous sexual experiments might lead a virgin to prostitution and suicide, a single glass of beer or spirits was enough to violate a young boy's moral fibre and leave him helpless in the grips of an uncontrollable appetite.20

This dualistic perspective is clearly presented in T. S. Arthur's *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*, a fantastically popular collection of melodramatic situations and tableaux. A main plot chronicles Joe Morgan's rise from drunkenness to respectability, thanks to his loyal wife and angelic, dying daughter, little Mary. But several important sub-plots show as many decent townspeople falling into insanity and ghastly deaths. One of the unlucky is Willy Hammond, enticed to drink by a predatory gambler, who then cheats the boy out of his fortune and, when caught in the act, stabs Willy to death in the saloon. Yet before Willy entered the bar-room, we are told, he was the prized son of a dutiful, Christian mother. No woman, Arthur tells us,

\[ ... \]

... ever loved a son with more self-devotion than Mrs. Hammond loved her beautiful, fine-spirited, intelligent, affectionate boy. To say that she was proud of him, is but a tame expression. Intense love—almost idolatry—was the strong passion of her heart. How tender, how watchful was her love! Except when at school, he was scarcely ever separated from her. In order to keep him by her side, she gave up her thoughts to the suggestion and maturing of plans for keeping his mind active and interested in her society—and her success was perfect. Up to the age of sixteen or seventeen, I do not think he had a desire for other companionship than that of his mother. But this, you know, could not last. The boy's maturing thoughts must go beyond the home and social circle. ... How his mother trembled with anxiety, as she saw him leave her side. Of the danger that would surround his path, she knew too well; and these were magnified by her fears—at least so I often said to her. Alas! how far the sad reality has outrun her most fearful anticipations.21
Indeed, when Willy dies in his mother's arms, crying desperately, "save me! save me!" the shock of his fall is enough to extinguish her reason, and she dies in a madhouse. Even though Arthur counters such falls with examples of men saved from damnation by female virtue, surely these victories rang hollow if seventeen years of successful indoctrination could be undone by a single sip of spirits. It is no wonder that the history of the temperance crusade is filled with shrill rhetoric, and even with actual violence. For if only this one temptation could be crushed entirely, nothing could stand between America and ultimate purification.

The peak of sentimentality came during the decade of the 1890s, a time when, according to Weihe,

...fears had deepened to the extent that other men's guilt came embedded in each new event, and once incidents carried their own meaning, communication between opponents effectively ceased.

In place of communication, antagonists confronted each other behind sets of stereotypes, frozen images that were specifically intended to exclude discussion. Reinforcing the faithful's feeling of separateness, the rhetoric of antithetical absolutes denied even the desirability of any interchange. If as so many substantial citizens maintained the issue was civilization versus anarchy, who would negotiate with chaos? ... In such a simplified world like always attracted like; good and evil flowed irresistibly to opposite poles.22

Such a polarizing effect was noted by Anne Cohen in so "factual" a genre as news reporting. In her study of the sensational Pearl Bryan murder case, she found at work a "formulaic filter" that distorted the recoverable facts in favor of a socially defined melodrama. As a result "stories tend to be altered progressively toward greater and greater similarity to the model" to the extent that incidents that did not happen, or that a reporter could not have witnessed,
nevertheless were reported in detail according to the sentimental model.23 While the Bryan family took an angry, revengeful stance throughout the trial, for instance, the papers invariably depicted them as passively sorrowing.24 Similarly, although reporters were barred from a last-minute meeting between one of the accused's mothers and the Bryan family, one paper nevertheless published a fabricated eye-witness account:

Standing in the parlor of the pretty home from which Pearl Bryan departed to meet her death, with streaming eyes and quavering voice, Mrs. Walling, the mother of the condemned Alonzo Walling, tonight pleaded with the woman whose torn heart still bleeds for her lost daughter for the life of her son. [sic]

It was the last pathetic struggle of mother love, and though more powerful than words can tell it failed absolutely. Though both mothers bewailed their great sorrow in unison, locked in each other's arms, yet sympathy failed to check the resolve of the murdered girl's mother . . .

Not the least significant of Ms. Cohen's findings was that these same stereotypes and tableaux passed into folk tradition in no fewer than six ballads, some of which share exact phrases with the news accounts.26

This seeming confrontation of good and evil was, however, an illusion, and as American society passed into the next century, sentimentality waned in popularity, nearly dropping from popular culture at large by 1915. Kelly notes that at this time the parent was replaced by the sports hero as the typical role-model in children's fiction; so in the social microcosm the "dutiful child" gave way to the "team-player," and individual achievement was tempered less by domestic concern than by obedience to rules.27 The sentimental patterns did not vanish, though; they survived, but in a defensive,
explicitly religious setting. As early as the 1870s evangelical sects of Christianity had adopted the secular family ideal as part of their standard indoctrination, insisting that parents teach their children not just humane behavior, but Bible-reading, hymn-singing and praying as well. "Indeed," notes James F. Findlay, Jr., "the family seemed to become the church for the individualist-minded evangelicals." When American society as a whole stepped away from individual ideals toward the bureaucracy, rurally-based fundamentalists not only retained the sentimental code of morality, they glorified it as "the old-time religion," the last island of human values within a depersonalized culture.

The sermons of the evangelists themselves served as one means of reinforcing the family stereotype, and the mother's role in particular. Starting with Dwight Moody, preachers used short anecdotes to break up the more doctrinal arguments and keep the audience attentive. This tendency intensified during the early twentieth century, and one important evangelist was said to have used seventeen such anecdotes during a half-hour address. These anecdotes, usually sentimental in outlook, often glorified the mother's role in leading her child to heaven. One such story, which I label "The Angel and the Mother's Love," sheds light on this quasi-folk genre and on the way the stereotype of the ideal mother developed in the twentieth century. In 1909 it was used by Billy Sunday in his Mother's Day sermon. In his version, an angel slips out of heaven for a holiday and, as he returns, decides to gather some "mementoes" of his trip. In turn he gathers up some fragrant flowers, a charming baby's smile, and "a mother's
love, pouring out over her babe like a gushing spring . . . ."

Before the angel reenters heaven, he takes out his mementoes;
the flowers have withered and the baby's smile faded. But the
mother's love, "the only thing he had found that would retain its
fragrance from earth to heaven," is still pristine. Sunday used
this anecdote at the very end of his sermon, which urged Christian
mothers to "try, with God's help, to do better than you ever have
done to raise your children for God." In this context the anec-
dote's significance is obvious: earthly possessions wither and
pleasures fade, but self-denying devotion to children remains heavenly
pure through life and death.

When pentecostal evangelist Jarrette A. Aycock retold the story
in 1923, though, he used it in a far different context and gave it
a new significance. The anecdote is worth quoting in its entirety
for the insight it gives into the fundamentalist world at the very
beginning of the period this dissertation will examine.

There is a verse of scripture, Isaiah 66:13, that has always
been a source of encouragement to me, "As one whom his mother com-
forteth, so will I comfort you." Those who know what it is to have
the comforting of a Christian mother can see herein the joy and
blessedness of a life in the service of Jesus. There is no love
outside of Christ like the love of a mother. I have heard the
story of how an angel at one time started out in search of the
most beautiful thing in the world; he saw a rose as it bloomed in
the morning sun, wet with the dew of heaven, and when he noted
its beauty he said, "Surely there is nothing more beautiful than
this," so plucking it he sped yonder, only to find that the flower
had faded and wilted and his search had been in vain. He went out
again and this time he saw a child at play in the early morning
with the smile of heaven on its face, and he said a little child
must be the most beautiful thing and seizing the child, he started
away, but the smile soon changed into a cry of pain and he knew
he had failed again. Once more he started on his search. One
night in a little home far removed from other people he saw a
physician turn away from a cot, on which lay a little boy, and
say to the mother, "He will be gone in a few moments; but whatever
you do, don't you kiss him, for the deadly disease might fasten upon you, and you would follow him, in a few hours." The mother promised; but just then the little fellow put up his hands and said, "Mama, I'm going now; kiss me good-bye." In spite of the danger that little mother rushed past the physician and catching her boy in her arms she pressed a kiss on his dying lips, and the angel standing back in the shadow shouted, "I have it now! I have it now!" and seizing a mother's love he sped yonder into the glory world, and when he reached there he found it just as strong, and just as true, as it was when he left the earth. I shall now want for comfort, for "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." 32

Here Aycock is addressing not mothers, but children who have experienced a mother's love. The angel, then, is the representative of the male child who has been forced out of the heavenly home to search, with increasing desperation, for "the most beautiful thing in the world," that is, for some comfort that will last through life and death. Unlike Sunday's version, the angel fails twice before finding this comfort, and the ideal mother's love is quite different from the peaceful overflowing emotion of the earlier version. Here the mother is actively heroic, defying the bureaucratic physician's orders to restrain her affection and sacrificing her life to give her dying child a last kiss. The context of the anecdote invites us to see the mother as Christ-like—"There is no love outside of Christ like the love of a mother." The juxtaposition of Jesus and the mother who lays down her life out of love for her ailing child is indeed so close as to make the two indistinguishable. Aycock's final appeal in his sermon in fact invites his congregation to come to Jesus, not as a deity whose love far outmeasures mere human love, but as a substitute for a lost mother.

If mother is gone, I can't call her back. But I will tell you what I can do. I can tell you of, and introduce you to, a Saviour that will comfort you like mother did—one who will share your
sorrows, sympathize with you in the hard places and stand by you like mother used to do. . . . And if you will let Him come into your life, He will not only comfort you as did your mother, but He will forgive your sins, and when your days upon earth are over, He will take you home to heaven and to mother, where you will have both Jesus and mother, and there will be no more good-byes.33

We can see that the American deification of Mother was not a straightforward process. Her preeminence began as a secular counterpart to the self-reliant new Adam, offering a peaceful "home" as a refuge from his unlimited but undirected activities. As stresses on small-town values increased, it became less possible to retain mere domesticity as a shield against the outside world. Mother became first a reformer, then a crusader against the social demons that threatened her children. Finally, in her most embattled state, she became a goddess, the embodiment of the sentimental moral code, capable not only of resistance but of Christ-like heroism, both the symbol and the vehicle of salvation for all those who believed in her. At the same time, though, she was a democratic goddess, whose worship implied a faith in the perfectability of mankind and whose preeminence offered mortal women a position that was, if not literally equal to man's, at least complementary to his and of equal importance.

To illustrate this progress from supporter to saint, let us look at two pieces of didactic popular fiction that follow the same sentimental formula: the victimized wife and mother who finally reforms her drunkard husband. The first of these is "My Mother's Gold Ring,"34 an anonymous tract published in 1833. The story describes how George, an honest, upright farmer, is enticed into taking just one glass of "ardent spirit," which immediately changes his character for the worse. He arrives home talking tipsily about the money he plans to spend on
luxuries; and when his wife rebukes him for his folly, he gives her
"a harsh look and a bitter word . . . the first he ever gave [her]
in his life." When his child likewise comments on his daddy's funny-
smelling breath, he instinctively strikes out, and the boy, covered
with blood, runs screaming to his mother (pp. 6-7). These acts mark
the start of a gradual but uncheckable moral collapse, and finally
the father is carried to jail. But the mother stays loyally with the
family, and when the father, dried out at last, is freed, he vows to
reform for her sake.

One day he suddenly asks her to bring him a certain gold ring.
The wife, certain that he plans to buy more liquor with it, replies,
"George . . . that ring was my mother's: she took it from her finger,
and gave it to me, the day that she died. I would not part with that
ring, unless it were to save life." He insists, though, and she doubt-
fully goes to find it. "I brought down the ring," her narrative con-
tinues, "and he asked me, with such an earnestness of manner, to put it
on his little finger, that I did so; not, however, without a trembling
hand and a misgiving heart. 'And now, Jenny,' said he, as he rose to
go out, 'pray that God will support me'" (pp. 19-20). Much to her
surprise, he walks straight past the saloon, refusing his friends'
invitations, and goes about his labors as he did before his fall.

Months later, when asked about his conversion, George explains:

" . . . I have in every trial and temptation— and a drinking man
knows well the force and meaning of those words— I have relied upon
this gold ring, to renew my strength, and remind me of my duty to
God, to my wife, to my children, and to society. Whenever the
struggle of appetite has commenced, I have looked upon this ring:
I have remembered that it was given, with the last words and dying
counsels of an excellent mother, to my wife, who placed it there;
and, 'under the blessing of Almighty God, it has proved, thus far, the life-boat of a drowning man' (p. 23).

While it is the thought of the females' virtue that supports the weak male, note that he reforms by his own powers, according to a plan he conceived and executed without help. Admittedly, his plan would have failed were it not for the devotion of his wife and the "last words and dying counsels" of his mother-in-law, but their roles in this story are supportive. The victory, although it ends the wife's sufferings, is a victory won by the male over his own worse nature.

By contrast, a short story entitled "Pat's Christmas Began New Era," printed in the Christmas 1924 issue of the Ironton (Ohio) Tribune and written by that paper's society editor, Mrs. Josephine P. Ellis, shows a radical role reversal. The husband enters the story already corrupted, and it is not until the end that we see anything of a better nature in him. In this story, the suffering mother, Pat, and her own mother are working desperately to complete Christmas preparations when the father, Bill, arrives home from his evening on the town. "A sinister look which lurked in a defiant way around his eyes, told the young wife in no uncertain manner that she had thought aright, 'Bill had been drinking again.'" Not wanting her mother to learn of this shameful fact, Pat invents a pretext to send her away, then turns to find that the father had dropped a lighted cigarette into a pile of excelsior, starting a blaze in front of her baby's bedroom door. At first she is "ready to go through anything to save her boy," but, seeing the guilty father stand motionless and dazed beside her, she begins to reason.
What if she should go through that inferno and come out burned fatally, sick from the smoke or blinded. Even though she saved her child, might not she be maimed for life? Of both parents she realized that she was the mainstay of that child's future; that if anything must happen to either one of them it would be best that she be spared to work and rear him.

After a quick but fervent prayer, she then turns to her husband and insists that he go into the fire and save the child; when he hesitates, she reaches into a drawer for a loaded revolver, raises it, and tells the drunkard, "You coward, you will go!" Recognizing "that the strong determination that had made Pat the woman she had always portrayed herself to be in times past was uppermost," the father dashes into the blaze, as Pat sinks fainting onto the floor.

When she revives, the fire is out and father and baby are both unharmed. But although Bill is now hailed as a hero for his desperate act, Pat sits aside with "a heart seared with shame," knowing how she had to force him to act the father. Once she is alone, though, Bill enters shamefaced to make the following confession:

"I have always been a coward; if I hadn't have been I wouldn't have acted such a fool all those years. You made me realize last night that I was a cad, through and through. I knew that you thought it was best, even though I was in a drunken condition, that I be the one to take the risk to save Buddy's life. I realized what a slacker I'd been, and when they praised me for my courage, I knew in my heart that it was you who had been the heroine. You've always been. I've learned my lesson and I only want your forgiveness" . . .

She grants it, thanking God for her Christmas gift: "a husband with a soul, one whom I thought I had lost, but who has been returned to me."

In this story we see how independent and decisive the wife and mother could be. Not only does she prefer to send away her own mother and deal with the situation in her own way, but she is the one who
devises the plan to "save" both child and husband. Bill, the husband, is entirely passive, except for a token glance of defiance, and his only actions are those that prove his subservience to his wife.

More importantly, we see the mother militant in her own virtue; she is willing to sentence the father to probable maiming or death, even at gunpoint, because she knows that his weak morals would otherwise corrupt her child. The fire he starts in front of the bedroom door is an obvious symbol for this moral danger, and by ordering her weakened husband into the flames the mother potentially protects her baby from two menaces at once. Both father and child pass through the blaze unharmed, but the experience so harrows the father that he capitulates to the mother as moral custodian of the family. The victory over alcohol is a battle fought and won entirely by the mother, and the father is no more than a tool in her manipulating but morally pure hands. It might not be too much to say that the father by this time has become a sinner in the hands of an angry goddess, who is quite willing to let the spider drop into the inferno of blazing excelsior.

ii. Popular Song: Elegies, Morals, and Hymns

Like popular literature in general, the popular song tradition followed a progression from a quietly elegiac tradition lamenting the loss of home to a militant glorification of Mother as man's last refuge in a world of sin. As with other popular genres, it would be impossible to study nineteenth-century popular song in a study of this size, so I will illustrate the overall contours of this
progression by looking at representative examples. Sentimental songs
during the period 1830-1923 fall into three main historical periods,
the elegiac parlor-song tradition, the moralistic music-hall tradition,
and the celebratory hymn tradition. To begin with, the parlor-song
tradition differed from the later sentimental traditions in that such
songs were not written to be performed before or by a large audience,
but were intended for private, amateur performance within the family
circle. Thus the songs tend to be simply written and subjective,
spoken in the first person by a representative child-figure.
With "Home Sweet Home" as their model, they weave an appealing halo
around an ideal home circle or a departed mother.\(^\text{36}\) Parlor songs
resemble early nineteenth-century popular poetry (indeed, some of
the most popular are settings of well-known poems), and so they
typically present the domestic circle as an embattled island of
friendship continually threatened from without by poverty and
death. In fact, as Bridges said of the poetry, home is "less an
actual place than a state of mind,"\(^\text{37}\) a memory recalled in nostalgia
by an adult male who is tired of his self-reliant struggles and now
yearns for rest. The group that sang such a song, then, was engaging
in a private ritual to bind themselves together as a "family"
and evoke their endangered concept of "home" as an act of solidarity.\(^\text{38}\)

The years before the Civil War produced few important mother
songs, however; the only important one was a British import, Henry
Russell's 1840 setting of Eliza Cook's poem "The Old Arm Chair"
(C241). Even this song is unusually defensive in tone, opening with
a shrill challenge, "... who shall dare/To chide me for loving that
The full text of the poem (cut in performance to three or four stanzas) runs as follows:

BACKWARD, turn backward, oh, Time, in your flight!
Make me a child again, just for to-night!
Mother, come back from the echoless shore,
Take me again to your heart as of yore--
Kiss from my forehead the furrows of care,
Smooth the few silver threads out of my hair--
Over my slumbers your loving watch keep--
Rock me to sleep, mother--rock me to sleep!

Chorus: Clasped to your heart in a loving embrace,
With your light lashes just sweeting my face,
Never hereafter to wake or to weep,
Rock me to sleep, mother--rock me to sleep!

[Backward, flow backward, oh, tide of years!
I am so weary of toils and of tears--
Toil without recompense--tears all in vain--
Take them, and give me my childhood again!
I have grown weary of dust and decay,
Weary of flinging my soul-wealth away--
Weary of sowing for others to reap;
Rock me to sleep, mother--rock me to sleep!]*

[Repeat Chorus]

*Sometimes omitted in song versions.
[Tired of the hollow, the base, the untrue,
Mother, oh, mother, my heart calls for you!
Many a summer the grass has grown green,
Blossomed and faded—our faces between—
Yet with strong yearnings and passionate pain,
Long I to-night for your presence again;
Come from the silence so long and so deep—
Rock me to sleep, mother—rock me to sleep!]*

[Repeat Chorus]

Over my heart, in days that are flown,
No love like mother-love ever has shown—
No other worship abides and endures,
Faithful, unselfish, and patient, like yours.
None like a mother can charm away pain
From the sick soul and the world-weary brain
Slumber's soft calm o'er my heavy lids creep—
Rock me to sleep, mother—rock me to sleep!

[Repeat Chorus]

Come, let your brown hair, just lighted with gold,
Fall on your shoulders again as of old—
Let it fall over my forehead tonight,
Shielding my faint eyes away from the light—
For with this sunny-edged shadows once more,
Haply will throng the sweet visions of yore,
Lovingly, softly, its bright billows sweep—
Rock me to sleep, mother—rock me to sleep!

[Repeat Chorus]

[Mother, dear mother! the years have been long
Since I last hushed to your lullaby song—
Sing, then, and unto my soul it shall seem
Womanhood's years have been but a dream;
Clasped to your arms in loving embrace,
With your light lashes just sweeping my face,
Never hereafter to wake or to weep—
Rock me to sleep, mother—rock me to sleep!]*

[Repeat Chorus]

(Nightingale Songster [1863], pp. 24-25.)

In the poem as originally printed Akers speaks of the trials of "womanhood," but once the sixth stanza was dropped the song

*Always omitted in song versions.
became a standard male lament and the mother his projection of a need to find something in life beyond "progress." Childhood is not a thing prized for its own joys, but an escape from "toil without recompense ... dust and decay," and achievement in the outside world is merely "sowing for others to reap." What the narrator prefers, as the chorus reiterates, is "Never hereafter to wake or to weep ..."—that is, a state of undifferentiated infancy, even, as Bridges shrewdly notes, the undemanding life of the womb.\(^{10}\)

As poem and song "Rock Me to Sleep, Mother" proved universally popular, but within a few years it was greeted with a series of answer songs that rebutted the child's nihilistic attitude toward progress. In one, the mother does in fact return from the echoless shores, but only to rebuke her child: "'Backward?' say onward! ye swift rolling years;/Gird on thy armor, keep back thy tears!"

Here the mother promises to comfort her child, but only after s/he has faced up to life's strifes in a self-reliant fashion. Then the child will gain a heavenly reward, in which "angels, my darling will rock thee to sleep."\(^{11}\) Even at this early date we can see the mother taking on a forceful didactic role, countering the child's desire to withdraw into the womb of home with a work-ethic that pushes the individual "onward!" in the hopes of gaining an eternal home in the afterlife.

Akers's intense elegy occasioned a flood of parlor songs along the same line, a flow encouraged by the outbreak of the Civil War the next year. It would be natural to expect war songs that lament a child's separation from his mother along with the more usual partings
from sweetheart or wife. But when Willard A. and Porter W. Heaps
surveyed the popular songs occasioned by the war, they found to their
surprise that mothers outnumbered any other object of affection.
This obsession with the mother-son tie was noted by contemporaries
as well. In 1865 one songwriter ironically dedicated his piece,
"Mother on the Brain," to "all writers of Mother Songs."

As you look at the songs that you see nowadays,
The gentle word of Mother, will surely meet your gaze;
In the parlor, on the street, or on the battle plain,
Ev'ry body seems to have—Mother on the brain.

Chorus: Oh, Mother, Mother, the truth is very plain,
That ev'ry body seems to have—Mother on the brain.

And as the mania's so contagious, I've just made up my mind
That a few of all the Mother Songs in verse I would unwind;
So listen all who wish to hear, my feelie rhyming strain,
While I sing to you a song—of Mother on the brain.

[Repeat Chorus]

(M. F. H. Smith, sheet music published by A. C. Peters
& Bro.)

There follows a versified list of forty-one songs, all including
"Mother" somewhere in the title. The song indicates that the craze
for songs about the mother stereotype was still a novelty (this is
in fact the earliest use of the term "mother song" that I can verify)
but it nonetheless shows how it was growing in popularity in the
popular song tradition of the time.

In the post-war period the mother began to represent more than
anxiety-free existence and human companionship. A major influence
on parlor songs at this time was the new wave of American hymns, the
so-called "gospel songs," a style that began before the war as an
effort to attract more youth to services. Under the influence of Ira
Sankey, Dwight Moody's song-leader, sentimental parlor-song formulas became "born again." Traditionalists considered the new songs impious: one critic grumbled, "Determine the pleasure you get from a circus quickstep, a negro minstrel sentimental ballad, a college chorus, and a hymn all in one and you have some gauge of the variety and contrast." Nevertheless they attracted spectators—and converts. More importantly for this study, many gospel songs were so secular in content that they became equally popular as parlor songs. One such was Rev. Robert Lowry's "Where Is My Boy To-Night?" (Pl48), published first in 1877 and still included in fundamental hymnals today.

Where is my wand'ring boy to-night—
The boy of my tenderest care
The boy that was once my joy and light,
The child of my love and prayer?

Chorus: 0 where is my boy to-night?
0 where is my boy to-night?
My heart o'erflows, for I love him he knows:
0 where is my boy to-night?

Once he was pure as morning dew,
As he knelt at his mother's knee;
No face was so bright, no heart more true,
And none was so sweet as he.

[Repeat Chorus]

0 could I see you now, my boy,
As fair as in olden time,
When prattle and smile made home a joy,
And life was a merry chime!

[Repeat Chorus]

Go for my wand'ring boy to-night;
Go search for him where you will;
But bring him to me with all his blight,
And tell him I love him still.

[Repeat Chorus]

(Gospel Hymns [ca. 1891], p. 165.)
In this hymn there is no religious reference more explicit than "prayer," and in fact the plot is simply a reversal of the standard elegiac situation. Now the mother is isolated from her wandering son and who laments the loss of "olden time." But by making this simple reversal, Rev. Lowry changes a great deal. Now it is not death or fate that breaks the home circle, it is the son's self-reliant activity. We are never told what sin, if any, the boy has committed out in the world, but we know that he has ceased being "pure as morning dew" and now is full of "blight." In brief, his wilful absence makes his mother suffer, and she no longer waits passively at home to comfort the child, but actively seeks to have him brought back to the fold. This dramatic role was more than a parlor fiction—the song actually had this function during revivals. Ira Sankey was fond of delivering "sermonettes" before singing his selections; one attached to "Where Is My Boy To-Night?" is as follows:

A mother came to me in Boston and asked me if I would try to find her wandering boy in California when I should go there with Mr. Moody to hold meetings. I promised to do what I could. For several weeks, as opportunity presented itself, I searched the cheap boarding-houses for the young man. At last I found him in the slums of the city and asked him to come to our meetings. He refused, saying that he was not fit to be seen there; but after much persuasion he came. One evening I sang: "Where is my wandering boy," and prefaced it with a few remarks, saying that I knew of one dear mother in the East who was praying for her wandering boy to-night. This, together with the song, touched the young man's heart, and he found his way into the inquiry-room, where, with my open Bible, I was enabled by God's grace to lead him to the light. I wrote to his mother and told her that her boy had been found, and that he was now a professed Christian. She sent me money to pay his railway fare back to Boston, and in a short time he had reached home and received a hearty welcome. He soon found employment, and became a useful citizen, and has since been a follower of Christ.

This song suggests how the parlor song developed into the more moralistic music-hall tradition. Although it still uses the standard elegiac
situation of the earlier tradition, it combines it with a subtle form of propaganda that seeks to shame and convert "sinners." This, with its use by evangelical singers in front of large congregations, points the way to the music-hall tradition soon to grow dominant.

The music hall did not, however, spring out of nowhere; its repertoire was based on propagandistic formulas that were fixed as early as the 1830s. In particular the temperance movement provided stereotypes and situations, though none of the songs of sobriety seem to have gained wide popularity until 1864, when Henry Clay Work's "Come Home, Father" (V003) was published. The inspiration for this song seems to have been a noted scene in William W. Pratt's stage adaptation of Ten Nights in a Bar-Room. In the first act, as the ruined Joe Morgan argues with his one-time friend, now the villainous bartender Simon Slade, his little daughter Mary rushes in to beg him to come home:

MARY. Oh, I've found you, at last! Now won't you come home with me? ... Come, father, mother's been waiting a long time, and I left her crying so sadly. Now do come home, and make us all so happy.

MOR. Yes, my child, I'll go. ... You have robbed me of my last penny, Simon Slade, but this treasure still remains. Farewell, friend Slade. Come dear one, come. I'll go home! Come, come! I'll go, yes, I'll go!46

It was at this point, in fact, that Work's song was introduced into the drama later on in the century, although it does not at all match the plot of the play.

Father, dear father, come home with me now, The clock in the steeple strikes one; You said you were coming right home from the shop, As soon as your days work was done. Our fire has gone out, our house is all dark, And mother's been watching since tea,
With poor brother Benny so sick in her arms,
And no one to help her but me.
Come home! come home! come home!
Please, father, dear father, come home!

Chorus: Hear the sweet voice of the child,
Which the night-winds repeat, as they roam!
Oh! who could resist this most plaintive of prayers:
Please, father, dear father, come home!

Father, dear father, come home with me now,
The clock in the steeple strikes two;
The night has grown colder, and Benny is worse;
But he has been calling for you:
Indeed he is worse, ma says he will die—
Perhaps before morning shall dawn
And this is the message she sent me to bring:
Come quickly, or he will be gone!
Come home! come home! come home!
Please father, dear father, come home!

[Repeat Chorus]

Father, dear father, come home with me now,
The clock in the steeple strikes three;
The house is so lonely, the hours are so long
For poor weeping mother and me!
Yes, we are alone; for Benny is dead,
And gone with the angels of light.
And these were the very last words that he said:
I want to kiss papa good-night.
Come home! come home! come home!
Please father, dear father, come home!

[Repeat Chorus]

(Pulling Hard Against the Stream Songster [1868], p. 41.)

While this song uses some of the tactics of the parlor-song tradition, there are two important changes. First, while the song largely consists of a subjective monologue, it is a dramatic monologue. Amateur singers could readily identify with the two songs discussed previously, filling in the vague situation with the facts of their own lives. But "Come Home, Father" can be nothing other than what it was labeled: "the song of Little Mary, standing at the bar-room door, while the
shameful midnight revel rages wildly as before." The terms of the song demand that the performer turn it into a dramatic tableau, in which the singer acts out a part while his audience chimes in with the appropriate aesthetic response of the chorus. The song still implies a ritual of solidarity, but now it is a solidarity based not on identification with the song, but on a common emotional response to the emblematic scene enacted before them.

Second, we see in this song the usual "home" setting, where mother and children wait passively to welcome the wanderer home. But this passivity is deceptive, as it is in nearly all moralistic songs, since passive suffering is itself a psychological weapon. Realistically one would not expect a wife to send her tender child into a dangerous saloon, and in fact the original "Little Mary" in Arthur's book is fatally wounded when she arrives during a drunken brawl. But the mother's quiet but conspicuous suffering, the girl's ingenious descriptions of what is going on, and even little Benny's last words combine to condemn the father's insensitivity. More subtly, they serve to suggest the ideal family circle that the father's sins have darkened. "I want to kiss papa good-night" acts both as the child's pathetic last effort to see his father once more before he goes to heaven, and also as a brief reminder of what the father naturally would be doing in an ideal domestic situation. Benny's words are in fact precisely the ones that would touch his father's consciousness most profoundly, and, although the song gives no indication whether the father breaks down in the end and goes home, all the sequels that Work's song inspired assume that he does.
These sequels give us further insight into the mother's usual role in these early moralistic songs. Two that I located provide happy endings to the plot: although it is too late to save Benny, the father comes to his senses and promises never to drink again. In one, the anonymous "Father's Come Home," he

... kneels by our little boy's bed;
And he prays for God's help, that the husband may fill
The place of the boy that is dead;
And say, though he left [his wife] forsaken to weep,
All alone to bear sorrow and pain,
He'll never more cause her a pang or a tear,
If once more she will trust him again.

(Pulling Hard Against the Stream Songster [1868], p. 42.)

In another sequel, Louie J. and J. William Suffern's "Please, Father, Don't Drink Any More," the mother resigns herself to God's will, thus melting the drunkard's heart and leading him to renew domestic ties (Sheet music published by S. Brainard & Sons, 1866). In all three cases, Work's original and the two sequels, we find an uneasy compromise between the passive, supportive mother of the parlor song and the active reformer. While it is the father who takes the initiative to change his ways, it is the mother's role to incite such reform by conspicuous suffering. Nevertheless, she takes no active role to save her husband, and in two of the three the immediate cause of the father's reform is the way in which the last words of Benny haunts him. In a more cynical vein, the same is true of Will S. Hays's parody-sequel, "The Old Man's Drunk Again." When the father's resolve to go straight proves shallow, the mother still suffers his abuse passively, while the narrator (presumably a more mature Little Mary) warns her dad:
Ol' don't abuse the boys,
And cause poor mother pain,
Or we'll rebel and "go for you,"
When you get drunk again.

(Don't Make a Noise Songster [ca. 1877], p. 17.)

At this early date the mother still plays a minor role in preserving the family circle, but during the 1870s and 1880s she became much more a powerful symbol of morality.

It was during what Sigmund Spaeth wassishly called "The Naïve Nineties" that the moralistic music-hall tradition became the dominant force in American popular music. In song texts of this time, Spaeth noted,

Right was still right and wrong was wrong, with special approval of mothers, sweethearts, courage and uniforms, a corresponding antagonism toward infidelity, dishonesty, and a morbid pleasure in the contemplation of natural death or its equivalent in senseless misunderstandings and separations.

The songs of the Nineties were perhaps more cruelly characteristic of their time than ever before, inexorable in their revelation of limited human understanding, commonplace emotions and the platitudes of social intercourse.

Spaeth's blanket condemnation describes the facts of the song tradition (as seen through another age's eyes), but it glosses over the shift in performance expectations that gave rise to this shift in taste. With songs like "Come Home, Father," popular songs began to dramatize situations, and once they moved from the temperance meeting to the stage, the drama was brought to its extreme. Instead of generalized internal monologues, music-hall songs tend to be observations, couched in objective narration. If the song is spoken in the first person, the speaker either recalls something that happened long ago or else he is a "man on the street" who happens to observe the events of the song. Monologués are spoken to him by orphans
but he does not often speak them himself, except dramatically, in the form of testimony given his audience. The narrator thus is less a generalized role-model for the amateur performer than a professional "preacher-figure" who presents "real-life" events and tells his audience how to respond to them. When the song was sung to accompany a series of slides, as was customary during the late 1890s, the narrator was further distanced from the action. His voice was no longer that of a suffering soul much like the listener, but that of an authoritative commentator on the day's events.

J. S. Bratton, although her work is based on English music-hall ballads, accurately describes the fine points of the moralistic tradition. Like Spaeth, she admits that the events such songs presented were exaggerated and unreal, but she points out that such exaggeration is characteristic of folk ballads as well. Both focus on "emblematically extreme cases which embody in a large and final form the concerns and pressures from which they spring." She concludes:

Realistic compromise and artistic understatement are both equally out of place in works which operate within such frameworks of convention. Similarly the sensational and sentimental ballads of the music halls developed a pattern of conventions of expression and story which were far from realistic, but expressed the lives of their audience in a peculiarly stylized manner.46

The moralistic music-hall tradition, then, is less an effort to describe the complexities of real life objectively, as Spaeth might wish, than it is an effort to explain real life by projecting an embattled moral code onto condensed, almost allegorical plots. That these plots were performed in front of large, cohesive audiences (one is tempted to say "congregations") means that they would need to use propagandistic tactics in order to compel assent from all.
There is more to these songs than "morbid pleasure in the contemplation of natural death," for, as Bratton shows, they "attempt to come to terms with the violence done to human feelings and decency, to push the stresses of everyday life to an extreme in a fantasy situation where they can be resolved, and attitudes for their acceptance tried out." In sum, what had been a limited, goal-oriented movement within the temperance movement became in the music halls a broader effort to perpetuate an embattled morality, and the experience of conversion through tears became a secular phenomenon.

To be sure, some song-writers took their roles as preachers less seriously than others. Edward B. Marks, who wrote the lyrics to "The Lost Child" and "Mother Was a Lady," claimed in later life that he directed such a song to "the gutter," and hoped no more of it than to see it "sung as loudly as possible in the city's lowest dives." Yet Marks's cynicism (which may have been overstated for his cynical 1930s readers) was by no means the norm. Paul Dresser, the most successful of the sentimental song-writers, often grew so involved with his creations that he would break into tears as he taught them to his singers, or, as Marks reports, as he composed at the keyboard. Theodore Dreiser, his brother, recalled how Paul composed one of his most lasting hits, "Just Tell Them That You Saw Me" (V321,1):
he came into the office of his publishing house one gray
November Sunday afternoon... and going into a small room which
was fitted up with a piano as a "try-out" room (professionals
desiring a song were frequently taught it in the office), he began
improvising, or rather repeating over and over, a certain strain
which was evidently in his mind. A little while later he came out
and said, "Listen to this, will you, Thee?"

He played and sang the first verse and chorus. In the middle
of the latter, so moved was he by the sentiment of it, his voice
broke and he had to stop. Tears stood in his eyes and he wiped
them away. A moment or two later he was able to go through it
without wavering and I thought it charming for the type of thing
it was intended to be. 53

While it would be naive to say that all song composers during the
1890s wrote with tears in their eyes, or that all music-hall audiences
heard them with damp handkerchiefs, it seems clear that sentimentality
was on the whole taken seriously and that at least some of the song-
writers were eager to take on the role of social preachers.

To illustrate how music-hall songs turned moral dictates into
compressed, emblematic scenes, let us look at James Thornton's hit,
"There's a Mother Always Waiting at Home Sweet Home" (A085). Marks
remembers Thornton as a heavy drinker and superlative stand-up
comedian, but like other comic artists of the time he fell back
on the sentimental number for his "change of pace." 54 This song was
his most lasting success, with "Going for a Pardon" (or "The East-
Bound Train," A010), a close second.

"So you're going to leave the old home, Jim, today you're going
away,
You're going among the city folk to dwell,"
So spoke a dear old mother to her boy one summer day,
"If your mind's made up that way I wish you well
The old home will be lonely,
We shall miss you when you're gone,
The birds won't sing as sweet when you're not nigh,
But if you are in trouble, Jim, just write and let us know,"
She spoke these words and then she said "good bye."
Chorus: When sickness over takes you,
When old companions shake you,
As through the world you wander all alone
When friends you haven't any
In your pocket not a penny,
There's a mother always waiting you at home, sweet home.

Ten years later to the village came a stranger no one knew,
His step was halt, and ragged clothes he wore,
The little children laugh’d at him as down the lane he walked,
At last he stopped before a cottage door
He gently knocked, no sound he heard,
He thought, can she be dead?
But soon he hears a voice well known to him
’Twas mother's voice, her hair was silvered by the touch of time,
She said, thank God, they've sent us back our Jim.

[Repeat Chorus]

(Songs of the Road and Range [ca. 1943], pp. 8-9.)

At first the mother seems much like those in earlier songs: she
wishes her son well, waits passively at home while he wanders, then
receives him back without complaint. But a closer look at the chorus
reveals the moralistic difference: the mother does not offer to wait
in case of sickness or poverty, she warns her son that she will "always"
be waiting "when" sickness comes and companions go. There is no doubt
that the son's departure will lead inexorably to illness and isolation,
and so it comes to pass. The mother's words are harsher than mere
advice or regrets: what she speaks is a prophecy, almost a curse,
that makes the son's return to home and mother inevitable. Unlike
many music-hall ballads, "There's a Mother" allows the sinner to
regain grace, but the vision it gives of life outside the home is
grim. There is no hope that the son would ever have made good in the
city, nor is there any haven for him outside that small cottage, not
even in his home town, where the children mock him as he passes.
One hillbilly recomposition of "There's a Mother" reinforces this grim, dualistic perspective of life by inserting an additional scene:

His steps were slow his feet were sore as through the streets he roamed,
He thought of his old mother weeping so;
At last he fell upon the street from hunger, thirst and cold,
And there he dreamed of mother dear and home.
And when he 'rose and staggered into a cottage door
He met a gray haired mother like his own.
She pitied his condition and she gave him food to eat
And then she bid him to his mother go.
(Jack Marlow [late 1930s], pp. 3-4.)

The strange figure of the "gray haired mother like [Jack's] own" who lives in a "cottage" incongruously placed on a city street, is an alter ego of the son's true mother, who haunts him in thoughts and dreams wherever he goes and finally rescues him from the gutter and points him homeward. More so than in the original the son is helpless in the face of "the city," helpless to do more than starve in the world of action, helpless to resist the omnipresent influence of his mother. Where the original aim of the elegiac parlor songs was to make life in this world liveable through the memory of Mother's love, in the moralistic tradition this love is more threat than refuge. The child's every act outside "home" is now futile, even potentially fatal, and by the same token the mother's acts, however minor, take on universal proportions.

Such elemental projections of morality proved effective in the 1890s, but their allegorical extremes also made them ephemeral. As soon as society at large abandoned small-town solutions to national problems and began to cope with them in a complex, bureaucratic fashion, these violent statements of despair and withdrawal to "home" became
outmoded, even ridiculous. Spaeth observes how rapidly story-oriented songs of this sort passed out of favor around 1905, to be replaced by non-narrative dance songs of all kinds. This shift away from objective narrative restored the subjective perspective of the parlor songs, but the tradition was one of hymns, not elegies. The relation between performer and audience was no longer the direct one of the music hall—preacher to congregation—but a complex interplay in which both performer and listener were subordinated to an orchestra. The individual's response to the words is not vital to the music; what is important in this kind of performance is that soloist, musicians, and dancers all move smoothly in tandem with everyone else. The ritual of solidarity is one that integrates everyone into an aesthetic bureaucracy, and, appropriately, the songs themselves show the individual bowing before a universal ideal of Motherhood.

This secular ideal, officially recognized by the establishment of Mother's Day at this time, is analogous to the sacred ideal vigorously championed in fundamentalist churches of the same period. Unlike the music-hall styled gospel songs of Sankey and others, these were composed for congregations as a whole. Some might be performed by soloists or quartets during a church service, but their context and explicit religious content subordinated both singer-preacher and his congregation to the ideal being celebrated. These shifts in emphasis parallel the shift Kelly had perceived in children's fiction, in which the typical hero is no longer the family member but the team-player. Submission to socially defined rules is primary; individual achievement is meaningful only in terms of the whole game.
Note that in each case—"game," "church," "dance," and "home"—the social microcosm is one that preserves an ideal rule-governed order in the middle of an otherwise absurd world. It is appropriate, therefore, that hymns to home and Mother should be sung both in church and in the dance hall, and also that the church should sense so powerful a rival in the dance.

On the secular side of the hymn tradition, Howard Johnson's "M-O-T-H-E-R (A Word That Means the World to Me)" (C003) was the most lasting of the new Mother's Day celebrations. The original song included two verses, but the choruses proved the part of the song that stuck firmly in popular tradition.

I've been around the world, you bet,
But never went to school;
Hard knocks are all I seem to get,
Perhaps I've been a fool;
But still some educated folks,
Supposed to be so swell,
Would fail if they were called upon
A simple word to spell,
Now if you'd like to put me to the test
There's one dear name that I can spell the best

Chorus: "M" is for the million things she gave me,
"O" means only that she's growing old,
"T" is for the tears she shed to save me,
"H" is for her heart, as pure as gold,
"E" is for her eyes, with lovelight shining,
"R" means right, and right she'll always be;
Put them all together, they spell "MOTHER,"
A word that means the world to me.

When I was but a baby,
Long before I learned to walk.
While lying in my cradle
I would try my best to talk;
It wasn't long before I spoke,
And all the neighbors heard,
My folks were very proud of me,
For "mother" was the word.
Although I'll never lay a claim to fame
I'm satisfied that I can spell the name.
Chorus: "M" is for the mercy she possesses, "O" means that I owe her all I own. "T" is for her tender, sweet caresses, "H" is for her hands that made a home. "E" means everything she's done to help me, "R" means real and regular, you see, Put them all together they spell "MOTHER," A word that means the world to me.

(Loyle Pack [ca. 1934], p. 3.)

The only actions presented in this song are those of the ideal mother, who sheds tears to "save" the narrator (apparently not in any definite religious sense) and who otherwise gives him a "million things" and does "ev'rything" to help. The stanzas show the narrator doing no more than admitting his lack of education, remaining loyal to his mother's name, and pronouncing "mother" as his first baby word. But this contrast of roles, though it completes the role-reversal begun in the moralistic tradition, is less important than the total absence of narrative, even in a condensed, emblematic form. The precious way in which the song is ordered around the "M-O-T-H-E-R" anagram is the song's only interest, and even the content of the anagram is deliberately vague. We see not an individual mother acting in specific ways, but an icon of Motherhood, before which the true believer devoutly kneels. Each line reinforces the ageless transcendence of this icon, comprising all the supportive qualities of all mothers into one object of worship. The stereotype no longer represents a human being, but "A word that means the world"—that is, an ideal that remains "pure as gold" and "always right" in the face of an imperfect world.

The sacred hymn tradition, by contrast, kept some narrative elements, but placed them in a specific evangelical context. The most popular
of these narratives was that in which a mother ensured her children's salvation. In part this theme was a reflection of new developments in Christian education. As the parlor song faded before the more professional music-hall songs, evangelists insisted that families preserve the traditional ritual of singing as a unit. Only now the mother was the song-leader, not the motherless child, and what she taught her children were hymns that made their moral duties clear.

What our mothers sang to us [one minister wrote] when they put us to sleep is singing yet. We may have forgotten the words; but they went into the fiber of our soul, and will forever be a part of it. It is not so much what you formally teach your children as what you sing to them. . . . There is a place in Switzerland where, if you distinctly utter your voice there come back ten or fifteen echoes, and every Christian song sung by a mother in the ear of her child shall have ten thousand echoes coming back from all the gates of heaven. Oh, if mothers only knew the power of this sacred spell, how much oftener the little ones would be gathered, and all our homes would chime with the songs of Jesus!56

The duties of the Christian mother as domestic evangelist were spelled out not only in teachings like this, but in many popular revivalist hymns as well; it is unusual to find any evangelical hymnal published between 1890 and 1930 that does not include at least one song that shows Mother leading her children to God. One of these, still current in a bluegrass arrangement, was E. M. Bartlett's "I Heard My Mother Call My Name in Prayer" (A088), first printed in 1918.

While kneeling by her bedside in the cottage on the hill,  
My mother prayed her blessings on me there;
She was talking then to Jesus while ev'rything was still
And I heard my mother call my name in pray'r.

Chorus: Yes, I heard my mother call my name in pray'r,
She was pouring out her heart to Jesus there,
Then I gave my heart to Him and he [sic] saved my soul from sin
For He heard my mother call my name in pray'r.
She was anxious for her boy to be just what he ought to be
And she asked the Lord to take him in His care;
Just the words I can't remember but I know she prayed for me
For I heard my mother call my name in pray'r.

[Repeat Chorus]

How my heart was touched and tendered by the pray'r that mother prayed!
I can almost see her form now kneeling there
As she told her Lord and Savior just how far from Him I strayed,
Yes I heard my mother call my name in pray'r.

[Repeat Chorus]

Then I gave my heart to Jesus and am living now for Him
And some day I'll go to meet Him in the air;
For He heard my mother praying and has saved my soul from sin
Yes, He heard my mother call my name in pray'r.

[Repeat Chorus]

(Bailes Brothers [ca. 1942], no. 56.)

The narrative content of this song, compared with the music-hall ballads, is slim; it consists only of a core situation that is presented in the first verse and chorus, then embellished in the three verses to follow. In addition, as in evangelical sermons of the time, the figures of Christ and Mother are closely related, almost equated. It is hard to distinguish between the acts of "praying her blessings on me" and saving "my soul from sin." If the narrator is passive, bowing to his mother's desire that he "be just what he ought to be," so is her God, who immediately grants her request just because "He heard my mother call my name in pray'r." The song is less a celebration of Jesus's saving grace than of the mother's determination to save her child. The dualism of music-hall ballads is here muted, since the child seems guilty of no more than indifference toward religion, but the mother's "blessing" tells him "just how far from
[Jesus hé] strayed" and that he still needs to be cleansed from "sin."
Anything less than living now for Him, evidently, is dangerous sin.
The son becomes a worshipper of mother's ideals, much like that in
"M-O-T-H-E-R," since the goal of this side of the hymn tradition is
not merely to keep children away from "the city," but to encourage
him to actively glorify and perpetuate the ideal of "home." To do
so now, the individual truly needs the support of "both Jesus and
Mother."

Thus the progress of the mother stereotype in popular song
almost exactly paralleled its development in popular literature as
a whole. It moved from a secular, elegiac parlor-song tradition that
supported the child's activity in a threatening society, to a militant
moralistic tradition that demanded obedience to a strict a priori
moral code, and finally to a tradition of hymns that glorified
Motherhood as a timeless, irresistible ideal. The folk tradition
that formed the foundation of the early country music repertory,
however, adopted these traditions in its own fashion. Based in
sub-cultures that retained small-town perspectives long after popular
culture at large abandoned them, it naturally preferred the most
reactionary of these songs. Embattled islands of morality in an
increasingly amoral world, they clung to the moralistic music-hall
tradition, which expressed a defensive didacticism, rather than to the
restrained optimism of the parlor-song or hymn traditions. While
"Rock Me to Sleep, Mother," "M-O-T-H-E-R," and "I Heard My Mother
Call My Name in Prayer" all found their ways into the folk or hill-
billy traditions, together they account for only two recordings, while
the more militant "There's a Mother Always Waiting" alone was recorded at least sixteen separate times. Once sentimental songs became part of this new tradition, however, they interacted with pre-existing folk patterns and stereotypes, often altered them, and were often themselves altered. When the early audiences of country music accepted sentimentality, they did so for their own reasons, and the process was less a surrender to a deterministic popular culture than a refashioning of its materials in a typically traditional way.
Notes to Chapter Two


3 Weibe, p. 44.

4 Kelly, p. 76.


6 Bridges, pp. 775-776.

7 For summaries of how this popular trend reflected woman's role within the family, see Kelly, pp. 88-89, and Bridges, pp. 765-767.


9 Weibe, p. 122.

10 Bridges, p. 767.

11 Bishop Henry Potter, quoted by Weibe, p. 293.

12 Kelly, pp. 39-43.

13 Kelly, pp. 43-47.


15 Bridges, pp. 767-768.

16 Bridges, pp. 777-779.

17 Kelly, p. 115.

18 Weibe, p. 62.

19 J. C. Furnas gives a brief but hostile account of this crusade and the literature it produced in *The Life and Times of the Late Demon Rum* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), pp. 277 ff. Norman H. Clark's *Deliver Us from Evil* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976) is a more sympathetic account of the movement, but does not deal as much with
the popular literature.

20 Furnas, pp. 224-226.


22 Weibe, p. 96.


25 Cohen, pp. 33-34.

26 Cohen, pp. 43-44.

27 Kelly, p. 179.


30 McLoughlin, p. 385. These anecdotes seem never to have been collected or studied extensively by folklorists, yet it is clear that they provided an oral reservoir of material from which a skilled evangelist could improvise sermons. Rev. Kenneth L. Bligen of Columbus today introduces such stories into his chanted sermons. These anecdotes resemble legends in form and style, and seem to have circulated among preachers since the 1870s. A study would be useful.


33 Aycock, p. 23.

34 "My Mother's Gold Ring," in *The Temperance Tales, Vol. 1* (Boston: Whipple and Damrell, 1836), n. pag. [the story is the first in the collection].
Josephine P. Ellis, "Pat's Christmas Began New Era," Ironton (Ohio) Tribune, December 25, 1924, pag. unknown. I quote passages of this story from a dated but unpaginated clipping in Ms. Ellis's scrapbook, now in the possession of the author's sister, Mrs. Jane Ellis Judd, Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. My thanks to her for calling the story to my attention and sending a xerox of it to me.

See J. S. Bratton's discussion of the English "drawing-room or Royalty 'ballad'" in The Victorian Popular Ballad (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), pp. 90-91. Bratton's comments are hostile, stating disdainfully that the genre "catered for idle women" and was "devoid of artistic merit" (p. 90). Still, her factual observations accurately describe the tradition on both sides of the Atlantic.

Bridges, p. 779.

Bratton, pp. 107-108.

According to the Oxford Companion to American Literature, the poem was first published on June 9, 1860 in The Saturday Evening Post under the pseudonym "Florence Percy." Elizabeth Akers is also known by her later married name, Elizabeth Akers Allen.

Bridges, p. 769.

The lyrics to this song, quoted from Buckley's Melodist (1864), pp. 10-11, are unattributed. The most popular setting was that of Ferdinand Mayer, published 1862 by Henry Tolman & Co.


See Findlay, pp. 215-216, for a brief account of this progress.

Quoted in McLoughlin, p. 234.

Ira Sankey, My Life and the Story of the Gospel Hymns and of Sacred Songs and Solos (1907; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1974), pp. 341-342. Sankey's practice of prefacing his solos with "observations on how men had been saved or awakened by his renderings of a particular gospel hymn" is recorded by Findlay, p. 214.


48 Bratton, p. 106.
49 Bratton, p. 113.
50 Edward B. Marks, as told to Abbot J. Liebling, They All Sang (New York: The Viking Press, 1934), p. 3
51 Marks, p. 34.
52 Marks, p. 124.
53 Theodore Dreiser, "My Brother Paul," in Twelve Men (New York: Boni and Liveright, Inc., 1919), p. 98. Dreiser was the family name, which Paul anglicized to Dresser when he began his career.
54 Marks, pp. 77-81.
56 An unidentified minister quoted by Sankey, pp. 372-373.
CHAPTER THREE
THE COUNTRY ELEGIAC TRADITION

To this point we have discussed sentimentality as part of a nation-wide popular song tradition, produced by songwriters and hymnodists in the cities and supported by urban audiences. In the rural sections of the country, however, subcultures had already begun to adopt these popular songs into a folksong tradition, and also to create their own variations on sentimental themes. The first uncritical collections of American folksongs noted the importance of numbers like "The Wandering Boy" (untraced; folk in origin? P150) and "Mother Was a Lady" (Marks & Stern, 1896). When, through a series of chance events in the recording industry, agents came to the Southeast to "collect" what folk performers had to offer, Mother was there in force. As we saw in the previous chapter, the country as a whole had turned away from mother songs, except for a few numbers in the "hymn" tradition. Songs in rural folk circulation, however, tended more often to follow earlier traditions, the elegiac parlor songs about grief at parting and the moralistic music-hall ballads that paint the urban world as a place of death and sin. These songs played a major part in the first years of recording, but as soon as the old repertory was exhausted, audiences and recording executives demanded new songs, and a new sentimental tradition began to appear.
This tradition, which may be termed the country elegiac strain, continued the hymns' emphasis on Mother's infallible holiness. But instead of presenting her as an active force, saving and guiding her children in present tense, she is a fading influence, far away in another world, and the child, lost in a hostile land, yearns for her presence. To see why such a tradition should become dominant in early country music, we need to recall that the period 1923-45 was one of upheaval in rural communities, especially in the South. Largely insulated from the industrial revolution that had reshaped the northern cities during the later nineteenth century, this part of the country retained the small-town mores that informed sentimentality. But as demand for southern goods rose sharply after World War I, industrialism hit the area. Previously quiescent towns like Roanoke and Winston-Salem quickly became big cities with slums, immigrants, and whores, and even in the countryside small factories and mills moved in to take advantage of cheap labor. This, combined with ruinously depressed markets for most farm products, meant the end of the self-sufficient farm home, and forced the generations that grew up in the 1920s to make a living outside the home in the mill or city.¹

Even before the Great Depression, then, the old lifestyles based on a small homogeneous community was being dismantled. The "golden age of country music," so beloved of collector and discographer John Edwards, was exactly contemporaneous with the Ku Klux Klan's rebirth and the anti-evolution hysteria. Southern communities were anxiously looking for scapegoats to blame for their disorientation, and also for certainties—racial purity, a literally true Bible,
infallible Motherhood—to which to cling. This uncertainty lasted nearly through the whole period surveyed, and the Second World War, while alleviating the South's economy, only furthered rural breakup by encouraging urban migration and forcing women—previously the symbols of the home—to take previously male jobs in war plants. By the end of this period both rural communities and country music had come of age. Both were by no means "modern" in any sense: both distrusted novelty and clung to the small-town ideals they inherited. But these ideals were no longer based on practical concerns; they were the "old-time" ways, which had to be preserved at all costs, even if it meant ignoring immediate social problems.

Yet both the South and its music were necessarily changed by the present, even though audiences preferred to wink at "uptown" influences. Throughout the period surveyed the sentimental mother became more and more ethereal as it became obvious that hers was not the industrial world of today. The two dominant types of song during this period were those that painted the glories of motherhood in its most deific colors, and those that presented the disoriented child far from home or beside Mother's grave, doomed to wander a strange world for the rest of his life. These two chords, major and minor, were the ones that alternated through the bulk of the early country sentimental repertory, and together they described the peculiar sense of loss that affected this generation. Old enough to remember or to have been taught the old ways, they grew up in a world that discarded these mores. Thus they "knew" what was right, but were forbidden to put it into practice. The result was an otherworldly perspective that
relied on the supernatural afterlife to magically restore small-town ways. It is during this period that holiness and pentecostal sects gained their converts, especially among recently urbanized hillbillies.\(^2\)

This chapter will survey this period, examining first the oral tradition of sentimental songs as it existed in 1923, then showing how such songs and their country imitations continued to influence early country musicians, both conservative and innovative.

1. Sentimentalizing the Folksong

Although the popular songs discussed previously were written by urban professionals, once they were adopted by oral performers, they interacted with pre-existing folk patterns and stereotypes. And in fact the two were not so different in form and intent as purists have often claimed. The nineteenth-century music-hall and parlor songs, as J. S. Bratton has argued, were folk objects of a sort, even when they were written by known composers and circulated in print. Citing M. J. C. Hodgart's definition of "ballad" as "impersonal art," Bratton maintained that the Victorian popular songs

... are still impersonal, in that they are the utterances of the public voice, for public consumption, and reveal nothing of the individuality of their composers. The only personalities involved are the dramatic ones which in many cases are used by the writer or performer to reinforce the drama of the action narrated: a character steps out of the story and tells it in his own person... The first-person narrator of the Victorian ballad does not violate the principle of impersonality because he is hardly ever an individual; rather he is a type, a representative of a class or group, and it is to that class or group, or a larger audience which is familiar with the stereotype, that he addresses himself.\(^3\)
We need not accept Bratton's definition entirely—she would insist that we see the political poems of Kipling and Tennyson as "folk art"—but we should recognize that the rhetorical tactics used in sentimental songs are not so far from the older British traditions. The "subjective" first-person narrator certainly is kin to similar tactics in broadsides and in the Child ballads told in dialogue, which depend less on our sympathizing with the narrator as an individual than on our being able to recognize the "type" who is speaking. Nevertheless, the specific types of characters presented in sentimental songs do break with past traditions in important ways.

Gordon Hall Gerould, surveying the oldest strata of British ballads, notes that parent-child relationships are not stressed, except when the parent acts as a villain, trying to block the child's progress in the world. In "The Lass of Roch Royal" (Child #76; 2:213-226), Love Gregory has left home long enough to father a child on Fair Annie, but then he is trapped back home by his evil mother. When Annie arrives to rescue him, the mother impersonates her son's voice and sends her off to die in a storm. When Gregory awakes and discovers what has happened, he curses his mother as an "ill woman," wishing her "ane ill death" (2:217). Mother-child relations are little improved in American variants of British ballads. In all versions of "The Wife of Usher's Well" (Child #79; 2:238-239), a grief-stricken mother demands the return of her dead children. In American variants, however, they return only to rebuke her for her arrogance:
She spread a table bounteously,
   And on it spread bread and wine,
Saying, "Come eat and drink, children dear,
   Come eat and drink of mine."

"We want none of your bread, mother,
   And we want none of your wine;
For we are children of the King,
   We have food and drink divine."

She spread a downy bed for them,
   And on it spread clean sheets;
And on it she spread a golden spread,
   That they might for the better sleep.

"Take it off, take it off," the oldest said,
"T is vanity and sin;
And woe, woe be to this wicked world,
Since pride has so entered in!"
(Cox, pp. 88-89.)

Within the older British tradition, then, the mother was presented
as a repressive, or even dangerous force ranged against the child. She
tries to recapture and cling to him in a self-indulgent fashion, and
whether he escapes to a love relationship or to heaven, he rightly
curses her for trying to block his way. It is curious, therefore, that
so perceptive an observer of folk attitudes as Roger D. Abrahams should
notice that in the British tradition "older characters stifle initia-
tive in the young, either through overt action or through smothering,"
yet at the same time ignore the equally important fact that in each
case these ballads condemn parental interference. If there is one
folk tradition that is, in fact, "strongly colored by puritanical
attitudes which are both restrictive and authoritative," it is the
native sentimental tradition, which pictures Mother as the final harbor
from a world of fruitless action, a harbor that the child eagerly longs
to regain.
One sign that the American folksong tradition accepted these puritanical attitudes is that older British ballad formulas were recomposed to suit sentimental patterns. An illustration of this acceptance is the history of the "Geordie" plot (Child #209; 4:123-140). The earliest collected Scots version shows Geordie's sweetheart appearing before the King of Scotland to plead for her lover's life:

O she's down on her bended knee,
I wat she's pale and weary:
'O pardon, pardon, noble king,
And gie me back my dearie!

'I hae born seven sons to my Geordie dear,
The seventh neer saw his daddie;
O pardon, pardon, noble king,
Pity a waefu lady!'  
(Child, 4:127.)

Significantly, the King initially spurns her plea and grants the pardon only after she has paid an enormous bribe. The later British recomposition, "Georgie" (Child, 4:140-142), the ballad most recovered in America, is even more relentless. The lover is hanged in spite of the lady's plea, and she is left to exclaim vengefully:

If I were on yonders hill
Where kisses I have many,
With my sword and pistols by my side,
I'd fight for the life of Georgie.  
(Davis, pp. 436-437.)

The major alterations in this plot begin in the nineteenth century with a sentimental ballad titled "The Prisoner at the Bar." This song retains the outlines of "Geordie's" plot, even restoring the happy ending, but the rhetorical tactics are greatly altered. The lady addresses the judge as a father-figure, ultimately a benevolent role:
Oh Judge, your mind must wander back
To those long years gone by,
And see your sweetheart and yourself
Just like this lad and I.
If you have children of your own,
Have mercy, do, I pray,
Remember Judge, you'll break my heart
If you send him away.

(Randolph, 4:348.)

The Judge tearfully recalls that he has "a little girl at home/With just such baby eyes,/And she's the mercy fathers get/From glory in the skies." At once he agrees to free the prisoner, without any guarantees or bribes. Here the sweetheart's plea is not against the authority figure himself, but against the dehumanizing system that forces him to judge people without regard for the human suffering he may cause. As soon as the Judge remembers that he too is a father and husband, he can act out of compassion, not according to bureaucratic rules. This ballad, however, shows us the sentimental pattern in its more liberal form: the sweetheart saves the criminal and presumably takes him away to make an honest man of him. The two thus manage to break free of parental supervision and establish a home of their own.

But it is no major step from this plot to "The Mother's Appeal for Her Boy" (A001). The initial situation is the same, except that now it is a mother who rushes in to make the plea:

"Remember I'm a widow and the prisoner there's my son;
And, gentlemen, remember 'tis the first wrong he has done.
Don't send my boy to prison, for that would drive me wild;
Remember I'm a widow and pleading for my child."

(Gardner & Chickering, pp. 355-356.)

The mother's plea, simply put, is that if her child is taken from her, it will destroy, not the child's life, but her own. No other plea is
necessary; when the bureaucratic D.A. objects to her appeal, she majestically silences him with "who here is more fit to plead than a mother for her lad?" The judge, as in the previous ballad, then acts as a compassionate father, but his words carry a moralistic message:

"I'm sorry to sit here on the bench and see you here today; I will not blight your future, but on your crime I frown; I cannot but remember I have children of my own.

"Therefore I will discharge you"--the court then gave a cheer--"Remember it is chiefly through your widowed mother here. I hope you prove a comfort and no more make her sad, For she's proved there's no one can plead like a mother for her lad."

The father-judge releases the child, but into the custody of the mother-judge, and now it is up to the son to keep her from suffering. Admittedly, the boy is described as "quite a youngster," but whatever the child's age, it is this version of the "Geordie" plot that entered the early country song tradition, emerging to inspire the hit song "I'm Here to Get My Baby Out of Jail" (A005). A further indication of how this version of the plot influenced folksong tradition is the effect it had on "The Maid Freed from the Gallows (Child #95; 2:346-355). The British originals show both mother and father refusing to save the condemned child, while the "true love" arrives just in time with the money. But in at least four independent American variants the stanzas are interchanged to present the true love as one of the villains while the mother arrives last to rescue her beloved son.6

Sentimentality, then, did not kill the tradition, in the sense that it did not keep older patterns from developing new variants and inspiring new songs. Not only were Tin Pan Alley Songs like "The Drunkard's Lone Child" (ca. 1870, V004; recomposition bef. 1930, P326) heavily recomposed in tradition, but new sentimental
cliches also reacted with older traditional material and were altered to suit folk expectations. Judging from the evidence of dated ballets, this process of mixing and adapting began as soon as mother songs became popular, and by 1923 it is doubtful that there existed anywhere such a thing as a "pure" folk tradition, at least within reach of academic collectors or recording agents. The first hillbilly entertainer to record extensively was Fiddlin' John Carson, a fifty-five-year-old performer from the north Georgia area whose archaic fiddling and singing best exemplify what country music was like before it went commercial. The recording agents for Okeh Records were almost completely unacquainted with traditional styles, but they knew that anything Carson put on disc would sell briskly in Atlanta. Thus they were in no position to dictate what he recorded or how he chose to perform it. After the success of his first set of recordings, a mix of fiddle tunes and sentimental numbers like "You Never Miss Your Mother Till She's Gone" (CO01), the Okeh executives agreed to let him cut a series of twelve-inch discs, thus giving him four to five minutes per side in which to perform longer numbers. The selections Fiddlin' John chose to record provide a clear picture of what a folk performer considered his best numbers. Two sides offered medleys, a set of dance tunes and a series of Civil War songs. Another side preserved Carson's version of "John Henry" (Laws I 1). But the remaining five sides were all sentimental classics, mostly from the 1890s when Carson probably assembled his repertory: "The Orphan Girl" (bef. 1870, P322), "When the Work's All Done This Fall" (1893, P506), "In the Baggage Coach Ahead" (Davis, 1896), "The Letter Edged in
Black" (1897, P542), and "Please, Mr. Conductor, Don't Put Me Off the Train" (1898, P165). We scholars would have preferred that he record something more like "The Tragedy of Fair Ellinger and the Brown Girl, Parts 1 and 2," or at least a broadside or two, but Carson presumably knew his audiences. This incident illustrates that by 1923 the folk tradition was no longer being influenced by sentimentality; like it or not, the dominant folk tradition was sentimentality.

ii. The Traditional Performers

The early years of the hillbilly recording industry, up to the virtual cessation of new recordings at the end of 1930, was marked by close adherence to the established rural sentimental repertory. The songs recorded during this hillbilly period, with few exceptions, were established classics or newer songs along the old patterns. The two most important song-writers of the hillbilly era, Carson J. Robison and Rev. Andrew Jenkins, were both from rural backgrounds and proved efficient at composing new "event ballads" or reworking older folksongs into hillbilly versions. A study of the first hillbilly performers, in fact, is a study of the avenues through which the older songs entered early country music and spurred imitation. In particular, two classes of early performers brought old repertory to the recording studio: vaudeville or music-hall singers and church groups. As we shall see, the first group initially proved more successful, even when their performing styles were at odds with rural norms, but it was the religious singers who remained popular long enough to set performing standards for later country music. They had the most
imitators, placed more sentimental songs in early country repertories, and created a performing style that was, however distant from folk styles, simple and flexible enough to permit easy passage of material between the two traditions.

Perhaps the continuity between the old repertory and the new recording industry is best exemplified by the first hillbilly superstar, the unlikely Vernon Dalhart.\(^{10}\) Or perhaps it is more accurate to call him the last superstar of the music hall; while Walter Haden has stressed his roots in rural Texas, it is clear that he left most of them behind when he entered the Dallas Conservatory of Music in the early 1900s. His early career included a few serious operatic roles, like Pinkerton in *Butterfly,* but he was more at home singing novelty "coon" songs like his first hit, "Can't Yo' Heah Me Callin', Caroline." Given folklorists' grudging admission that Dalhart was chiefly responsible for propelling several doleful event ballads into oral tradition, it is surprising to find that he was an admired Gilbert and Sullivan performer and a large part of his repertory was comic. The first LP reissue album devoted to Dalhart\(^ {11}\) shows that he was in fact quite a good vaudeville comic singer, not above camping up a few of the dreariest of the topical ballads he recorded. Jenkins's "Frank Dupree" (now Laws E 24) and even his famous "Wreck of the Old 97" (G 2) were done for laughs, in an absurdly cheerful, broadly "pseudo-hillbilly" style.\(^ {12}\) And, like most comic performers in minstrel shows and vaudeville, he used sentimental songs of home and mother as his "change of pace."
It is difficult to tell what sentimental songs were still performed on the vaudeville circuit during the period 1900-23, so it is hard to say exactly what repertory Dalhart was used to performing before he became an imitation hillbilly. But he learned his craft well. His light tenor voice could wrap mournfully around 1890s tunes like "The Letter Edged in Black" (P542) or "Just Tell Them That You Saw Me" (V321.1) without turning them into sobfests, and his enunciation, even when he affected a rural accent, was flawless. His recorded repertory was huge: some five thousand releases were made of at least several hundred songs (no one has ever counted). Thus he made commercially available many excellent renditions of music-hall songs that were still demanded by rural audiences. In addition, Dalhart recorded many new or newly arranged sentimental ballads by his accompanist, Carson J. Robison, as well as by Tin Pan Alley songwriters of the day. These songs, often indistinguishable from 1890s models, also became hits with rural audiences ("The Crepe on the Little Cabin Door" [1926, VO89], for example). But it is important to see that Dalhart's popularity was based largely on the demand for his repertory, not on the attractiveness of his singing; the songs sold themselves. Many of his numbers entered or reentered folk tradition, but he never attracted fans like a Jimmie Rodgers, or even a Carson J. Robison, and he provoked no imitators within hillbilly tradition. (It is true, though, that his chief rival, Frank Luther, later became quite a successful early folk-revival artist among urban audiences.)

Since the turn of the century there had been a brisk demand for broadsides and sheet music of sentimental numbers. Henry J. Wehman
and W. W. Delaney regularly collected thirty or so of the latest music-hall hits and sold them by mail order to rural audiences.

Delaney's songsters, Edward B. Marks recalled,

went all over the country, wherever people wanted cheap, sentimental reading matter. Songs usually had from four to eight verses in those days, and they were quite edifying. We never objected to Delaney's use of our lyrics—if he paid for them—because lots of hinterlanders, after reading the words of a song, wrote to us for the music.13

Sheet music, not only for the latest hits, but for older favorites, was also kept in print by mail-order houses. In 1918 the McKinley Music Company offered hundred of songs for as little as ten cents a copy, including new songs like "M-O-T-H-E-R" (1915, C003) and older classics like "Where Is My Boy To-Night" (1877, P148) and "Break the News to Mother" (1897, P507).14 For those songers who had picked up some musical knowledge from itinerant singing-teachers or from choir practice at church, it would not be difficult to pick out the original tune from the sheet music. And for those who knew the tune already (or preferred to make one up), newspapers and magazines were often willing to reprint old song lyrics if readers requested.15 Oddly enough, while Marks had used recordings as early as 1897 to plug new sentimental numbers like "Whisper Your Mother's Name" (P164), few such numbers circulated widely on disc until Dalhart began re-making them in the 1920s.16 It is little wonder, then, that they sold as heartily as they did, for the recording was only the latest link in the continuing tradition of broadsides. Here was the text, clearly enunciated (whatever one might think of the performer), as well as the tune, both repeatable at will and ready for the learning.
But as soon as other performers like Bradley Kincaid and, in his earliest recordings, Jimmie Rodgers, stepped forward to record the old numbers, Dalhart's popularity dwindled. Kincaid, a Kentucky boy with strong traditional roots, trained his voice at Berea and had taken a job directing church groups in Chicago when, almost by accident, he was asked to present an educational program on American ballads over WLS. The response to his singing, clearly enunciated in a smooth, Dalhartesque tenor, was so positive that he became a regular on the WLS Barn Dance and began a vaudeville career as well. Until his retirement in 1949 he remained committed to what he termed "the old mountain ballads," which included some songs that were indeed old, like "The Turkish Lady" (Child #53) and "Barbara Allen" (Child #64), the last perhaps his most requested number. But the concept of old mountain ballads also encompassed "Pictures from Life's Other Side" (1896, V290), "Just Plain Folks" (1901, VI90), and "My Mother's Hands" (bef. 1924, Cl69). His refusal to do more than chord along with the songs, often quite freely, and sing them in a neutered but refined accent kept him in favor with even the purists among his audience, even after many more traditional artists had left the profession. Similarly, Jimmie Rodgers began his career by mixing comic and novelty pieces with clearly enunciated versions of "Mother Was a Lady" (Marks & Stern, 1896), "Whisper Your Mother's Name" (1896, F164), and "She Was Happy Till She Met You" (1899, A170). His straightforward, sincere, but definitely rural style delighted his listeners. In fact, "Mother Was a Lady" sold an amazing 200,000 copies, stunning its authors, who thought the song long dead, and
embarassing Victor, who were stuck for royalties on what they (and probably Rodgers) considered a folksong. This did not keep the recording agents from issuing the other two songs, though, nor did Peer International hesitate to put them under copyright, even though both songs were still legally protected. Nobody ever noticed, though, and to this day Peer lists them as composed by Rodgers. While Kincaid's and Rodgers's careers were building through their renditions of older songs, by contrast Dalhart's career was all but over in 1928. His efforts to find new songs after he broke with Robison proved futile, and his recordings dwindled and ceased by 1933. A comeback effort in 1938 was ineffectual. Country performers by this time could produce their own broadsides.

At the same time as Dalhart and his followers were producing "uptown" versions of the old sentimental repertory, other vaudeville performers like Uncle Dave Macon and Charlie Poole were recording "downhome" renditions, often of the same songs. Although Macon did not begin his professional career until 1918, he learned his songs and performance styles much earlier from travelling minstrels who boarded in his father's Nashville hotel. On stage he adopted the persona of the rowdy, irresponsible "dirty old man" who specialized in cheerfully immoral sentiments:

I'se a-gwine to the hills for to buy me a jug of brandy
Gwine to give it all to Mandy
Keep her good and drunk and whoozey all the time, time, time
Keep her good and drunk and whoozey all the time.
("Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy," Vocalion 14448 [7/8/24].)

And to some extent he lived this persona: backstage at the Grand Ole Opry he awaited his stage call by sipping Jack Daniels and entertaining
the stage crew with bawdy songs. The stage managers feared that one
night he would take one sip too many and start to perform such a song
on the air. But he never did. One of the performers who accompanied
Uncle Dave on his tours recalled that while he would get away with any
sort of joke or wild antic during his act, he never finished a program
without singing a hymn or quoting Scripture. If his high-living rowdy
numbers were the songs most requested, Macon was equally famous for
straightforward, sincere renditions of hymns like "How Beautiful
Heaven Must Be" (the song carved on his tombstone) and sentimental
songs like "Put Me in My Little Bed" (1870, A082), "Poor Old Dad"
(1886, V182), and "Save My Mother's Picture from the Sale" (bef. 1925,
P371).

That this contrast of comic and sentimental material was typical of
vaudeville-influenced performers is made clear by the even more curious
case of Charlie Poole. While he may never have toured on a regular
vaudeville circuit, he regularly travelled with his own troupe as far
as Montana. His distinctive banjo style, like that of Uncle Dave Macon,
was indebted to uptown showmen like Fred Van Eps. Poole's repertory
included jazzy pieces like W. C. Handy's "Beale Street Blues," and he
also played the part of the high-living scrappers he celebrated in
song. His biographer, C. Kinney Rorrer, notes that he carried a razor
and was capable of starting a brawl without provocation at any
moment. Audiences came in droves to see him, prepared either for
good music or a good fight. One such event erupted into a tavern
brawl, during which Poole was nearly shot to death after breaking his
banjo over a policeman's head. He survived this fight, but died at
the age of thirty one at the end of an extended binge. Yet while his songs of high life and slugging made up a large portion of his recorded repertory, like Macon he seems to have been partial to sentimental numbers as his more "sincere" moments. Hymns seem never to have figured in his repertory, but songs like "A Mother's Appeal for Her Boy" (bef. 1897, A001), "Old and Only in the Way" (bef. 1889, V183), and "Mother's Last Farewell Kiss" (bef. 1930, P166) certainly did, and they were as popular among listeners as his rough-and-tumble songs. Sentimentality obviously appealed to him, and his audiences found nothing contradictory in his taste.

That we find sentimental songs tempering the hell-raising in the two performers' repertories, as well as in Rodgers's and Dalhart's, suggests that the moralistic or religious pieces served as a way of cleansing and baptizing what might otherwise be a profane event. If we accept Albert F. McLean, Jr.'s, thesis that the American rituals of vaudeville comedy "denied the validity of certain basic Christian principles," and in particular those represented by sentimentality, then we can see why audiences, especially in rural areas, would expect some sign that the performers still accepted these principles in "real" life. Even to this day we find gospel numbers serving this same function in bluegrass concerts, as Howard Wight Marshall notes, turning a "profane" occasion into a "sacred" one for the traditional audiences. Still, we should observe that it is the "profane" acceding to the "sacred," never the other way around. Regardless of what the performers thought about the two sides of their repertories, they gave the sacred numbers stature above the secular ones, and seem
rarely to have mocked sentimental pieces. Certainly in the case of Uncle Dave Macon the sentimental and religious numbers, while outnumbered by the rowdy pieces, always took the most sincere place in his performances.25

But the more important of the traditional influences, uptown or downhome, came not from the stage, however baptized by sentiment, but from the church itself. Both urban and rural congregations, except for the most reactionary, accepted the gospel hymn tradition that became popular in the later nineteenth century, and they encouraged special groups, duets and quartets, to arrange and perform the new style of hymns. Thoroughly popular in melody and harmony, these songs practically drove the older hymn traditions out of existence; although George Pullen Jackson found some Sacred Harp groups preserving them during the 1920s, even he had to admit that "the gospel hymn blight has taken almost complete possession." With the blight came a healthy dose of mother-worship: Jackson's list of the greatest gospel hits of 1930 included "If I Could Hear My Mother Pray Again" (1922, A088.1) and "Sweetest Mother" (1917, C006).26 The first recordings of gospel hymns are practically indistinguishable from Dalhart's secular performances. The sound is cultivated, slick, cleanly enunciated, and typically backed by orchestra or piano rather than guitar or fiddle. Even the first country performers recorded hymns in a dignified style. The McCravy Brothers,27 apparently professional evangelical singers in the Sankey tradition, were the most successful of these citified harmonizers. As one contemporary ad commented, "Their voices blend beautifully, one brother carrying the tenor against the other's
baritone, and their diction is perfect, every word being distinctly pronounced." When such groups dipped into sentimental secular material, like Dalhart, it was either 1890s repertory or contemporary Tin Pan Alley work. So influential were these early gospel groups than when Buell Kazee performed sacred material like "Meet Mother in the Skies" (bef. 1898, P401), he abandoned the "rough voice" of his folk performances and opted for his cultivated "good voice" with studio violin backing. It is a shock to turn from "Lady Gay" to such a side, rather like finding a fretless banjo with a formica fingerboard. 28

But other performers were less willing to let the folk and sacred sides of their repertories remain distinct, so they produced a hybrid "old-time" style that was more flexible than folk styles but not so pretentious as the music-hall sound. In particular two early groups, both originally sacred in orientation, succeeded in fusing uptown styles with downhome material. The first of these was a harmony duet composed of two blind mountain musicians, Lester McFarland and Robert A. Gardner. 29 They joined forces originally at the Kentucky School for the Blind and began singing in schoolhouses for rural audiences, then over the new radio station at Knoxville. Judging from their early recordings, their repertory was made up equally of hymns and sentimental ballads, arranged from tradition or from early hillbilly recordings along the lines of the gospel songs. Gardner played guitar, an instrument by now accepted in mountain churches, but McFarland, for some reason, chose to take up the mandolin, at that time exclusively an uptown, cultivated instrument. Their vocals, while smooth in comparison with Macon and Poole, were notably harsher than Dalhart
and Robison or the McCravys, and, when combined with their unorthodox instrumentation (sometimes augmented by a real fiddle, never a violin), the resulting hillbilly sound was jarring to those accustomed to the uptown gospel style. The record reviewer for the Nashville Tennessean was condescending but usually favorable to early hillbilly performers, but he had to draw the line at one of McFarland and Gardner's early gospel releases:

For those who like punch in their religion, Lester McFarland and Robert A. Gardner offer a "Whooppee" version of "Sweet Hour of Prayer" and "In the Garden" ([Vocalion] No. 4055). Brazen voices are assisted by mandolin and guitar in the first instance and full-fledged fiddle band in the second, a background which, with choppy waltz time, leaves no vestige of the prayerful or reverent. But there are probably some who like their hymns served up thus.  

There were: not only did McFarland and Gardner's performances of numbers like "The East-Bound Train" (orig. "Going for a Pardon," 1896, A010) and "Hold Fast to the Right" (ca. 1900?, A083) establish them as early country standards, but their long career on WLS (lasting until 1950) sparked many imitators. A host of harmony duets followed them, some of whom opted for a more contemporary repertory (like the Delmore and Callahan Brothers), but most of whom followed in McFarland and Gardner's sentimental footsteps. Using the same traditional/sacred repertory, smooth harmonies, and even the uptown mandolin, Karl Davis and Harty Taylor likewise established themselves as WLS favorites. In turn they were followed by the Bolick Brothers, better known as "The Blue Sky Boys," who still perform occasionally at festivals, using the same conservative selection of sentimental songs and hymns. The precedent had even more lasting consequences than imitation, though: the Monroe Brothers, who also began as a harmony duet in the Mac and
Bob tr a d it io n , both formed bands that strongly influenced post-war
country music. Not only did they bring the sentimental and religious
repertory to the center of bluegrass tradition, but Bill Monroe adapted
the uptown mandolin style into an old-time virtuoso style capable of
holding its own against the traditional fiddle-banjo team. It is
ironic that bluegrass, the most old-fashioned of modern popular music
traditions, began as a mix of urban harmonies and instrumentation with
songs from sacred and oral tradition.

The popularizing of folk traditions, however, was a twofold
process: if the performing style was urbanized, at the same time
the urban harmonies and mannerisms were simplified to allow traditional
numbers to pass freely into the early country tradition. The group
who most exploited this interchange between popular styles and tradi-
tional material was the Carter Family, the most successful and
influential of the traditional groups. Its central figure, A. P.
Carter, was one of the most intriguing figures in early country music.31
Offered a recording contract with Brunswick Records as "Fiddlin'
Doc" Carter, he turned it down because he feared his mother might
disapprove. His professional career he spent holding together a
"family" group that was a family really only during its first five
years in the business. The history of the group before its first
recordings in 1927 is unclear, but it seems that A. P. and his
wife Sara first performed as a gospel duet in local churches.
When his sister-in-law Maybelle joined them as a third voice and
guitar-player, they broadened their repertory to include sentimental
and folksongs similar to those performed by McFarland and Gardner.
In any case, their first recordings set a pattern that the group never abandoned, even in its last years together. Of the six sides cut, two were traditional ballads, two were sentimental songs ("Poor Orphan Child" [untraced] and "The Wandering Boy" [bef. 1911, P150]), and one was a hymn with a prominent mother ("Little Log Cabin by the Sea" [1927, C270]). The sound of the group was also heavily maternal: A. P.'s voice was weak and tremulous, while Sara's and Maybelle's were strong, even mannish contraltos. Given A. P.'s practice of roaming erratically around the recording studio, contributing a bass part only when he happened to come close to the microphone, the Carter Family's recordings left no doubt that in this group, at least, the mothers were still very much in charge of things.

Yet the Carter Family functioned as a family only for a short time. By 1929 all its principals had left the Blue Ridge to find day jobs in northern cities, and three years later A. P. and Sara separated, with Sara returning to Virginia. From this point on the three lived separate lives, gathering only when A. P. called them together for rehearsals, brief tours, and recording sessions. Personal stresses did not, however, affect their recorded persona—that of a tightly-knit, rural family devoted to old-time songs and ideals. While their repertory occasionally took in a few modern hits, like Turk and Handman's 1927 Broadway number, "Are You Lonesome Tonight," still the bulk of their songs remained as before—gospel and sentimental numbers arranged in a consistent "old-time" harmonized style. As their personal store of songs dried up, A. P. took to disappearing into the hills regularly, sometimes taking along his Black friend
Leslie Riddles (who apparently could remember tunes better than A. P.),
his motto, "If you can't remember the tune, you can't remember the words,"
he quizzed backwoods performers he found about their old songs, or
rummaged around for old sheet music, then returned home with his finds,
arranged them, and taught them to the others at the next rehearsal.
Thus the type of songs the Carters performed remained much the same
from start to finish. As John Atkins, their biographer, noted, "the
Carters never altered, they just improved." After seventeen years
of performing and recording, the group disbanded in 1943, but Sara
rejoined A. P. twice more at his request during the 1950s, even
though by that time she had remarried and lived in California. It
is true that McFarland and Gardner recorded more sentimental songs
lauding home and mother than did the Carter Family (35 to 32),
but never so many that became country and (later) bluegrass standards.
The Carters' recordings of "The Picture on the Wall" (1927, C085),
"Jimmie Brown the Newsboy" (1929, A051), and the evergreen "Can the
Circle Be Unbroken" (1935, P416) perpetuated the early sentimental
tradition, both sacred and secular, and their stylistic influence,
both among professional and folk performers, was unmatched by any other
early country group.

What was "traditional" about these groups, then, was not so much
their vocal stylings or arrangements, both of which were at best
distant cousins to the pinched, reedy, monophonic folk style of the
actual mountains, but their traditional repertory and personae. From
the beginning onward these performers placed primary emphasis on the
religious and sentimental numbers from the pre-1923 era, whether as
their featured pieces or as a sanctifying "change of pace." Except
for Dalhart and the McCravys, the performers kept their arrangements simple, altering the songs to standardized harmonies to be sure, but no more than was needed to make them easy to perform under varying conditions, under the strict time limitations of radio, stage performance, or one side of a 78 rpm. record. The entry into hillbilly popular repertories did sometimes smooth out older songs, a process that Norm and Anne Cohen found operating in folk circles as well, but it also made the songs accessible to a wide number of country groups in easily imitated or adapted arrangements. Thus the traditional performers, even as they violated the letter of the oral tradition, preserved its spirit by ensuring broad circulation for songs that had otherwise been performed privately for as long as seventy-five years.

In addition, the "harmony" or "family" persona that many of these performers adopted gave the right aura of togetherness to the material, and artists like Kincaid and A. P. Carter directly connected themselves to the folk tradition by seeking only the oldest or most conventional songs to pass on to posterity. And the "old folk songs" were, more often than not, directly opposed to the growing numbers of rowdy, anti-sentimental songs that became the center of the country-western repertory. In 1930 Bradley Kincaid warned his audience to distinguish between what he disdainfully called "Hilly Billy songs," or "bum songs and jail songs such as are often sung in lumber camps and among railroad gangs," and the "fine old folk songs of the mountains," which included both Child ballads and sentimental classics. As late as 1947 the Blue Sky Boys, always one of the most conservative of the
most conservative of the harmony duets, were still echoing Kincaid's
sentiments:

For quite a number of years we have tried to entertain our radio
audiences by singing and playing the Old-Time songs. We have tried
to sing them with the same spirit we feel they were written. . . .
Most people commonly refer to these songs as HILL-BILLY. We wish
to take this opportunity to correct this misunderstanding.

HILL-BILLY songs are usually the bum and hobo songs of the bar room
and Honky Tonk nature and do not carry the quality or character
that you will find in the songs handed down to us by our Pioneer
Ancestors. The majority of folk tunes were based on actual events
and the writer usually wrote them from the heart. The writer of
today usually writes songs for the profit he receives from them. 35

Harmony, stylistic conservatism, and devotion to past generations marked
the most successful of the traditional groups, and it is not surprising
that when D. K. Wilgus asked one of his informants why she enjoyed
Carter Family recordings so much, her response was perhaps the
highest accolade a rural listener could provide. "Because they're
such good people." 36

iii. Novel Trends and Continuity

The performers we have surveyed to this point, except for the
imitators of McFarland and Gardner, all began their careers before
or during the first years of hillbilly recording, hence they repre­
sent the generation of performers who learned their trade before
country music became a tradition of its own. Part of the attrac­
tiveness of the "golden age" of country music is the remarkable
number of regional styles that appear and disappear in the early
recordings, as opposed to the standardized styles of later periods.
But, predictably, this diversity began to diminish as the industry
grew up. To begin with, recording agents became more hesitant to let performers wax older numbers already available in rival versions. Several performers recall that Ralph Peer, artist-and-repertory agent for Okeh, then Victor, carried with him an extensive list of songs already on record, so that auditions sometimes became a frustrating effort to come up with something that was not on that damn list.37 By 1929 the old repertory was nearly exhausted, and to keep on recording or performing on radio, the artists needed new material. A. P. Carter and Bradley Kincaid solved the problem by making extensive "field trips" to collect obscure traditional songs, while McFarland and Gardner gave in to pressure and began to cover pop hits like "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles." But most traditional groups either began looking for songwriters or simply retired from the scene.

On top of this drive for novel material, the depression hit the entertainment industries especially hard. The slump in record sales actually began well before 1929—in fact, companies' willingness to record hillbilly music was a result of their desperate search for novel material—and by 1931 nearly all recording had ceased except for the most professional, best-selling groups. At the same time the major vaudeville circuits disbanded, unable to compete with radio and movies, thus shutting off a major outlet for country showmen. As Bob Coltman has pointed out, the result of these conditions was to leave radio the sole stage for hillbilly performers, and the peculiar demands of broadcasting necessarily changed the styles and repertories of its artists.38 In particular, while the schoolroom and vaudeville stage encouraged flamboyance and loud, raucous voices to project the
songs to the back of the audience, the sensitive microphone of the radio station made singers like Uncle Dave Macon sound crude alongside the Delmore Brothers, who could modulate their tone to produce ultra-smooth harmonies. Also, simply being on the air alongside midstream pop performers encouraged artists to be eclectic, simply in order to compete with programs going on at the same time on different frequencies. Finally, because radio stations by this time were more than amateur hookups, they insisted that their performers be more responsible as well. The early days, when any fiddler could walk in and play for America was gone: if Uncle Jimmie Thompson wasn't there at 10:35 or if he keeled over dead drunk in the middle of "Wagoner," well, somebody more dependable was waiting to take his place. By extension, artists who did not appeal to as broad an audience as possible had to adapt or be dropped in favor of someone more "popular" in both senses of the word.

The result of this shift from the disc, often field-recorded, to the radio spot, always urban and professional, was the end of old-time hillbilly music as a widely distributed popular tradition. The steadiest of the older artists, like Kincaid, Mac and Bob, and the Carters, survived this slack period, but the no longer represented the mainstream of country music. Their places were taken by a new group of performers, the first generation who had learned their styles from early country recordings and performances and who were willing to take a stab at becoming career artists. This generation took over sentimental patterns, but in a fashion once removed from their origins. That is, as country songwriters began to gear up (and they produced
twice as many songs from 1930 to 1945 as had previously appeared in 
country tradition) they concentrated less on narrative songs that 
showed Mother in action and more on elegiac songs that described her 
ideal charms from afar or lamented her passing. Certainly there was 
an obvious social reason for this new emphasis on elegy: the depression 
was serving the coup de grâce to nineteenth-century lifestyles. But 
there was also a practical reason for the shift: since their narrative 
content was slim and easily conveyed in a stanza or two, they fitted 
more easily into radio spots and onto a side of a 78 recording, now 
squeezed tighter by growing attention to instrumental breaks. The 
ballad, even the curtailed Tin-Pan-Alley style, simply was not as 
performable as the celebration or the threnody, and as country music 
became more an occupation tied to carefully timed intervals, there was 
less time to devote to complicated plot lines or tableaux.

One of this new generation of performers and songwriters was 
Asher Sizemore, who came to the Grand Ole Opry in 1933 with his little 
son Jimmie. Like earlier parent-child teams, they concentrated on 
sacred and sentimental material, but alongside standards like "Shake 
Hands with Mother Again" (bef. 1933, P413) Sizemore added many of his 
own compositions. Between 1933 and 1937 he contributed seventeen 
mother and daddy songs to country tradition, plugged them over 
WSM, and sold them in his own folios. Not only did the songbooks 
sell by the thousands, but they provoked record-breaking attendance 
at his personal appearances. His persona was the same as older 
performers—he and Little Jimmie always ended their performances 
with a prayer—but a new note of commercialism had crept into the
family circle. Once prayers were done and the microphones were dead, Little Jimmie was fond of asking, "Dad, how much dough did we make tonight?" One of their songs, "Don't Wait 'Til Mother's Hair Has Turned to Silver" (1937, V099), has been recovered from oral tradition in Tennessee. So much for the profit-free "fine old folk songs of the mountains."

Another way in which the media began to affect country songs and performers showed up in the increasing demand for cowboy singers. Granted, real cowboys had always included mother songs in their repertoires, such as "The Cowboy at Church" (bef. 1910, A086) and "When the Work's All Done This Fall" (1893, P506). But the newer cowboy singers like Gene Autry were more interested in promoting new songs of their own. This tradition of the cowboy performer derived from the later career of Jimmie Rodgers, who began to depend on professional songwriters after his own old-time repertory was exhausted. His early mother songs stayed close to the older tradition, but, beginning in 1929, his numbers had a more progressive flavor. He was the first, for instance, to record a sentimental "domestic daddy" song in "Daddy and Home" (1928, C050), and several of his later songs, like "Mother, Queen of My Heart" (1932, V094) and "Fifteen Years Ago Today" (1934, V258) showed him willing to try out material that experimented with old themes in new contexts. His repertory, a vaudevillian mix of the rowdy and the remorseful, carried over into the early careers of his followers. Gene Autry, Wilf Carter, and Hank Snow all began their careers with a string of bluesy "moving on" numbers mixed with regretful hymns to mother
and dad. Autry in particular was persistent in producing new material, recording more than a dozen domestic hymns during his early years, including the super-hit, "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" (1931, C052). The "western" image, it seems, required performers to play the bad boy, continually heading away from home to the wild frontiers, yet continually regretting the loss of Mother. One must note, though, that all of Rodgers's followers used mother songs only during the early part of their careers; when they were established artists, they no longer needed to assure audiences that they were mother's boys after all. Or perhaps by the late 1930s and after it was no longer expected of them.

The period during and immediately before the Second World War brought yet another set of stresses to bear on the South and the entertainment industries. To begin with, the military buildup further displaced rural populations, either through conscription or through heavy activity in urban war plants. The result was another concerted move to the cities, this time complicated by the entry of mothers (an estimated four million by 1943) into the regular work force. Woman were beginning to adopt previously masculine roles, necessarily leaving old roles at home. A 1943 report on the war's effect on families summarized the concern woman's roles caused:

Neglect of children by some war-working mothers became a national scandal in 1942, and gave rise to ambitious but ineffective plans for day care. It is clear that war work furnished many mothers with an excuse for getting away from their families; social workers are quite familiar with these "war-work deserters." 43

The songs written during this period stressed lost ideals even more strongly, and at this time the first "bad" mothers began to appear
in country songs. Oddly, though, only ten percent of sentimental parent-child songs written from 1940 to 1945 so much as mention the war: the standard theme still was the disintegrating home and the confused wanderer.

At the same time events in the musical publishing and broadcasting words again temporarily disrupted the song tradition. Already slowed down by war-time restrictions on raw products like shellac, the record companies were first incompromised by broadcasters' refusal to play selections licensed by ASCAP during their dispute of 1941, then were entirely shut down when the American Federation of Musicians called a general strike in 1942. Again the bulk of country music-making was thrown onto radio, and music publishers associated with BMI, ASCAP's chief rival, were quick to take advantage of the need for new, performable songs. To fill the demand for short pieces suitable for radio spots, writers like Bobby Gregory of American Music, Inc., dashed off literally hundreds of selections. During this period Gregory wrote at least twenty-three mom and dad songs, and may have penned many more under various pseudonyms. American Music folios of the period contain dozens of new songs, anonymous in style, conventional in content, yet all supposedly written by different, otherwise unknown authors like Neita Dawn, Mary Gaskill, and James Huckleberry. Again, the result was to simplify sentimental formulas to the shortest form possible (most of these new songs include only one verse and a chorus) and to confirm the trend toward brief, elegiac statements rather than complex narratives.
Also significant were the smaller but more influential groups of songs coming from Nashville, then establishing itself as the capital of professional country music. Writers like Wallace Fowler, who wrote the first successful song about a neglectful mother, were beginning to place parental stereotypes into a new urban world of fast living and changed morals. Divorce, for years a tabooed subject, began to appear tentatively in sentimental songs, leading to altered views of parents. Fathers, once either drunkards or mother-surrogates, now began to assume individual roles, and even "guilty" fathers, as we shall see, were portrayed with more sympathy. Mothers, except for the few careless ones, tended to become even more deified than before, and by the end of the period surveyed the stereotype was idealized to the point that it seems hardly human. Indeed, her assistance by this time was purely inspirational, for mother and child rarely meet face to face in song plots. Like the rural home, by 1945 little more than a bright memory, Mother was lost in a blur of heavenly light. It is useful to contrast a popular post-war mother song with the "Geordie" tradition from which it derived:

One day a mother, came to a prison
To see an erring, but precious son
She told the warden, how much she loved him
It did not matter, what he had done.

Chorus: She did not bring (bring to him)
Parole or pardon (pardon free)
She brought no silver (brought no gold)
No pomp or style (him to see)
It was a halo (halo bright)
Sent down from heaven (heaven's light)
The sweetest gift, a mother's smile.

(The Blue Sky Boys, Bluebird 21-0034 [1/31/49].)
The song contrasts this mother's gift with the more tangible ones offered by previous songs—gold and silver for the hangman, a pardon wangled out of the judge, warden, or governor, and so on. This gift is far better, for it is...

A gracious smile, like a "halo/Sent down from heaven." And even this fades by the song's last stanza, for she leaves for heaven, "From heartaches free..." The prisoner, representative of the audience trapped in modernity, is left with only a memory of how much Mother loved him in bygone days, no more. There is a distant but undefined hope of regaining her in the end: "You were her baby/And e'er will be." But in the song the son is left in the prison, with no earthly hope of reestablishing the cozy fireplace of the past.

The new songs thus marked a return to the earliest form of the mother song, the elegiac parlor-song tradition, although with a number of fundamental changes. First, the songs were still sung in the context of the music hall, by a representative of the audience, not by the home circle itself. Recordings and the radio, the distancing media through which these songs came to audiences, removed even the face-to-face contact of the "preacher-figure," thereby giving his words an impersonal, heightened sense of authority. Second, most of the songs are explicitly religious, in the sense that Mother is associated not with social practicalities but with otherworldly guidance. She awaits the disoriented child up yonder, or in a home down yonder that is so perfect it is a regained Eden. But, the songs make clear, she can be regained only through correct Christian behavior. Third, the child, typically the narrator, is alone in the
world, and rarely is there any suggestion that he may regain some semblance of the "home" atmosphere by establishing a family of his own. While both the earlier elegiac tradition and the moralistic songs offered some refuge to the wandering child, however bleak the outside world may be, the country elegiac tradition tells us that the home is totally gone, to be regained only the other side of death. The "sweetest gift" of this tradition, then, is its distinctive air of otherworldliness, the hint of divinity attached to the fading Mother, that gives the listener hope that if he follows her ethereal traces, he will find his way back to the "real" world of the past, where nothing has ever changed and nothing ever will.

But with all these changes, the emotional core of the original elegiac tradition remained intact: the lament of an individual faced with the task of making a living in a world without a home. Even during the last years of the period surveyed the old formulas could generate songs that embody the same tactics of songs written fifty or more years before. One of the most beloved subjects of the elegiac tradition, the "death letter" tableau, emerged intact in Ernest Tubb's 1944 hit, "A Soldier's Last Letter" (P523). It is instructive to compare it to an earlier hit song, "The Letter Edged in Black" (1897, P542) that tells essentially the same story. Although mother and son exchange places, the two are otherwise close in structure and content.

Both songs begin with a false air of cheerfulness. "The Letter Edged in Black" begins with this bright early morning picture:
I was standing by my window yestermorning,
Without a thought of worry or of care,
When I saw the post man coming down the pathway
With such a happy smile and jaunty air
Oh, he rang the bell and whistled while he waited,
And then he said, "Good-morning to you, Jack" . . . .

(Cousin Lee [1936], p. 44.)

It is only when the postman prefers the death-letter that the narrator recognizes that something is wrong; he breaks the seal "with trembling hands" to find that his mother has died. In "Soldier's Last Letter," the mother's moment of happiness lasts a bit longer.

The song begins in much the same fashion:

When the postman delivered a letter
It filled her dear heart full of joy
But she didn't know till she read the inside
It was the last one from her darling boy.

(Horstman, pp. 246-247.)*

The opening section of the letter gives no hint of tragedy as the son chats about his messy shoes, once again assures his mother that he loves her, and vows to "prove it when this war is won." Abruptly the letter breaks off with a note that a battle is shaping up: "I'll finish this letter the first chance I get . . . ." It is only then that "the mother's old hands began to tremble . . . for there was no name/And she knew that her darling had died."

The emotional core of both songs is the moment of shock as the two principals confront death in the family. Their responses are distinct, but in entirely conventional ways. The son in "Letter Edged in Black" acts passively, saying only "I bow my head in sadness and in sorrow,/The sunlight of my life it now has fled . . . ." Although the mother's dying words beg him to return home, he shows no sign of doing

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so. The soldier in the later song likewise shows little initiative.

Even though he is away from home, fighting for his country, the tone of his letter is strangely apologetic:

I'm writing this down in a trench, Mom
Don't scold if it isn't so neat
You know, as you did when I was a kid
And I'd come home with mud on my feet.

The one desire he expresses is not to win individual glory, or even to help win the war, but to return home to Mother, and one cannot help seeing him less as a G.I. than as a lost, bewildered child at summer camp. And when the captain gives him his orders, he obediently marches to his death.

The mothers in both songs, however, are strong figures, even in the face of death. On her dying bed the mother in "Letter Edged in Black" orders the conventional "heavy" father to recant the "angry words" he spoke at her son's departure. Her last act, forcing him to invite the son back home, neutralizes the father's inflexibility and restores a broken family circle. It is too late for the mother to do so in "Soldier's Last Letter," but she does the next best thing: she swallows her personal grief and asks God to help the war effort:

She prayed, "Lord above, hear my plea
And protect all the sons that are fighting tonight
And, dear God, keep America free."

In brief, the mother is at least capable of intervening or praying that no further grief take place, while the child is grief-stricken or passive in the face of death. It is little wonder that the mother always represents the force that holds on to what is left of the past and who offers a return to the perfection of good old days, and that the
history of songs celebrating her is one of persistent tastes and tactics, even in the face of radical changes in society and other song traditions in country music.
APPENDIX TO CHAPTER TWO

THE EARLY COUNTRY REPERTORY, 1923-45

This dissertation is based on a detailed survey of 754 songs, some quite popular, others totally obscure, nearly all of which were written for or performed by American country artists during the period 1923-45. (For completeness's sake, I also included a few songs from Black, Canadian, or Australian traditions, as well as some recovered only from folk performers.) A complete catalog proved far too bulky to include with this dissertation (incomplete, it already spans 100 single-spaced pages), but I will summarize some of its data here to clarify the chapters to follow.

To begin with, nearly a fifth of the songs definitely come from before 1923, and 15% have been recovered at least once from oral tradition, both remarkably high figures considering the whole of early country repertory. On the other hand, the numbers of newly written songs rose quickly after 1929, and practically none of these came from or passed into oral tradition. Admittedly, this figure may be slanted, as folksong collectors are still hesitant to report "hillbilly" songs from tradition, but it seems clear that during the latter part of the period surveyed the sentimental tradition went from one dominated by oral tradition to one that was a self-sufficient popular tradition. Of the songs known to have been written before 1923, fully 65% have been reported from folk performers, while only 4% of the newer songs have been so reported.

To this point I have been using broad terms like "elegiac," "moralistic," and "hymnic" to describe song traditions. When I chose to examine the specific content of early country songs, I had to develop more precise terms to describe the conventional structures of a large body of songs. By comparing songs with similar content, I isolated four basic formulas that comprise the whole of my material: Celebration, Assistance, Violation, and Parting. As these are the basic formulas that I will discuss in detail in the chapters to follow, I will define them briefly here. The Celebration category, derived mostly from the hymnic tradition, is distinct from the other three narrative headings in that it characterizes those songs whose organization is descriptive rather than dramatic. In such songs the unifying factor may be a systematic exploration and definition of the mother's ideal characteristics—her patience, her silvery hair, her devout prayers—while the other three categories show her in action—teaching a child religion, saving him from prison, or dying. The Celebration category includes such important songs as "M-O-T-H-E-R" (C003), "The Picture on the Wall" (C085), and "Rock Me to Sleep, Mother" (C161).
The three narrative categories fell under three unequal headings. The smallest was Assistance, which handled plots involving an errant son or drunkard father who, with the help of a mother or angel child, manages to extricate himself from his sinful ways and start a new life. Although minor in number, it included some extremely popular numbers, such as "A Mother's Appeal for Her Boy" (A001), "There's a Mother Always Waiting at Home Sweet Home" (A085), and "I Heard My Mother Call My Name in Prayer" (A088). Violation, a somewhat larger and more widespread category, portrayed the actions of a wayward child or parent (normally male) who defies the normal moral code of the community, an act followed by consequences (punishment or conversion) that restore the natural order of things. Songs like "The Blind Girl" (V002), "Come Home, Father" (V003), and "The Mailman's Warning" (V164) fell under this heading. These two categories together include most of the songs inherited from the moralistic tradition and newer songs in the same vein.

Finally, Parting, the main category derived from the elegiac tradition, covered all instances in which parent and child are divided by circumstances, whether it be through one person's physical departure or by his death. These songs dramatize the state of the orphan or wanderer who finds himself without a home or mother, or else that of the wayward child who has grown tired and dissatisfied with the world and longs to regain his lost home. Under this heading came most of the newer songs of the late 1930s and 1940s, as well as "Where Is My Boy To-Night?" (P148), "The Letter Edged in Black" (P542), and "A Soldier's Last Letter" (P523).

Overall, Parting and Celebration, which portrayed the glories of home and mother elegiacally from afar, proved the two most popular formulas, while Violation and Assistance, which showed her in action, straggled behind. But the overall figures do not reflect the changes that took place as country music became a tradition of its own. The following chart, listing the songs by historical period and formula, makes this shift in taste more explicit:

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<td>1940-1945</td>
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As can be seen, the new songs 1930-45, comprising two-thirds of the total songs catalogued, included a few more Partings, considerably more Celebrations, and far fewer Assistance and Violation plots than periods before. While the two elegiac categories were ascendent from the start of hillbilly recordings, in the most traditional side of the repertory, that derived from oral tradition, the two groups were close to parity, and it was not until the last years of the period surveyed that the elegiac took its lopsided 82%/18% dominance. In particular, we can conclude that songs portraying the mother as an immediate force in the child's life shrank to a minor role in country music during this period. In the chapters to come, I will suggest some reasons why this should have been the case.
Notes to Chapter Three


2 Cash, pp. 296-297.


6 In the listing made by Eleanor Long in her study "The Maid" and "The Hangman" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), the texts that make this change are A28 (North Carolina, 1927), B48 (Tennessee, 1938), C27 (Arkansas, 1962), and E15 (Maine, before 1929). That all four versions represent four entirely independent textual traditions within the ballad's history indicates that the changes were made independently and do not represent the influence of a single performer or version. To these four I can add the following version copyrighted by Harlan Howard in 1964 under the title "Gallows Pole":

Honey, did you bring me silver?
Honey did you bring me gold?
Woman, did you bring me a little silver
To keep me from the Gallows Pole?
What did you—what did you bring
To keep me from the Gallows Pole?
[spoken] Hey Mom,
How come you just turn and walk away from me?
—Oh—I see.

Daddy, did you bring me silver?
Father, did you bring me gold?
Papa, did you bring a little silver
To keep me from the gallows pole?
What did you—what did you bring
To keep me from the Gallows Pole?
[spoken] Papa, how come you don't answer me?
Oh—I see.
Buddy, did you bring me silver
Friend, did you bring me gold?
Buddy, did you bring a little silver
To keep me from the Gallows Pole?
What did you—what did you bring
To keep me from the Gallows Pole?
[spoken] Old Buddy—why won't you speak to me?
Oh—I see.

Mama, did you bring me silver?
Mama, did you bring me gold?
Mama, did you bring me silver
To keep me from the Gallows Pole
What did you—what did you bring
To keep me from the Gallows Pole?

Well, Son, I brought you silver
Son, I brought you gold
I brought you everything I've got
To keep you from the Gallows Pole
I've got it—and I'll get it—
To keep you from the Gallows Pole
To keep you from the Gallows Pole.

(Johnny Bond [ca. 1966], p. 50; line division regularized.)

7 A book of ballets written by William A. Larkin of Pekin, Illinois, mostly between 1866 and 1868, includes "Just Before the Battle, Mother" (1863, PO81) and several other parlor-song favorites alongside older British ballads like "Barbara Allen" and "The Ship Carpenter" (Child #84 and #243). There are no signs that the singer saw any differences among what he termed "the best selected songs in this country . . . ." The ballets were reprinted by Ruth Ann Musick in "The Old Album of William A. Larkin," JAF, 60 (1947), 201-251. Similarly, Benjamin Harrison Mullen of Ozark, Arkansas, wrote down a number of his traditional songs in 1907, listing both Civil War ballads and three Tin-Pan-Alley songs from the recent past: "The Girl I Loved in Sunny Tennessee" (Braisted & Carter, 1899), "Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder" (Gillespie & Dillea, 1900), and "Train Talk," an untraced reworking of "Life's Railway to Heaven" (Abbey & Tillman, 1890). See Patrick B. Mullen, "Folk Songs and Family Traditions," Publications of the Folk Lore Society of Texas, 37 (1972), 49-63.

8 These recordings, made in three installments between March and December 1924, were released in the following form:
Okeh 7003: "Dixie Division" [the Civil War medley] b/w "Sugar in the Gourd [the fiddle medley]."
Okeh 7004: "Dixie Cowboy" ["When the Work's All Done This Fall"] b/w "John Henry Blues."
Okeh 7006: "The Baggage Coach Ahead" b/w "The Orphan Child."
Okeh 7008: "The Lightning Express" [Please, Mr. Conductor . . . ] b/w "The Letter Edged in Black."
My identification of "The Orphan Child" with the traditional ballad catalogued as P322 is still tentative, as I have not been able to screen this extremely rare recording. Details of Carson's early recordings are drawn from Archie Green, "Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol," JAF, 78 (1965), 208-210, and Norm Cohen, "'Fiddlin' John Carson: An Appreciation and a Discography," JEMPO, 10 (1974), 139-140, and passim.

9 Two of these composers' reworkings, Robison's "Mother's Grave" (P322, a version of "Village Churchyard," P331) and Jenkins's "A Drunkard's Child" (V016, a version of "The Drunkard's Lone Child," V004), not only gained popular acceptance through recordings by Dalhart and Rodgers, they eventually filtered back into oral circulation alongside their traditional parents. Robison is discussed briefly in Bill C. Malone's Country Music, U.S.A. (Austin: American Folklore Society, 1968), pp. 59-60. Rev. Andrew Jenkins is more extensively discussed by Archie Green in Only a Miner (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), pp. 127-130.


11 This reissue, Davis Unlimited 33030: Vernon Dalhart: Old Time Songs: 1925-1930, includes several of his most successful sentimental, disaster, and comic numbers. Especially interesting are his deliberately comic renditions of "Zeb Turney's Gal" (Laws E 18), "Wreck of the Old 97" (G 2), "Frank Dupree" (E 24), and "Kinnie Wagner" (E 7), alongside his sincere performances of "The Letter Edged in Black" (1897, P542), "The Little Rosewood Casket" (orig. "A Packet of Old Love Letters," White & Goullaud, 1870), and "I'll Be with You When the Roses Bloom Again" (Edwards & Cobb, 1901).

12 Lest we find Dalhart's treatment of Laws G 2 objectionable, I understand that the treatment Gid Tanner and His Skillet Lickers give the ballad on Columbia 15142 (3/28/27) is even more parodic, with the tragic (?) wreck represented by a cacophony of hooting and pan-banging. The side, needless to say, has never been reissued by revivalists. One also recalls that "Casey Jones (Laws G 1) was originally published as a great new vaudeville comic number. Many people of the time, it seems, didn't take train wrecks very seriously.


14 This catalog, No. 36 [undated, but probably issued in September, 1918], was unearthed by the author in an antique store in Pincastle, Virginia, the center of one of the most active folk music areas in the Appalachians.
Charles K. Wolfe, in *The Grand Ole Opry: The Early Years* (London: Old Time Music, 1975), has reprinted portions of the Nashville Banner's weekly "Query Box" (pp. 38-39). The editors furnished on request old song texts, poems, and other sentimental materials, nearly all from the nineteenth century; at times they refused to honor requests because the piece was, in their opinion, "too new." The sample page Wolfe prints includes "Lorena" (Webster, 1857), "The Fatal Wedding" (Davis, 1893), and a traditional text of "Put My Little Shoes Away" (Mitchell & Pratt, 1876) sent in by a helpful reader. All three have been collected in tradition: see Randolph, 4:257-259, 277-279, and 178-180. Wolfe does not mention when this column was first established, but Edward D. Ives has traced a similar column in a Canadian rural weekly back to 1895. See his "A Man and His Song" in *Folksongs and Their Makers*, ed. Ray B. Browne (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1969), p. 105. A scrapbook in my possession, compiled between 1890 and 1910 by Miss Annie Tapscott of Tucker, Virginia, contains dozens of these requested songs and poems, including both "Barbara Allen" and "Rock Me to Sleep, Mother" (1860, C161).


The Rodgers recording, made at his second session on November 30, 1927 (just before his huge hit, "Blue Yodel"), was first released as "If Brother Jack Were Here" on Victor 21433. According to Johnny Bond, in *The Recordings of Jimmie Rodgers* (Los Angeles: The John Edwards Memorial Foundation, 1978), a reviewer blew the whistle on the copyright infringement within a month of its issue. Victor quickly altered the record label to give the original title and author credit (p. 2), but not before Marks had taken legal action to claim royalties. For details on the record's sales and the ensuing legalities, see Marks, p. 34, Goldberg, p. 130, and Douglas Gilbert, *Lost Chords* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1942), p. 221.


Biographical information on Poole's life is sparse and unreliable. I have depended on C. Kinney Rorrer's notes to County 540: *Charlie Poole: Volume Four*, and on Norm Cohen's brief comments in "Early Pioneers," in *Stars of Country Music*, pp. 24-27.
Listen to Poole's "Southern Medley," reissued on County 540; for Macon's vaudeville three-finger picking, hear "Uncle Dave's Beloved Solo" (a number he elsewhere identified as "Dew Drop"), reissued on Bear Family 15518: Uncle Dave Macon: First Row, Second Left. A good sampler of Fred Van Eps's recordings is Yazoo 1044: Fred Van Eps and Vess L. Cissman.

Rumor had it that the fatal drinking party lasted two weeks; however, Walter Smith, one of Poole's fellow musicians who was with him at his death, admits it lasted only "a few days" (quoted by Norm Cohen in "Walter 'Kid' Smith," JEMFQ, 9 [1973], 130).


Bob Hyland relates how one night Uncle Dave ended a concert with a hell-raising version of "Take Me Back to My Old Carolina Home" (not a sentimental number, but the tale of a hobo's run-in with the law). After the show "an elderly gentleman" came backstage to say, "Uncle Dave, whenever I hear you sing, 'Rock of Ages' like you did tonight I can just feel the POWER!" Uncle Dave, obviously pleased, shook the man's hand, saying, "Thank you, Brother." (Quoted in Cohen and Rinzler, p. 50.)


Information on the McCravys, even though they often recorded for Brunswick and Victor, is hard to find, even among studies of hill-billy music. Malone ignores them, and the only certain data I have comes from a facsimile of a Brunswick promotion sheet, reprinted in Archie Green, "Brunswick's Folksong Discs, 1928," JEMFQ, 13 (1977), 75.

It is significant that Kazee refused to sanction any reissue of his early recordings unless place were given his songs done in "good voice" (Kazee's own term). Accordingly, no reissue was ever released, so unwilling were revivalists to admit that rural audiences accepted trained as well as untrained singing. See Tony Russell, "Buell Kazee, 1900-76," Old Time Music, No. 12 (Summer 1976), 17.

The career of McFarland and Gardner is briefly summarized in Malone, pp. 126-127, but a more through study of their recordings and influence is needed.

From the November 11, 1928 issue, as quoted by Wolfe, p. 36.


33 In their article, "Tune Evolution as an Indicator of Traditional Musical Norms," JAF, 86 (1973), 37-47, the Cohens studied fourteen songs recovered widely in oral tradition for which the original sheet music is extant. They found that while the texts remained reasonably stable, in each case the tunes varied from the original in a predictable fashion. Some changes, such as the loss of accidentals and bridges, could be explained easily—an untrained singer would tend to simplify melodies he learned by ear. But the Cohens were less able to explain the more radical shifts, which disregarded the original chord progressions in favor of what was to become the standard "country" I-IV-V progression. Nor were they able to explain where this now standard progression came from. Lacking evidence to clear up these problems, they concluded that when songs moved from a popular arena into oral circulation, they were "transformed almost immediately according to principles yet to be fully discovered" (p. 44).

34 Quoted by Wilgus, "Bradley Kincaid," p. 97.

35 Quoted from the sleeve of Rounder 1006: The Blue Sky Boys: "The Sunny Side of Life." As David E. Whisnant has noted in "Our Type of Song," in the booklet to JEMF-104: Presenting The Blue Sky Boys, pp. 6-11, this statement was mostly rhetoric. The contents of the folio was similar to the Bolicks' repertory at the time—sentimental, but hardly dating to pioneer times. Indeed, all but three of the songs were less than ten years old.

36 Quote passed to me in private conversations and during the UCLA Ballad Classification Seminar, Spring 1976.


38 My discussion of the changes that occurred at this time is based on Bob Coltman's article, "Across the Chasm," Old Time Music, No. 23 (Winter 1976/77), pp. 6-12.

39 See Wolfe, pp. 53-64, on the erratic late career of Uncle Jimmie Thompson, the first and most unreliable of the Grand Old Opry stars.
Wolfe gives an account of the Sizemores' lucrative career on pp. 118-119.


This brief summary of music industry troubles is based on Malone, pp. 186-189.
CHAPTER FOUR

"THAT'S WHAT GOD MADE MOTHERS FOR":

CELEBRATION AND ASSISTANCE

One of the many hymns Tin Pan Alley produced during the early part of the century was Leo Wood's "That's What God Made Mothers For" (1919, C004). In it, a child dreams of his departed mother, who begs him to end his grieving, then enumerates the roles she was created to perform:

To watch over you when a baby
To tuck you to sleep with a song
To try to be near you to comfort and cheer you
To teach you the right from the wrong
To do all she can to make you a man
And over a million things more
To sigh for you, cry for you
Yes, even die for you
That's what God made mothers for.

(Max Martin [1930s], p. 13.)

For the American South, a society that was going through extreme social change, it was vital that the old concept of motherhood be kept alive for future mothers. In this chapter we will examine what roles this socially defined concept involved. The songs, both elegiac and moralistic, that spoke most to this social need were those classified under Celebration and Assistance: while celebratory songs defined and explored the ideal characteristics of motherhood in a nostalgic, non-narrative vein, Assistance plots showed her passing on standard morals to a child as yet unable to act in his own behalf. These songs thus present the stereotypes of the ideal mother in their simplest, most straightforward forms, and by isolating them, we can better
understand how they operate in the more complex narrative plots of Violation and Parting.

Doubtless there are many possible ways to divide and define an ideal mother's roles, but this chapter will focus on four basic stereotypes presented in early country songs. The first is the Domestic Mother, who protects and comforts the infant in the womb-like security of the home or cradle. Second, the Christian Mother introduces the young child to his society's moral code. Third, the Angel Mother initiates the adolescent or young adult into active participation in a social mythology that will "save" him from death; she also often escorts the dying child across the barrier of death to the afterlife. Fourth, the Redeemer Mother literally or spiritually follows the young adult into society, saves him from the dangerous consequences of his behavior, and guides him back to the socially sanctioned way of life. As can be seen, each of these roles show the mother as a "helper" figure who assists the child as he passes from one level of development to another. She is the central figure as the child passes from the womb to infancy, from infancy to childhood, from childhood to self-sufficient adulthood, and finally from adulthood to the spiritual afterlife in heaven. Because her intermediary role is in turn related to rites of passage that have deep religious significance, the mother herself tends to become a religious figure who makes the child's spiritual development possible. Whether she sighs, cries, or dies, or simply teaches him "the right from the wrong," her central role throughout is the one God made her to fulfill: "To do all she can to make you a man."
i. The Domestic Mother

The role of the Domestic Mother in early country songs, briefly, is to care for the child during the period when he is incapable of fending for himself—that is, in infancy and early childhood. The mother watches over the child, rocks his cradle, entertains him with songs, and otherwise keeps the home a circle of earthly perfection, where life is nothing but happiness. We have already discussed the womb-like nature of home life, as presented in "Rock Me to Sleep, Mother" (1860, C161); similarly, in country songs, the home is mainly an extension of the child's natal life. The mother keeps the child in this protected environment for as long as possible, until it becomes necessary for him to enter the world of men. That the father or siblings are present, if at all, only as shadows in these visions of childhood further insulates the child from any contact with social life, even family life.

The one scene most venerated in song is that of "tucking into bed" or "rocking to sleep." An early version of this ritual is presented in "My Mother's Prayer" (or "The Trundle Bed," bef. 1895, C245). When the narrator returns to his childhood home, he happens on the trundle bed in which he slept as an infant. Suddenly he imagines his mother's voice and is carried back to childhood:

'Tis the hour of my retiring,  
At the dusky eventide;  
Near my trundle bed I'm kneeling,  
As of yore, by mother's side.
Hands are on my head so loving,
As they were in childhood's days;
I, with weary tones, am trying
To repeat the words she says;
"Tis a prayer in language simple
As a mother's lips can frame;
"Father, Thou who are in heaven,
Hallowed, ever, be Thy name."

Prayer is over: to the pillow
With a "good-night!" kiss I creep,
Scarcely waking while I whisper,
"Now I lay me down to sleep."
Then my mother, o'er me bending,
Prays in earnest words, but mild:
"Hear my prayer, O heavenly Father,
Bless, oh, bless, my precious child!"

( *Gospel Hymns* [1895], no. 344.)

Although this version lacks the most widespread motif, the actual rocking to sleep, it contains nearly every other feature of the bedtime scene: the lullaby, prayer, good-night kiss, and night vigil over the sleeping child. "The Old Red Cradle" (bef. 1889, C162), from the same late parlor-song tradition as the previous song, supplies a similar scene with rocking. The narrator recalls "the good old trusty days when the door was never locked . . . " and longs for the cradle that gave him "the sweetest rest [he has ever] known . . . . "

By my mother it was rocked when the evening meal was laid,
And again I seem to see her as she smiled,
When the rest were all in bed, 'twas then she knelt and prayed
By the old red cradle and her child.

( *Our New Clown Songster* [1889], p. 24.)

In these parlor songs home is the secure world before things got worse, and Mother is the one who provides the ideal, trouble-free rest for the infant. Such songs continued to appear well into the period surveyed, beginning with "Rock Me to Sleep in an Old Rocking Chair" (1926, C171). Its beginning sets the new elegiac pattern:
When the shadows fall  
And the night birds call,  
How I long to be  
Back on mother's knee  
Just to softly say;

Chorus: Rock me to sleep in an old rocking chair  
And make me a child again,  
Then sing an old time lullabye,  
One with a sweet refrain,  
Then lay me down on my pillow,  
The angels will keep me from harm,  
Rock me to sleep in an old rocking chair,  
Safe in my mother's arms.

(Sheet music published by Forster Music Publisher, Inc.)

A similar song, "Rocky Mountain Lullaby" (1931, C175), begins with a scene of a miner "sick in his cabin," who utters a prayer: "When shadows creep, won't you rock me to sleep/With a Rocky Mountain lullaby (so tender)?" In response, he hears "the voice of an angel above," coming to grant his prayer. Curiously, the story is arrested at this point, and the second verse steps back to moralize on how "We all treasure dreams of our childhood . . . (Hill Billy Songster [ca. 1940], p. 21). As in earlier parlor-song versions of the bedtime scene, the dream shared by the country singer and his audience is the important thing, not whether a dramatized miner lives or dies.

The final extension of the bedtime scene comes when the afterworld itself becomes a rocking cradle. The last example cited suggested this move, since the returning mother is an angelic helper too, but later songs like "When It's Sleepy Time for Me in Heaven" (ca. 1940s, A097) make the extension explicit. In this song a little boy, about to get tucked into bed, asks his mother:
When it's sleepy time for me in Heaven,
Will you rock me to sleep on your breast?
Will a lullaby sung by the angels
Take me to dreamland and rest?
Can I say my little prayer to my Savior,
As I bow by my bed on my knee?
If they let me do this I'll be happy
When it's sleepy time in Heaven for me.

(Grandad Hite [1940s?], p. 11.)

The mother, whispering "a thankful prayer," assents, "Yes, darling,
when you go to Heaven/I am sure you can do all this . . . ." This
desire for a celestial cradle was not merely a childish wish, for
we find it also in songs in the Parting category, where the grown
child envisions his Angel Mother in heaven. In "I Dreamed of Mother
Last Night" (1945, P437), for instance, the adult child dreams of
visiting Mother in the afterworld:

The heavens were shining so bright
No clouds to darken the sky
She soothed me with hands so gentle and light
And sang to me a sweet lullaby
She called me her darling again
How wonderful and sweet it did seem
The angels joined her sweet refrain
Oh what a wonderful dream.

(Doc Hopkins [1945], p. 9.)

Thus the child, whether in dreams of the past or hopes of the future
beyond death, desires the original, unblemished state of being he
left in infancy—an unindividuated, private world of bliss, shared
only by Mother.

The songs that discuss later stages of childhood tend to be
encomiums, focusing on many different scenes. The mother sings
songs, plays games, gathers flowers, fixes breakfast, and keeps the
house in good order, but her activities have a single end: to keep
the child happy and untroubled. By now the world is not quite as
self-sufficient as it was in the cradle, and the mother's task now is to be a "pal," soothing the child's sorrows and cheering him up. In "The Pal That Is Always True" (1935, C327), Mother is the one "Who made your childhood happy and shared every sorrow with you . . . ."
The narrator warns his listeners that "You will never find another/Tho' you search the whole world through—she will stand by you in trouble/Like no one else will do . . . (Blue Grass Roy [ca. 1939], pp. 4-5). Similarly, in "You Never Miss Your Mother Till She's Gone" (bef. 1923, C001), she is the one who sings for the children "When our father dear would leave us all alone" (Loye Pack [ca. 1934a], p. 53). Again, she is the only one on earth "who would share our ills and pains." If there is a consistent motif that unifies songs of this sort, it is the image of "the hand that touched my brow," a gesture of reassurance, brushing away the sorrows that greet the growing child.

The image is most tangibly presented in "My Mother's Hands" (bef. 1924, C169):

Oh, those beautiful, beautiful hands,  
How they cared for my infant days,  
They guided my feet into pleasant paths  
And smoothed all the rugged ways.

Oh, those beautiful, beautiful hands,  
As they press my aching brow;  
They cooled the fever and eased the pain,  
Me thinks I can feel them now.  
(Bradley Kincaid [ca. 1946], p. 28.)

In retrospect the child must admit that Mother's tasks lessened the pains of life, but did not abolish them. At the same time that one narrator recalls that his mother's life was "sweet to me, just as sweet as sweet could be," for her life was different: "her aching heart was
always full of pain" ("My Ozark Mountain Home," 1932, C177; County 520: Echoes of the Ozarks, Vol. 3). The adult narrator of "My Mother's Old Sun Bonnet" (1935, C253), recalls that "Hard work, hard luck and worry, /Were all my Mother knew . . . ." Still, it was her job to keep this worry from affecting her children:

I seem to see her toiling around the old home place,
When times were hard and she was in despair.
She'd pull that old sunbonnet down low upon her face,
To hide from us the worry written there.
(WLS [1935], pp. 10-11.)

Even at this stage the role of the Domestic Mother begins to shade into the more suffering roles mothers play in Violation plots, but her despair is not caused by the children; rather it functions to keep "hard luck" from troubling the charmed home circle. After infancy, such songs admit, the world is no longer free of sorrow, but the burden is the mother's alone. Although she has to struggle with despair by herself, the last song cited suggests that God grants her "a special kind of love" to help her make it through to "a special place . . . above" where her self-denial will be rewarded.

The home, thanks to the Domestic Mother's labor, retains its isolated nature well into childhood. Out in the country, removed from the temptations associated with "the City," the home is a "safe harbor" for growing children, and it remains so even after they have left to participate in the world at large. A nineteenth-century parlor song, "'Tis Home Because Mother Is There" (? d., C163), describes the home as "A shrine where the heart loves to kneel," in which "my mother is there;/To shield me from sorrow and care . . . ." (Loye Pack [ca. 1934a], pp. 47-48). In the early country tradition, if anything, this ideal
"shrine" became still more idealized. In Wilf Carter's "What a Wonderful Mother of Mine" (1940, C034), Home is the place "Where the birds are always singing/And the skies are always blue/No more sorrows no more heartaches . . ." ("Montana Slim" [i.e., Wilf Carter], Bluebird B-8491 [1940]). There the mother and child have no greater responsibilities than to wander through the meadows under perpetual sunlight, lazily "Picking flowers on the hillside/Just to pass the time away . . . ." Thus the Celebrations share the same elegiac view of Home as do Partings, in which the cabin in the hills is always idyllic, carefree, and devoid of obligations, at least for the child, who need only "hang around the cabin door/No work or worry anymore" ("Blue Ridge Mountain Blues," bef. 1924, P220).

The descriptions of the Domestic Mother also owe much to the elegiac tradition: like the earliest parlor songs, they celebrate an ideal that is already lost, and regain it only through dreams or hopes of the next world. Throughout country Celebrations are hints that this stereotype does not refer to mothers in present tense. "My Mother's Prayer" ends with the narrator waking from his reverie to recognize that "Many years has that dear mother/In the quiet churchyard lain. . . ." The very title of "You Never Miss Your Mother Till She's Gone" acts as a refrain throughout the song, ruefully commenting on the narrator's lost paradise. The perspective against which the Domestic Mother is celebrated is that of a dark, friendless world in which the grown-up child lives now, and while he may wish to return to the world of the cradle, he can do so only through fantasy or by means of a miracle. In either case, the dream or the
returned mother's spirit cannot stay with the child, and soon he must return alone to the hostile world. It is more accurate, then, to look at the stereotype of the Domestic Mother not as a role model for females (though it may have had this effect incidentally) than as a convenient fantasy for males. She symbolizes the child's lost golden age of freedom and security, and insofar as the mother is always an aging, fleeting figure, she represents the steady loss of comfort in the maturing child's life.

By way of offering another perspective on this role, let us look at an anecdotal version of the bedtime scene, as presented in a sermon for rural audiences of the early twenties. Jarrette Aycock, whose version of "The Angel and the Mother's Love" has already been discussed (pp. 52-54), also presented a description of the old home in the context of his own ministry. Sometime after he found Jesus, he recalled, he returned home to visit his mother. She was, Aycock emphasizes, "of the old-fashioned type, a country home and a country life was all she knew . . . . She never traveled, [and] never went to the city . . . ." As he prepared for bed, he saw her come into his room with an old oil lamp, and suddenly he "longed to be a little boy again . . . ."

I said, "Mother, I wish you would come and tuck the cover around me like you used to when I was a little boy."

She placed the lamp on the table and came over to the bed and with hands that were old and wrinkled and all knotted by rheumatism, she began to tuck the cover in about my body, and you know what that means; there is no one on earth that can put a fellow to bed comfortable like mother can. I could not keep from crying and there were tears trickling down her old face as she smoothed back my hair,
stooped over, placed a kiss on my cheek, patted my face with a wrinkled hand, said good-night baby, picked up the lamp, and I saw her bended form pass through the door leaving the room in darkness. The thought then came to me, you will soon be an orphan boy; your mother will soon be gone . . .

Aycock comes closer to regaining childhood than any of the narrators in the songs surveyed, but even before he is left in the darkened room alone, we know that the aged, decrepit mother is not long for this world. Indeed, in her isolated cabin home without electricity, gas, or water, she is hardly of this world. Even if "no one on earth . . . can put a fellow to bed comfortable like mother can," there is no way to hold on to that fading security, short of celebrating it in song and trusting in the supernatural to return one to the "better home" in the next world.

ii. The Christian Mother

The means by which the child reaches this supernatural home in the sky is, in part, the role entrusted to the next of our stereotypes, the Christian Mother. She is the one who teaches him the beliefs and rituals that enable him to reach a state of grace. In more sociological terms, her role is what Berger and Luckmann have termed "primary socialization." This process involves introducing the child to the moral certainties and dictates by which he becomes part of society outside the family circle. One of the chief God-given roles of Mother is "to teach you the wrong from the right," and the Christian Mother fulfills this holy work. Furthermore, as Berger and Luckmann observe, the child learns these moral certainties in a setting without rival ideologies, so his acceptance of Mother's faith as "the way things
are" is automatic and unquestioning.

It is for this reason that the world internalized in primary socialization is so much more firmly entrenched in consciousness than worlds internalized [later in life] in secondary socializations. However much the original sense of inevitability may be weakened in subsequent disenchantments, the recollection of a never-to-be repeated certainty—the certainty of the first dawn of reality—still adheres to the first world of childhood.7

This sentiment, though expressed in more doctrinaire terms, is fully endorsed by a number of early country songs. In "I Found It in Mother's Bible" (1941, C279), the narrator admits that "Some people reject the Savior and spurn His matchless love," but he still insists, "I'm gonna believe this story, no matter what others do,/I found it in mother's Bible,/And I know it must be true" (Red Foley [1948], no. 14).

The duty of the Christian Mother to implant righteous thoughts in her child's young mind was, as we saw, strongly endorsed by evangelicals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The narrator of "I Found It in Mother's Bible" calls for a return to "the old time power,/The pentecostal way . . ." but in fact the role of the Christian mother even predates the "old time" religion. The narrator of "The Old Arm Chair" (1840, C241) listened as a child to "gentle words that mother would give/To fit me to die, and teach me to live," and he knelt beside the chair (like the Blind Girl) "to lisp my earliest prayer . . ." (Moss Rose Songster [1860s], pp. 10-11). A song from the same period, G. P. Morris's "My Mother's Bible" (not found in early country tradition), describes the family prayer meetings led by Mother. Dying, this Christian Mother gave the Bible to her child, who finds it the "truest friend man ever knew . . . In teaching me the way to live,/It taught me how to die" (Gentle Annie Melodist [1859], pp. 21-22).
These and similar songs began a strong tradition of "memento" songs (cataloged as C241-282) that deal with the reminders a mother leaves behind to remind children of their duties to her. "The Picture on the Wall" (1927, C085), has already been discussed, but it is only one of many early country songs that show how important it is for a child to preserve Mother's ideology in adult life.

What moral certainties were important enough to associate with the Christian Mother? Predictably, the Bible, her society's chief holy book, appears most often. For Protestant, and especially fundamentalist sects, introducing the infallible Holy Word was critical, for without it the individual might not be able to work out his own salvation with God. The Old Testament, not surprisingly, receives scant attention, although some heroic role models appear: Daniel, "who trusted in the Lord" (c270) and "little David bold,/Who became a king at last . . . ." (C266). The main focus of "Mother's Bible" are the four Gospels, and more particularly on Christ's suffering on the Cross:

Then she read of Jesus's love,
As He blest the children dear,
How He suffered, bled and died upon the tree;
Of His heavy load of care,
Then she dried my flowing tears
With her kisses as she said it was all for me.
(C266.)

Here, as in many gospel songs, Christ's Passion is the archetypal act of conspicuous suffering, and the child is expected to respond to it not as his metaphysical liberation from sin, but as an ultimate demand for sympathy. More than once the mother weeps as she reads the tragic story to her child, and even "today" the narrator finds the pages
"tear-stained" (e.g., C202, C266). But even more important than the Passion are the biblical promises of individual salvation. The Holy Book is the guide, as we have seen, on "how to live and how to die" (C241, but also C270), and, as one song explains, it

... tells the wond'rrous story of the straight and narrow way
And the mansions built on heaven's happy shore
Now Jesus is my leader he will guide me all the way
He will guide me to my home forevermore.

(C277.)

Primarily, then, the Bible that the Christian Mother read emphasized Christ's death to save the individual sinner who followed a strict moral code to a "home on high."

But the Bible was a memento in more than its content: the book itself picked up talismanic import. Invariably it is "old and faded," often battered and torn, but because it was Mother's, it is "pure as gold," and even the dust that collected on it, to one narrator, is "dearer than gold dust" (C276, C278). Partially this is because the message the book contains leads the child "onward and upward to God" (C271) and keeps him on that "narrow way/That leads at last to that bright home above" (C266). But a few songs explain that Mother's Bible can save the body as well as the soul. In "Mother, I Thank You" (1943, A181), the child leaves home with his Bible stowed securely over his heart. In a letter home he tells his mother that the holy book brings comfort to himself and his buddies as they read it every day. In the next letter he describes how it saved his life during a battle: "My Bible saved me, It played It's [sic] part,/It stopped the bullet aimed at my heart..." (Smilie Sutter [1943], p. 3).10

This song neatly juxtaposes the Bible's great value: read every day,
it helps the individual escape spiritual death; kept over the heart, it miraculously saves him from physical death.

A similar halo surrounds the hymns a mother might sing to her children. Several early country songs incorporate verses from hymns into Celebrations of Mother, and one, Rev. Andrew Jenkins's "Songs My Mother Sang" (1925, C269), is little more than a catalog of hymn titles:

I love the songs my mother sang to me,
There is a Fount, I'm Glad Salvation's free;
Oh, sing the songs she sang so long ago,
Alas and Did and Whiter than the snow.

(Stuart Hamblen [1942], pp. 22-23.)

Nearly all the titles listed in this song deal with the promise of a perfect life in heaven and how an individual can guarantee his own salvation. The four hymns Jenkins directly quotes are "Whiter Than the Snow," "Take Me as I Am," (these two assurances of free salvation) "Life's Railway to Heaven," and "In the Sweet Bye and Bye" (descriptions of the transition from earthly trials to a glorious afterlife).

Like the message of Mother's Bible, these songs follow the child into adult life, helping keep to the "narrow" path. "My Mother's Song" (1954, C273) uses an older hymn, "Jesus I Love Thee," in this way:

Often tho' I've wandered,
Till sin held me bound,
I in mother's message
Sweet relief have found;
To my mother's Savior
I my all resign:
"My Jesus, I love Thee,
I know Thou art mine."

Something in the message
Always finds my heart,
Often as I hear it,
Will the tear-drops start . . . .

(Haden Family [ca. 1941], no. 39.)
The situation is slightly different in songs where the teaching is secular and proverbial. "I Believe It, For My Mother Told Me So" (ca. 1887, C265) incorporates cliches like "A rolling stone would gather little moss..." with religious teachings about how "the Father watch'd o'er me from above..." But the bulk of Mother's advice, here as later, warns against mixing too freely with the world outside Home:

She told me that in manhood, temptations I would meet,
And that very few true friends in life I'd know,
She also said the world was full of falsehood and deceit,
I believe it for my mother told me so.

(Grandma's Songs, p. 56.)

Even in later country songs, which did not emphasize the world's sinfulness as did the music-hall tradition, we find much the same sentiment. The home circle alone provides the tradition that "saves," and once the child rejects Mother to become socially mobile, he risks moral—or even physical—destruction. "Old Fashioned Dipper" (1933, C272) presents "an old fashioned woman in an old fashioned gown," who warns her children to "Be content with a dipper on a nail" and avoid "gold and...greeds that destroy [and] rob human hearts of all comfort and joy" (Bob Miller [1933], pp. 14-15). If the child remains loyal to his Mother's creed, that is, to the certainties of his primary socialization, he not only may live a contented life, but he may also return to the perfect home circle after a decent moral life.

This attitude is presented more directly in narrative plots that dramatize a mother's parting advice, whether delivered in the doorway to a departing child or from the mother's deathbed. In either case, Mother's "last words" carry unusual force, which can take the form
of an interdiction or even a curse. Even when the child does not
break the interdiction, the advice still is a moral dictate, with the
force of Scripture or proverbial wisdom. One of the most durable of
the songs about parting advice is W. H. Doane's "Hold Fast to the
Right" (n.d., late 19th century, A083), in which the mother warns
her boy not to "forsake . . . the way of salvation . . . /That you
learn'd from your mother at home." She reminds him that she gave him
to God in his cradle, teaching him the best she knew. As he leaves
to seek employment in the world, she presents him with the Bible,
"the book of all others the best,/It will help you to live and prepare
you to die,/And will lead to the gates of the blest" (McFarland & Gar­
nier [1931], p. 61). This song is more tinged with religion than many,
but even the most secular advice included some sacred elements. "Don't
Forget Home and Mother" (1940, A096) warns the son to "Shun evil com­
panions all the way . . ." and "From the pathway Eternal never [to]
stray . . ." (Home & Hill Country Ballads [1940], pp. 24-25). A
slightly later country song, "In All the World There's Just One
Mother" (1944, A098), the mother assures her son that if he fails
in life, she will still welcome him home, "For it is written in the
Bible,/They welcomed home the black-sheep son" (Chuck Wagon Gang [1944],
p. 29).

The main injunction, though, is not explicitly religious, even if
it is hard to dissociate from religious concerns. The repeated warning,
"don't forget to write home," seems only an act of filial courtesy,
but in many songs it is more important than that. In "Don't Forget
to Drop a Line to Mother" (1908, C324), the father (for once) advises
his son that although he will "meet some boys in the city/They'll all be friends to you . . ." he should never forget that it will be Mother "Who will guard you from all harm" and who will be "the pal you'll always find true-blue" (Frank & James McCravy, Regal Zonophone G22060 [1930]). If the child is entering a hostile, possible wicked social atmosphere, he must retain some link with Mother, who represents the "right" way. The acts of writing home, praying for Mother, remembering her advice, or keeping her picture on the wall all finally represent a single moral stance—clinging to an old-fashioned way of life and remaining aloof from rival ideologies.

In deathbed advice the mother's words are doubly significant. In "A Mother's Last Word to Her Daughter" (1929, A091) it is clear that the child's soul is in peril. After reminding the daughter of how she has instructed and prayed for her, the mother then adopts a threatening tone:

Oh daughter you may do things, that you can consider no harm
But God, in heaven, do know that you are wrong
You better let dancing, card parties, all go by
So that you can be able to gain your home on high.
(Washington Phillips, Columbia 14511 [1929].)

The daughter, weeping and trembling, immediately agrees to serve God from that moment on. In a more generalized vein, "Prepare to Meet Your Mother" (1929, C326) presents a similar message. Here a preacher-figure reminds his audience of their mothers' deaths, when "you promised you'd meet her/As you knelt by her side/As the death-sweat rolled from her/And fell on her pillow . . . ." He warns that this last promise must be obeyed, and if we children do not "Get ready to meet her," we may find ourselves "shut out of heaven" on Judgment
Day (Frank & James McCravy, Victor V-40151 [7/17/29]).

The implications of this advising role shade into the figure of the Suffering Mother, discussed in the following chapter, and in fact the Christian Mother is the stereotype within Celebrations and Assistance plots that owes most to the moralistic tradition. As custodian of the moral code, the Christian Mother must present the child with a set of dictates that determine the bounds of his social life and prevent any "anti-social" behavior. But since the process of primary socialization implies that these dictates be infallible truths, the mother's role extends to moral interdiction as well. If the child follows her advice to the letter, that is, he will live a happy social life within "home" grounds and will be rewarded with a permanent home in the afterlife. But if the child disobeys this advice, whether he overtly rebels or neglects to "keep in touch" with it, his acts are automatically punished, either in this life or the next.

iii. The Angel Mother

But the mother's roles were not limited to passing on doctrines from generation to generation; she could act as this code's active embodiment. This active role I have termed the Angel Mother, and, as the term suggests, the function of this stereotype is to act as intermediary between the world of the child and the unknown world of the deity and the afterlife. She is the one who communicates with Jesus, associates with angels, and, through prayer, gains the power to "save" her child. Finally, she is the one who approaches death
and transcends it by crossing into the other world ahead of the child, thus preparing for his own successful passage. In Berger and Luckmann's terms, her role is to "locate" death in the child's universe, making it something comprehensible, an event to be welcomed, not dreaded. If Mother is already "on the other side," death is no ordeal, but a glad reunion. Similarly, in those songs in which the child dies first, the mother invariably stands beside him to ease his passage. In one well-known hymn, "Oh Those Tombs" (Golden, 1918), a child's somber reflections on death's inevitability are answered by Mother's voice, speaking mysteriously from beyond the grave to say that she is "safe with my Savior at home" (Mainer's Mountaineers, King 661 [ca. 1946]).

This intermediary role clarifies songs that dwell on the mother's aged features, often in grotesque detail. Some songs, like "What Shall We Do with Mother" (bef. 1927, A050), do little more than present a list of the ravages of time:

Her sight has grown dim since her children left home,
Her hearing is not very clear;
Her voice is all broken and shattered with age,
No longer melod'ous to hear. . . .

She'll have to be led wherever she goes,
Already her steps are untrue;
And lately she walks with a cane in her hand,
With mother, now what shall we do?
(Haden Family [ca. 1941], no. 16.)

At first these songs seem to celebrate Mother's decrepit, withering state, but a later song, "Wrinkled and Old" (1944, C044), puts these details in their heavenly perspective:

Her hands are all calloused, her back it is bent.
The wrinkles grow larger each day.
But she'll be rewarded in heaven I know
When the Savior calls her away. . . .
Her hair's turned to silver, her eyesight is dim
A life of hard work she has done.
The angels in Heaven will greet her some day
When life's race on earth she has run.
(Billy Scott [1944], p. 16.)

Here it is clear that the mother exists in a liminal position, too old to participate normally in this life, but soon to pass into another plane of existence, where she will change her earthly decrepitude for supernatural power. She lives between life and death, and the ugliness of old age takes on spiritual beauty for the child: "Tho' old to me she is fair" (AO50). For this very reason, as we shall see, it is an especially vicious crime to wrong a mother in this liminal state.

But the Angel Mother gains her power through her actions as well as passively through aging. In particular her prayers make her a figure who can win blessings for her children. Many songs show the praying mother as an iconic figure, "an earthly angel," as "When My Mother Knelt in Prayer" (1934, C179) puts it. In this song we see a typical prayer scene:

In the evening, when my mother knelt in pray'r,
By the bedside on her knees, surely, angels heard her pleas;
As she knelt, we felt secure, beside her there.
Just like that rock of old, to which we hold,
She prayed for ev'ryone, not one did mother shun;
And, last of all, she prayed that "God's will be done."
And she ended, as she kissed the bible there;
In the evening, when my mother knelt in pray'r.
(Bob Miller [1934c], pp. 54-55.)

As in most prayer scenes, the mother asks God to "bless" the children, making them secure or free from sin. Either she speaks to angels, as in this scene, or directly to God or Jesus. In some cases the prayer scene becomes a plea for conversion, as in "I Heard My Mother Call My Name in Prayer" (1919, A088; see pp. 79-81). In "When Mother Prayed
for Me' (1935, C183), the mother holds her child in her arms and asks God to shine down love while "the blinding tears rolled down her cheek . . ." (Slim Bryant [1945], pp. 18-19). Similarly, "My Mother Prayed" (1941, C207) ends the prayer scene with the child's religious experience. After asking God to "come/In His mighty power," the mother is transfigured by His presence; the child offers his heart to the deity and is immediately saved:

When mother prayed, oh then I knew,  
Within my soul, that God was true,  
I could no longer, doubt His love,  
But yielded all, born from above.

The role of the Angel Mother thus is more complicated that that of the Christian Mother, who merely introduces the child to the means of salvation. The Angel Mother is responsible for taking the child through an initiation, in which he passes from a stage of passive belief to active participation in religion. He is "born again," and from this point on he is one of the righteous, capable of passing through this world on his way to heaven. Even if the Angel Mother dies after this point, he still will be guided by the sense of certainty that comes with the experience of rebirth. For the scene of conversion can never be forgot: "This heart of mine, can never know,/A sweeter time, than that blessed hour . . ." (C227). The child may even wish to experience rebirth again, as does the narrator of "If I Could Hear My Mother Pray Again" (1923, A088.1). Yet he recognizes that his path lies onward, through the passage of death, back "home":

She used to pray that I on Jesus would rely,  
And always walk the shining gospel way;  
So trusting still His love I seek that home above,  
Where I shall meet my mother some glad day.  

(Letsey Pickard [ca. 1938], no. 1.)
In the same way as the aging mother becomes spiritually more powerful, death becomes not threatening but inviting when a mother waits the child in the afterlife. Because she dies, in many songs, the child is obli-ged to meet her in "that home above." In "The Ring My Mother Wore" (bef. 1869, C242), this obligation is presented explicitly: the dying mother lifts her hands in prayer, then places her wedding ring on the child's hand, saying "We'll meet again in heaven!" Although the son mourns her loss, he consoles himself with a sure place "Among the blest in realms above, Where sorrows are unknown . . ." (Little Maggie May Songster [1869], p. 62). In a country analogue, "The White Rose of Georgia" (1945, C098), the child returns yearly to his mother's grave, recalling mournfully how "she taught [him] as a lad that God would save." But the roses on her grave mystically speak to him:

Never look on me with sorrow for your Mother is not here
She's in heaven where the Holy Angels sing;
Just remember there's a land beyond the starry sky above
A land where death no more will have it's [sic] sting.

(Clyde Moody [1947], p. 21.)

But these songs reflect only the passive side of the mother's connection with death: because she dies, that is, her child longs to die as well. The Angel Mother's role after death is not, however, limited to mere waiting.

In some songs she becomes a powerful angelic spirit that can intervene directly with the deity to protect her child. In "Is She Praying There" (bef. 1939, A095), her child can even hear her spirit voice when he is troubled:

Father up in heaven
Thou canst all control
Keep my boy from sinning
Save his precious soul.
The child assures himself that he will meet her "Close by the pearly portals," since her intervention has saved his soul (Charlie Monroe, Bluebird B-8118 [2/5/39]). Many other songs show the Angel Mother returning as an otherworldly spirit to whisper advice and encouragement to her wandering child, and in a few songs she does even more. One such, "The Old Parlor Organ" (1930, P410), brings together the roles of the Christian Mother and the Angel Mother in a revealing fashion.

The song opens with the narrator in a desperate plight:

The night is cold and stormy  
I'm turned from every door  
My heart is heavy-laden  
I'm friendless sick and poor  
And as the dark surrounds me  
And death is drawing near  
I think of my old mother  
And my little home so dear.

As he lies dying, scenes of the old home pass through his mind. In one vision, he recalls his mother playing the organ while his father, a shadowy figure otherwise, sings "In the Sweet Bye and Bye" and "There'll Be No Sorrow There." Then she is dead, and the child thinks of how her "unseen angel hands" played one last tune on the parlor organ. (In the Victor recording, this tune is "Abide with Me," a traditional funeral hymn; thus all three hymns deal with overcoming death through faith in God and the afterlife.) Suddenly the narrator ends his reverie and faces approaching death. He hears the sound of the parlor organ once again, accompanied by his Angel Mother's voice:

Oh Mother I am coming  
Keep playing to guide my way  
As death draws nigh my soul takes wings  
To the land of endless day.

("Bud Billings" [i.e., Frank Luther], Victor V-40251 [4/24/30].)
Here the mother is much more than an evangelist at home—she is a miracle-worker. By returning in spirit to play the organ at her own funeral, she proves that she can transcend death, and by attending at her child's last moments, she helps him pass the final barrier into heaven. She is, in fact, a powerful religious figure in her own right.

What kind of religious figure was the Angel Mother? We have seen that pentecostal sects accorded her a place second only to Jesus Christ. It is therefore tempting, but simplistic, to collapse this stereotype into similar types of "The Great Mother," of which the Virgin Mary is only the most immediate example. A few songs in the Tin-Pan-Alley popular tradition during the period surveyed did make the connection between the Virgin and the American Mother. Walter Donaldson's hit song, "My Mom" (1932, CO10) has the narrator exclaim, "As years come on her, / I gaze upon her, / She's my Madonna, / My Mom!" (Sheet music published by Bregman, Vocco & Conn, Inc. [1932]). A country song from slightly later, "Sweet Mountain Mother of Mine" (1938, C026) makes a similar equation: "That vine covered cabin [is] forever a shrine, / Just like the madonna to me you're divine ..." (Gene Autry [1938], p. 26). But neither song enjoyed wide circulation among the most traditional performers or audiences during this period. Certainly European Mary-worship must have influenced nineteenth-century popular song, and probably is the source of the mother's dual roles as intercessor with the deity and as protector of the soul at the time of death. But to call the Protestant Mother a reworking of the Catholic Virgin would ignore many of the most important features of this stereotype. In particular, we need to recognize that Mother was a
role-model, not a goddess. Feminist Marina Warner, discussing the
development of Virgin cults on the continent, found that Mary's
increasingly immaculate nature implicitly denied any possibility for
mortal women to participate in her divinity. The process by which her
image was perfected was paralleled by an increasingly hostile view of
woman's nature. By contrast, the Protestant Mother was always a rep­
sentative figure, a type of motherhood in general, in which all women
naturally participate. The period in which the stereotype became popu­
lar was marked by a real increase of female participation in political
and social movements. It is therefore important to resist a simple
equation of Mother with other female deities and to see just what
American attitudes are implied by this stereotype.

To begin with, the Angel Mother was an extension and a synthesis of
several ideals represented by the Domestic and Christian Mothers. As
the elegiac world of childhood represented ultimate security, so the
mother embodied this heaven-like rest, and the two became idealized
together. In "Mother (Sweet Pal of All My Dreams) (1942, C040), the
narrator recalls:

When I walked with you, I saw, I felt, I knew
Everlasting glory of earth and Heaven, too
All magic glamor and all the charm and spell
Of your loveliness, Mother, adorned the hills and dell.

Similarly, the moralistic desire for an infallible code of ethics that
would lead the individual back to the lost security of home necessarily
idealized the teacher as well as the lesson. In "Just Mother and Me"
(1941, C205), the narrator assures himself that because his mother
taught him "holy" songs "About the sweet angels in heaven;/And that
beautiful city above," he will therefore meet her again "with the
angels above;/Where they sing those songs together . . ." (Red Foley
[1941], p. 62). Because Mother's teachings are holy and lead to a
holy destination, she too becomes holy and infallible. Finally, since
these teachings are validated by supernatural forces, the Angel Mother
becomes an intermediary, first between God and the child, then between
the afterlife and this world. In "Mother's Grave" (3) (1940, C090),
the narrator wanders to his mother's grave where, as he comments,

... I hear the songs of angels
And I feel their presence near;
Scenes of earth fade in the distance
And a glorious host I see,
There among the white-robed seraphs,
Mother, dear, waits for me.
(Haden Family [ca. 1941], no. 25.)

In summary, then, the figure of Mother, as seen in the roles of home-
maker, preacher, and unearthly spirit, invariably represents a
mediator between an imperfect world and a world that is lost in the
past or attainable only after death, where earthly troubles are no
more. For the purposes of analysis I have discussed them as if
songwriters considered them separate entities, but from the examples
quoted we can already see that this was not the case. The most popular
celebrations delighted in combining these roles, making Mother's
divinity the reflection, not of one, but of many equally revered roles.

The most explicit of these celebrations was published as "She'll
Be There" (1935, C016), but it was usually known by its first line,
"What a Friend We Have in Mother." Its full text, cut in recordings
to three stanzas, is as follows:
What a friend we have in Mother
Who will all our secrets share,
We should never keep things from her,
Tell her all and she'll be there.
Oh, what tender love she gives us,
When in sorrow and despair,
Tell her gently, whisper softly
She will listen, she'll be there.

When you're sick and cannot labor,
And there's nothing you can do,
Call on mother she will help you,
God will bless her, that is true,
She will clean and do the dishes,
She will feed you [sic] babes with care,
If she finds you cold or hungry,
Do not worry, she'll be there.

Day by day as she grows older,
She's the nation's guiding star,
Don't forget the pray'rs she taught you,
You may need them bye and bye,
Tho' her hair has turned to silver,
Send her flowers sweet and fair,
Drop a card or send a letter,
She'll be waiting, she'll be there.

When her eyes have closed to slumber,
Gently kiss her icy brow,
Fold her hands upon her bosom,
She will rest in heaven now,
When your days are dark and dreary,
And your cross is hard to bear,
Do not let your mem'ry fail you,
Think of her, and she'll be there.

(Jake & Carl [1939], pp. 4-5.)*

From the outset this song stresses Mother's divinity: that a performer could sing it to the tune of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and not find it blasphemous indicates how revered the Angel Mother had become by this time. But the equating of Jesus and Mother is more than nominal: all the important roles of motherhood are here presented, blended, and hallowed. The Domestic Mother is the one who comforts the child in

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time of "sorrow and despair" and who automatically takes over the child's home when he is sick. Note, however, that the mother takes on this role as a sacrifice—no one expects her to do the dishes every day, but she does them when her child "cannot labor." As "the nation's guiding star," she teaches the child the prayers he will need later on, and as the Christien Mother she is always waiting at home for the card that will let her know that her child is still "in touch" with the code she represents. Finally, as the Angel Mother, she precedes the child into the afterlife, returning to encourage him supernaturally when he once again falls into despair. The roles are presented in separate stanzas, but the hymn is more than a catalog, it is a cumulative definition of motherhood. It begins with the most undemanding tasks, such as lending an ear to a child's troubles, and concludes with the most transcendent, the spiritual return to help the child bear his "cross." First and last, she is the one who makes a "man" of her child, assisting him from one stage of life to the next. If she cannot make his world perfect, at least she offers him the means to perfection.

Above all, we note that this stereotype is, after all, a stereotype, not a specific deity like the Shakers' Mother Lee. The intermediate nature of "Mother" denotes an attitude toward humans, both male and female, that sees them too as having a nature intermediate between animal-like sin and superhuman perfection. That the mother is always one spiritual step ahead of the male child need not prove that audiences would agree that females are "spiritual" while males are "practical." Indeed, more often the females provide the practical
advice on how to live, while the males are preoccupied with regaining
spiritual grace. The distinctively feminine role, though, is a con-
servative one: while the male is continually trying out new ways of
life, the female tries to preserve as much stability as she can within
a mutable world. Her role, in brief, is to pass down to the next gene-
ration the traditions that will carry both her and her children to the
land of perfection. But if, as Emerson suggested, every man can be
his own Jesus Christ, then early country songs tell us that every
woman was capable of becoming her own Virgin Mary.

iv. The Redeemer Mother

The final role of mothers, as the term suggests, is not entirely
distinct from that of the Angel Mother, and there is much overlap
between the two. The focus of this role, however, is the reciprocal
relation between the mother and an active, if "erring" child. Previous
roles have presented a self-sufficient mother who acts on the child
but need not react to his own actions. The Redeemer Mother, on the
other hand, must judge her child's efforts to set out in life, correct
his mistakes, and return him to the path of virtue. Her specific
tactics vary: in some songs she physically ransoms her child from
prison, while in others it is merely her influence that changes the
child's life. What is important here, though, is whether or not
the child reforms, and it is pointless to apply an active/passive
distinction among these tactics. If the child is saved, the mother
is a redeemer, even if her only "act" is to remain in the child's
The new element in this role is the figure acted on, in this case, the Erring Child. The terms used to describe this figure's actions are significant: he errs, roams, wanders, strays, or rambles. True, once the child wanders, he "wanders in sin," but not because he openly flouts the moral code. He simply makes mistakes that pull him away from the ideals taught him by his mother. The role of the Redeemer Mother is to complete the child's integration into society by leading him through a process of secondary socialization. If primary socialization involved learning the basic moral certainties, according to Berger and Luckmann, then secondary socialization is "the acquisition of role-specific vocabularies," or, in terms of the country song tradition, the knowledge of how to survive outside the home environment. The child now must enter "new sectors of the objective world of his society," and the process involves a period of disorientation during which the child lingers between the two ways of life. While learning to act in an imperfect world, he still must remain true to the ideals of perfection learned at home, and until he finds the "right" compromise between the two, his activity is aimless, non-directed "roamings." The Redeemer Mother, returning in person or in spirit, acts as a catalyst, impelling the child out of his indecision into an active social role.

Most songs present this process of secondary socialization in moral terms alone, focusing on the child's rebirth or conversion, but some songs combine moral disorientation with physical hardship, thus reinforcing the mother's redeeming function. In "A Boy's Best Friend Is His Mother" (2) (bef. 1886, C323), the preacher-figure warns us:
When you are sick in bed and your money is all gone
And by your friends you are spurned
Your mother she will watch o'er your bedside night and day
And pray for you every night and morn . . . .
(Charlie Oaks, Vocalion 5110 [1927].)

The "friends" who desert the child are joined later in the song by
his sisters and brothers, who likewise are prone to "turn away" in
time of need. Only the mother is capable of aiding the child during
such troubles. A similar situation arises in "Little Mountain Shack"
(1942, A006), when the child leaves his parents to seek illusory
"streets of gold" in the corrupted City. At first he does well, but
squanders his money on "city gals and wine." His fall comes abruptly:

But I soon took down sick, and had no money left to pay my bills
And then all my good time friends they turned me down,
So I wrote a letter to the old folks way back in the hills
And at once they came to help me in the town.

Dear old mother sat up nights and nursed me until I got well
Then they took me back to my old mountain home
I have learned a lesson that I wont [sic] forget until I die
There is no place on this earth as sweet as home.
(Bobby Gregory [1942b], p. 30.)

There is no great distance between these acts of physical rescue and
their spiritual counterparts, as the child's "wandering" is often
presented in allegorical terms:

O'er desert wild, o'er mountain high
A wanderer I chose to be,
A wretched soul condemned to die,
Still mother's prayers have followed me.

Chorus: I'm coming home, I'm coming home,
To live my wasted life anew
For mother's prayers have followed me,
Have followed me the whole world thro'.
("Mother's Prayers Have Followed Me," 1912, A087. Songs for
Service [ca. 1915], no. 14.)
The message implied in this song does not depend on our seeing an actual wanderer in a desert or a condemned prisoner; rather it is a song about a spiritual conversion that takes the individual from an arid, condemned world of irreligion to the security of the "home" code. In much the same way the Redeemer Mother seeks to do more than initiate her child into active support of her religion, she often has to struggle with a reluctant sinner to bring him back to God. In "My Mother's Hands" (2) (1941, C035), the child strays from her good advice, but is brought back to the fold when "Those wrinkled hands she would press to [his] face ... [and] tell [him] of our dear Saviors [sic] grace ... ." Mother's moral campaign is usually successful sooner or later, as we see in "Just the Thought of Mother" (ca. 1929, A092). Here the child has "roamed in darkness/Weary, tempest-tossed ..." but his mother's unending prayers "Gave [him] strength to answer/Yes unto His call [and]/Consecrate for ever/Unto God [his] all" (Ganus Brothers, Vocalion 5312 [ca. 1929]). A more generalized song, "Old Fashioned Mother" (ca. 1940, C083) celebrates Mother's ceaseless evangelism to save their children:

My old fashioned Mother we need you today
All over the world so wide
For sin and temptations are leading astray
The child [from] the old fire side,
If your feeble hand now could only reach down.
That tender voice pray again
It would save many souls from the pit falls;
Who travels [sic] the byways of sin.

(Gurney Thomas [n.d., ca. 1940?], p. 7.)

The Redeemer Mother as religious savior was so well established during the period surveyed that it was common for the child to be converted by no more--literally--than "just the thought of mother."
Of course the religious nature of the experience lends an aura of the supernatural to the thought itself, as if it were divinely ordained. In "The Cowboy at Church" (bef. 1910, A086), the roaming child happens to pass a church on Sunday, whereupon "something urged [him] in . . . /It seemed just like [his] mother's voice was speaking from the skies" (Arkansas Woodchopper [ca. 1931], p. 17). Here the composer suggests that it might have been the mother's voice, but other religious songs do not insist even on the "seems." In "The Faded Letter" (1925, A089), the main character is a young man who has "wandered far away from home" and who decides to take up burglary to earn a living. One stormy night he hides in an attic, where by coincidence he finds "a scribbled letter upon the dusty floor," which is written in his mother's hand.

The lines were badly written, with many a tear-drop stain
The burglar's heart was smitten, the message was not in vain
The lightening [sic] ceased it's [sic] flashing, the thunder ceased to roll
Up in the dusty attic new courage filled his soul.

(The Jenkins Secular Songs TSS., p. 172.)

The next morning, his guilt washed away, he emerges "out into the sunlight, to start his life anew . . . ." Even more tenuous is the mother's role in "The Cross on the Prison Floor" (1929, A093). Here the convict son (his crime is never made clear) simply happens to see the shadow of a cross, cast on the floor by the moonlight shining through the cell's grating. Musing on the sight, he recalls his childhood.

Long years ago in a far off land
He stood in a cottage home
Bidding farewell to a mother dear
Soon to be left alone,
She placed in his hand a cross of gold
And prayed God to guide Him [sic] e'er more,
These words were recalled as he saw once more,
The Cross on the Prison Floor.

The convict prays, and although next morning his body is found dead in
the cell, "his soul had been won and guided home/By the Cross on the
Prison Floor" (Loye Pack [ca. 1934b], pp. 4-5). Again we find the
spiritual drama allegorized: the convict cannot break his literal
bars and return home, but his religious experience liberates his spirit
and returns him to the way of home and Mother.

In each of these plots, regardless of how much she acts, the mother's
role is the same. Through her influence the child transcends his aim-
less and sterile life and takes on a more directed social role that
is both goal-oriented and socially accepted. He is now "a child of
heaven," headed for the eternal reward in the other world. But the
most conspicuous feature of these plots is the power held by the Redeemer
Mother over the Erring Child. She is the one who knows what he ought
to be doing, and there is a sense of inevitability in the way in which
she finally wins out over the child's roaming, whether she be alive
or dead. She is the representative of the social duties that secon-
dary socialization legitimates, after all, and her purpose is less to
punish "aimlessness" than to provide the direction that frees the child
from social disorientation. It is inappropriate to criticize these
plots for their use of coincidence and supernatural trappings, since,
as Bratton has suggested, they are not intended to be realistic songs,
but "true," stylized extensions of social attitudes,19 in which the
actions of mother and son represent an allegory of how a young adult
should enter the world at large.'
From this angle we may approach one of the most popular mother songs of the early country period, Karl Davis and Harty Taylor's "I'm Here to Get My Baby Out of Jail" (1936, A-05). Its plot seems the most unrealistic of the songs we have presented, but it follows a well-established tradition of pleas for innocent prisoners. The text is as follows:

I'm not in your town to stay,
Said a lady old and gray
To the warden of a penitentiary
I'm not in your town to stay
And I'll soon be on my way
I'm just here to get my baby out of jail, yes warden
I'm just here to get my baby out of jail.

I've tried to raise my baby right,
I have prayed both day and night,
That he'd never follow footsteps of his dad
I have searched both far and wide,
I had feared that he had died
And at last I find my baby here in jail, yes warden
But it's good to find my baby here in jail.

It is just five years today,
Since my husband passed away
He was found beneath the snow so cold so white
I made a vow to keep his ring,
And his gold watch and his chain
But the county laid my husband in the ground, yes warden
The county laid my baby's papa in the ground.

I will pawn you my watch,
I will pawn you my chain
I will pawn you my diamond ring
I will wash all your clothes,
I will scrub all your floors
If that will get my baby out of jail, yes warden
You know I want my darling out of jail.

Then we heared [sic] the warden say,
To this lady old and gray
I will bring your baby boy to your side
Two iron gates swung wide apart,
She held her darling to her heart
She kissed her baby boy and there she died, but smiling
In the arms of her dear boy there she died.

*(Doc Hopkins [1936], p. 3.)*

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The tune of this song, with slight variation, was borrowed from a folk- lyric known variously as "Reuben," "Nine Hundred Miles," or "Train 45." Today the tune is best known as a hot instrumental, but during the early years of hillbilly music it was just as often a slow, mournful piece similar in mood to "I'm Here to Get My Baby Out of Jail."
The lyric freely admitted floating sentimental stanzas, in fact. One version recorded by Emry Arthur included these stanzas:

Old Reuben had a wreck, he broke his fireman's neck
He can't get no letter from his home...
The longest day, I ever seen
Was the day that I left my home.
My mama told me, and Papa did too
That I must never roam.
("Reuben Oh Reuben," Paramount 3237 [ca. 1/30].)

An earlier recorded version by Fiddlin' John Carson juxtaposes one lyric stanza that Davis and Taylor reworded and another with a familiar sentimental motif:

Lord I'll pawn you my watch, and I'll pawn you my chain
Pawn you my gold diamond ring
That don't pay, my little woman's fine
Pawn you my wagon and my team.

You can count the days I'm gone, on the train that I left on
You can hear the whistle blow hundred mile
If that train runs right, I'll see Ma tomorrow night
Lord I'm nine hundred miles from my home.
("I'm Nine Hundred Miles from Home," Okeh 40196 [8/27/24].)

Doubtless it was lyric fragments such as these, focusing on homelessness and disorientation, that suggested the tune to Karl Davis. In later years he recalled that he wrote the initial version of the song soon after he and his partner migrated from their native Kentucky to Chicago. One day he drove another WLS performer back to his nearby home in Wisconsin, then started the long drive back to his city...
hotel room.

On the way back I was alone, the ride was long and the road was narrow and crooked. I started humming a tune, and two or three times along the way I stopped to write down some lyrics. By the time I got back to my hotel in Chicago I had it completed.21

The details Davis recalled are significant. For a recent Appalachian migrant, still not wholly at home in the city, seeing another performer reach his home so easily must have awakened strong feelings of loneliness and disorientation. As he drove the "long . . . narrow and crooked" road, not homeward, but back to a hotel room, Davis must have identified with the stereotypical Erring Boy who longs to find some straight path in life that led to some definite goal. Such thoughts doubtless suggested both the tune and the narrative he connected with it.

In outline the song follows earlier songs like "A Mother's Appeal for Her Son" (bef. 1897, A001): a bureaucratic father-figure tries to separate mother and son, but the mother's conspicuous suffering sets the child free. But there is one innovation: in this song the child's crime is blamed explicitly on the father's influence. Even though the Christian Mother "prayed both night and day," the drunkard husband's example pulled the son along the trail of his footsteps, which would have led him to a snowy doom and a pauper's grave. An answer song, "I'm Just Here to Get My Baby Out of Jail, No. 2" (1936, V097) stresses this point from the son's point of view: "Dad was gone most every night, yet I thought that he was right/I never dreamed that he was going wrong . . .".(Dixon Brothers, Bluebird B-6691 [10/13/36]). It then becomes apparent that the mother saves her baby from two dangers at once, the literal prison ruled by the
father-like warden, and the spiritual consequences of having followed
the "footsteps of his dad" instead of his mother. By extension, the
mother's plea physically liberates the child, but also frees him to
tavel the "right" path through life, without having to bear the
stigma of his past.

Why does the mother die, then? Initially it would seem more appro-
priate to the allegory to show her guiding the son back home or giving
him instructions on how to act in the future. But instead the son's
release is instantly followed by the mother's death. To some extent
we might explain away the ending as a commonplace, similar to that of
"The Blind Girl," or else as a concession to the dominant elegiac mode,
which avoided reuniting families in this world to concentrate on the
next. Still, this "happy death" ending is especially appropriate to
"I'm Here to Get My Baby Out of Jail" because it dramatizes the Redeemer
Mother's specific role in secondary socialization. Her function is to
make a free man out of a "baby," to pull him away from his automatic
imitation of his father (which would lead him to a frozen, sterile
lifestyle), and push him out into the world as an individual capable
of making his own way. To couple his liberation with his passive
return to the home atmosphere would certainly not have been impossible
within the tradition, but it would have been more typical of moralistic
songs like "There's a Mother Always Waiting at Home Sweet Home" (1903,
A085). Within the country elegiac tradition, which concedes that it
is no longer possible to withdraw from the world into the maternal home,
it is much more "realistic" (within the stylized conventions of this
tradition) to show him parted from his mother, but capable now of
finding his own way to the "better home" in the afterlife. The answer
to this song presents this attitude in a clearer fashion:

        See my mother lying there
        With her smiling face so fair
        She is resting now in peace eternity
        I will meet her in the sky
        Where we'll never say good-bye
        For she saved me from the penitentiary, her pleading
        Has saved me from the penitentiary.

To sum up, the function of the mother in Celebration and Assistance
songs is to lead the child from a helpless womb-like existence step by
step to a self-sufficient life in society at large. She is the one
who shelters the infant in the cradle-like home, instructs him in life's
moral certainties, and makes sure that he successfully passes from the
safe harbor of "home" into the stormy world of "life." In addition, she
takes on an aura of supernatural power because she is so closely
identified with the ideal home (representing both a state of grace on
earth and perfected existence in the afterworld). Her primary role,
that of supervising the child's passage from one stage in life to
another, is acted out over and over, even beyond her death, for she
is the one who helps the child cross the threatening boundary between
this world and the next. Her role as helper and as initiator remains
constant through all the different manifestations we have seen: that
is, the Domestic, Christian, Angel, and Redeemer Mothers are all aspects
of a coherent attitude toward Motherhood. If God "made" mothers to
perform such high tasks, it is hardly surprising that early country
song tradition accorded her powers second only to those of the Redeemer
Himself.
Notes to Chapter Four

1 From this point forth I will use the term "child" for the second member of the mother-son/daughter team, referring to hir as "he." This is not merely a concession to sexist language conventions, for most songs that identify the sex of the child portray a son rather than a daughter. Given the heavy masculine slant both in numbers of performers and also in numbers of songwriters, we can assume that most of the songs that do not specify sex assume the child to be male. In any case, those songs that do feature daughters use different conventions, that will have to be covered by themselves. For the sake of being consistent, I have also used "child" to refer to sons or daughters of any age, even when they clearly are old enough to be considered adults. They act as "children" in the songs, and that is what I am interested in.

2 Although my conception of "helper" owes something to Propp's "donor" or "provider" (Morphology of the Folktale, 2nd edn., trans. Laurence Scott, rev. and ed. Louis A. Wagner [Austin: American Folklore Society, 1968], pp. 39-50), it is premature to suggest that early country songs follow his morphological pattern to the dot. Here and elsewhere, however, I have borrowed concepts of his that do seem to explain the narrative patterns of country songs. In many songs we can see the mother acting as a "function" (rather than as a character) because the child's progress is aided by her influence, whether she actually appears or not. This concept clarifies the mother's role in songs in which her memory, or a token associated with her, leads to the child's reform.

3 The text I have quoted is the one that entered country tradition. It is, however, a close imitation of an earlier song, John C. Baker's setting of an anonymous poem, called "My Trundle Bed: Or, Recollections of Childhood" (Sheet music published by J. L. Peters [1860]). The lines corresponding to those quoted in the text are as follows:

... I wandered back to childhood,
To the merry days of yore,
When I knelt beside my mother,
By this bed upon the floor.

Then it was with hands so gently
Placed upon my infant head,
That she taught my lips to utter
Carefully the words she said;
Never can they be forgotten,
Deep are they in mem'ry riven—
"Hallowed be thy name, O Father!
Father! thou who art in heaven."

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This she taught me, then she told me
Of its import, great and deep—
After which I learned to utter
"Now I lay me down to sleep;"
Then it was with hands uplifted,
And in accents soft and mild,
That my mother asked—"Our Father!
Father! do thou bless my child!"

This song's debt to the parlor-song tradition becomes clear when the recitation quotes the opening couplet of "Rock Me to Sleep, Mother":

Just to hear again that dear sweet voice
Would make this life well worth while
And make your heart and soul rejoice;
Turn backward, turn backward
Oh time in your flight,
And make me a child again—just for tonight.


To keep the text here concise, I have combined quotes from several songs, citing them only by their catalog numbers. Full citations are as follows:

C202 - "My Mother's Bible" (2) (ca. 1940); Jimmie Davis, Decca [English] FM 5125 (ca. 1940).
C241 - "The Old Arm Chair" (1840); Moss Rose Songster (1850s?), pp. 10-11.
C266 - "My Mother's Bible" (1) (1893); Homer Rodeheaver (1922), no. 131.
C270 - "Little Log Cabin by the Sea" (1927); Carter Family, Victor 21074 (8/1/27).
C271 - "My Mother's Old Bible Is True" (1928); Frank & James McCravy, Victor V-40265 (12/16/29).
C276 - "The Dust on Mother's Old Bible" (1939); Drifting Pioneers (1939), pp. 50-51.
C277 - "Mother's Torn and Faded Bible" (1940); Three Tobacco Tabs, Regal Zonophone [Australian] G23182 (ca. 1940).
C278 - "The Bible That My Mother Read to Me" (1941); Gordon Sizemore (ca. 1941), p. 12.

Two examples of the Passion sentimentalized that come from the period surveyed are "The Heart That Was Broken for Me" (authors untraced, bef. 1938) and "Tramp on the Street" (Cole & Cole, 1939). The opening verse and chorus of the first of these runs like this:
There came from the skies, in the days long ago
The Lord with a message of love
This world knew Him not, He was treated with scorn
This wonderful gift from above.

Chorus: They crowned Him with thorns, He was beaten with stripes
He was wounded and nailed to the tree
But the pain in His heart, was the hardest to bear
The heart that was broken for me.
(Carter Family, Decca 5662 [8/6/38].)

The relevant portion of "Tramp on the Street" is as follows:

Jesus who died on, Calvary's tree
Shed His life's blood for, you and for me
They pierced His side, His hands and His feet
Then they left Him to die like, a tramp on the street....

Chorus: He was Mary's own darling, He was God's chosen son
Once He was fair and, once He was young
Mary she rocked Him, her darling to sleep
But they left Him to die like, a tramp on the street.
(Molly O'Day & The Cumberland Mountain Folks, Columbia 52013 [12/16/46].)

Although it does not seem to have been catalogued by legend scholars, the motif of a Bible over a soldier's heart stopping an otherwise fatal bullet is a widespread folk belief, dating back to the Civil War.

This is the case in many dying-child ballads, including (a brief cross-section) "Little Bessie," "Put My Little Shoes Away," "The Dying Girl's Message" (or "Raise the Window Higher, Mother"), and "Darling Little Joe." In some of these the child reverses the conventional roles and reassures a grieving mother that it is "sweet to die." In "Will the Roses Bloom in Heaven" (Harris, 1911), it is not clear in the original who is reassuring whom, but by the time the Carter Family recorded it, an extra stanza had made the mother's role more definite:

Then Mother whispered
In the land so bright and fair
Where the roses will be blooming
There will be no parting there
Good-bye my little darling
For Death is lingering near
And on the little pale face
There was not one trace of fear.
(Victor 23748 [10/12/32].)
The motif of the mother comforting a dying son is so influential that even when the child dies damned, the mother often makes a token appearance, as in "Oh, Death":

My mother come, to my bed
Place a cold towel upon my head
My head is warm, my feet is cold
Death is moving upon my soul.

(Dock Boggs, Folkways FA 2351 [6/26/63].)

And when, for some reason, Mother cannot be by a dying son's side, it is a bad omen:

Alas, it is so. But thus it must be,
No word of comfort or promise for me;
To die without God or hope in his [sic] son,
Covered in darkness, bereaved and undone.

Chorus: Only a prayer, only a tear.
Oh, if sister and mother were here!
Only a song; 'twill comfort and cheer,
Only a word from that book so dear.

("Dying from Home and Lost" [Brown, 1892]; Brown, 3:91.)

The standard comparative psychological study of female deities is Erich Neumann's *The Great Mother*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955). Susan McGinity of Tarleton State University has been working on contemporary mother songs from this angle, but I have not been able to see any of her work.

This song was popular enough to draw Ring Lardner's attention, who parodied it in *Lose with a Smile* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933). The final sequence of rhymes, in Lardner's version, is "Theys no one greater/Then my old pater./He is my alma mater my pop" (p. 111). (Admittedly Casey Stengel helped him with some of the words, or so the book claims.)

A 1869 song, "How the Gates Came Ajar" (Bostwick & Eastburn), shows the Virgin Mary coming to the aid of the spirit of a little child, newly arrived in heaven, who longs to give some sign to her lonely mother on earth. The Virgin orders a guardian angel to unlock heaven's gate, and the child pushes it ajar, so that "Now never a sad eyed mother,/But may catch the glory afar . . ." (Sheet music published by S. Brainard & Sons). Here the Virgin plays the supernatural role of mediating between life and death that the Angel Mother later was to play herself.

One statement of the theme is in Emerson's "Divinity School Address":

Jesus Christ belonged to the true race of prophets. He saw with open eye the mystery of the soul. Drawn by its severe harmony, ravished with its beauty, he lived in it, and had his being there. Alone in all history he estimated the greatness of man. One man was true to what is in you and me. He saw that God incarnates himself in man, and evermore goes forth anew to take possession of his World.

(Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Stephen E. Whicher [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957], p. 105.)

Berger & Luckmann, pp. 130, 138.

An analogue to this scene occurs as another of the anecdotes in Aycock's Nightingale of the Psalms, in which a boy, picked up unconscious and brain-sick on a city street, cannot be helped until his mother is located and rushed to his side:

He turned his face toward her, and without opening his eyes, he whispered, "Mother," just once and dropped into a peaceful sleep and awoke on his road to recovery. There is nothing on earth but a mother's love that will do that . . . (pp. 20-21).

Motifs associated with this story would seem to have had a wide circulation, since the "nursing back to life" motif surfaces in Chapter 57 of Dickens's Great Expectations, where Joe Gargery arrives post-haste from the countryside to revive his penniless, unconscious charge.


A full discussion of this folk-lyric will appear in Norm Cohen's Long Steel Rail (to be published ca. 1979 by University of Illinois Press). A summary of his findings, along with an extensive discography and bibliography of variants, may be found in Cohen's booklet to JEMP 103: Paramount Old Time Tunes (1977), pp. 18-19.

CHAPTER FIVE

"DON'T FORGET THE SONG!":

VIOLATION

In an imaginative fashion, the **Violation** formula explores the boundary between behavior sanctioned by the community and acts considered sinful. In terms of narrative, it shows a character defying the normal moral order, thereby placing himself outside his normal position into a "fallen" state that necessarily brings suffering both to himself and to others. To restore the original order, the character must either be excluded from the community or resocialized back into it. My use of the term "violation" thus differs slightly from Propp's, in that I use it to characterize a broad sequence of narrative events that may or may not involve an interdiction.¹ The consequences of defying the moral code are more central to the early country tradition than the actual crime, which is often omitted or presented in vestigial form. Yet my use of the Proppian term is still apt for such songs, since in a contextual sense the violation of the community's interdiction is still the most important aspect of their content. That is, by defining the actions that are opposed to the tradition, songs of **Violation** themselves act as interdictions to those who hear them. At the same time, the act of defining "evil" in popular tradition is a way of characterizing the tradition itself as "good."

Since those who acknowledge the "good" always emerge intact in this world or the next, these songs also proclaim and reaffirm the integrity
of the tradition that informs them with significance. As we shall see, the mother is nearly always associated with the "good," as moral teacher and custodian of the home circle. When the child loses her, he loses his sense of direction in the world; when he returns to her, he reassumes his place in a comprehensible moral order.

Many of these rhetorical functions have been proposed in theory by Roger Abrahams in his essay, "Personal Power and Social Restraint." Here he describes his concept of "the way folklore would operate in an ideal peasant community," although he admits that no such group exists today in the Western world (p. 20). Yet since such a model does survive vigorously in the form of a fantasy, an "alternative life style . . . to those bewildered by the complexities of the city situation," Abrahams's observations are apropos to the early country song tradition. As we have seen, the audience for such songs was not exclusively rural, but increasingly urban or at least urban-dominated. As such, this audience was concerned to pass on traditional mores and preserve some form of the "old-time" family and church for another generation. We have already noted that songs from the moralistic tradition held a disproportionately large place in oral tradition, doubtless for this very reason. Such traditional artists, according to Abrahams's theory, would tend to use their narratives to induce an audience

. . . to take a stance in relation to the predicament presented in the story and the way in which it was worked out. The audience will be guided in this by reminders from the performer as to the way this predicament is traditionally handled. The performer's ultimate purpose will be to present a movement of actions stamped by all with
a sense of approval or disapproval. The story serves as a pattern of behavior for the future, either through emulation or avoidance, because the piece has been performed well and the pattern of the dramative movement is familiar (p. 20).

By the same token, Abrahams proposes, the performance of such "tales" serves the tellers' personal aims. Through the telling they proclaim "their superior knowledge of the way things are," and the success of the performance should "guarantee that their position of respect and authority will not be undermined" (p. 28). Accordingly, the narrative, in Abrahams's ideal peasant world, serves both the purposes of the community as a whole as well as those of its traditional custodians in particular.

There are significant differences between Abrahams's "tale," which the performer presumably can rework within formulaic restraints to instruct a particular audience, and the "narrative songs" we will now consider, which normally are fixed texts written to fit a large variety of audiences. Nevertheless, Abrahams's observations fit the Violation formula especially well, since what he terms the "esthetic form," or the way a story is constructed, is here intended to make its "rhetorical intent" explicit: that is, the story embodies the moral. The subject of the songs we will survey is a youth, typically male, at the beginning of his adult life, who acts contrary to traditional ways and so meets with an appropriate fall, unless rescued by a representative of the moral code.3 The narrator, the youth himself or a preacher-figure, insists that we take a moral stance toward the lad's fate, and his message often concludes with a direct warning to the audience: "You may forget the singer/But don't forget the song" ("Bad Companions," bef. 1925, VO85.1). The strategies of Abrahams's ideal tale-teller
are codified and exemplified by these song texts, and the formula
itself acts as a socially-defined interdiction that reaffirms standard
mores and the power of traditional authorities like the Christian Mother.

The typical Violation story covers only a fraction of the plot
implied, as songs normally compress the action into a few dramatic
scenes and leave the audience to infer the rest. But combining formulas
from a large number of songs, we can isolate the following typical
Violation mega-plot: As the young child is about the enter the world
on his own, an Admonishing Mother gives him moral warnings that, if
not followed, may lead him to misfortune. The Reckless Child ignores
her warnings and, through seemingly trivial sins, slips into a state
of corruption from which he cannot extricate himself. Eventually he
drifts into the state of a Fallen Child in either of two ways:
either he graduates from trivial sins to crimes that force society to
exclude and punish him, or he so constantly neglects his Suffering
Mother that she dies, leaving the child without moral direction in a
bewildering world. Throughout these songs, however, the Redeemer Mother,
discussed in the previous chapter, can appear to extricate a Reckless
or even a Fallen Child from his predicament, almost like a wild card
the songwriter can play at any moment to turn his tragic tale into a
happy one, without denying the moral embodied by the predicament.
Because the mother represents the "good" life made possible by the
moral code, and because she can rescue the child from his prison of
sins, she assumes even more authority over the child's life. The force
of nemesis is stronger than the child's aimless actions, but the force
of redemption, in most songs, is stronger still.
1. The Admonishing Mother

Songs that show the child leaving home to enter a life of sin often include a scene in which the mother offers one last warning. Most often this scene takes place as the child is about to leave home, but occasionally it is delivered from a deathbed. This role, which I have termed the Admonishing Mother, is similar to some of the functions of the Christian Mother, who also gives advice to her departing children. The difference is mainly one of context: the Christian Mother instructs an otherwise passive child, while the Admonishing Mother reproves a dissident child. By the same token, a Christian Mother's advice is usually obeyed, while an Admonishing Mother's is always disobeyed.

The content of the mother's warning varies, depending on the plot to follow. In songs that present a child's life of crime, the warnings tend to be commonplace, even proverbial. "My Mother's Tears" (1933, V325) begins with the mother's words, "Contentment can't be bought for gold, nor greed, nor with fame . . ." but the child disregards such a creed as "old fashioned" (Bob Miller [1933], pp. 6-7). In "You Reap Just What You Sow" (ca. 1939, V331), the mother even delivers a small cluster of proverbs to her departing son:

"Always follow the straight and narrow,
Wherever you may go,
Remember, life is what you make it,
You reap just what you sow."

(Ernest Iverson [ca. 1939], pp. 18-19.)

These warnings function as interdictions against which to judge the son's later misdeeds, but they also serve to equate the Admonishing Mother's words with the lore of the community at large. When the child
disregards such warnings as "old fashioned," he denies the validity of such communal lore and, by extension, sets himself outside the society.

The analogous scene in songs that later focus on the mother's suffering is more explicit: the Admonishing Mother tells the child not to leave, or to return as soon as possible, or else she will die. Typical of such episodes is "I Have Traveled through Life, I Have Seen Many Things" (or "Be Home Early To-night, My Dear Boy," bef. 1883, V082). Here the son enjoys an occasional night of drinking and gambling, but the mother repeatedly warns him to "Be home early..." One night she is "sick/In fever and torture and pain," and, although she warns her boy that she may never give the warning again, he leaves anyhow for his "night's fun and joy." When he returns, true to her word, she is dead (Kelly Harrell, "Be at Home Soon Tonight, My Dear Boy," Okeh 40505 [ca. 8/26/25]). The interdiction in "The Wanderer's Warning" (1929, V091) has a different force, however: the mother stays alive, but the child is forever excluded from home. Accused by his father of drinking and gambling, the son angrily vows to leave home, whereupon the mother steps in:

My poor mother broke down a-crying  
My son oh my son do not leave  
Your poor mother's heart will be broken  
And all my life long I will grieve.

The son leaves nevertheless, but he is haunted by the echo of Mother's plea. Although the narrator admits that he has left home "just this morning," yet his heart is heavy, for he recognizes that now he "will never come home" ("Bud Billings" [i.e., Frank Luther], Victor V-40057 [3/8/29]). One wonders why he could not simply turn around and be
back home by suppertime? But here, as in other songs, the mother's interdiction becomes a curse as soon as it is disregarded. By leaving her, the child has "broken his mother's heart," and, worse, he has renounced his normal role in the home circle. Once he turns his back on such a plea, he is doomed to a life on the blinds of a freight train, "Bound for nobody knows where . . . ."

In this context it is useful to look at those ballads in which the child enters a world of physical rather than moral dangers. Breaking his mother's advice, he is killed in an accident. The most widespread example of this plot is "The Wreck on the C. & O." (ca. 1890, V270), in which George Alley's mother shows up to tell her boy to "'be careful how you run;/For many a man has lost his life in trying to make lost time . . . ."' (Cox, p. 222). The child's response, though, varies in the ballad's textual history. In some texts (for example, Cox's A text quoted above), George implies that he will run his train "into Clifton Forge or drop her into hell," and in most texts he boasts that he will run her "with a speed unknown to all." He is, of course, killed when his engine hits a rock, but he gets a chance to expiate his sin by letting his fireman jump to safety while he stays behind "'to die for you and me.'" A recomposition of the ballad, "The Fatal Run" (ca. 1934, V271), is less forgiving: an additional stanza toward the beginning makes the Admonishing Mother's warning more a threat:

Frankie said to his mother, a sad look on his face
Mother dear my father's dead, I have to take his place
That is true my darling boy, be careful and don't be late
Your father didn't drive his engine right, that's how he met his fate.

(Cliff Carlisle, Decca 5398 [1935].)
In this version Frankie Lee pulls the throttle open "to watch that engine fly" and is soon struck dead by another train on "Dead Man's Curve."4

It is clear that the Admonishing Mother, when she appears in these songs, speaks with the force of natural authority, and her warnings are disobeyed only at the risk of moral ruin or death. To underscore this authority, the mother often reappears at the end of the song to lament her child's ruin or even to repeat her warning directly to the audience. In "Gambling on the Sabbath Day" (bef. 1889, V2h2), the condemned gambler's mother watches his execution, then cries out "God save and pity this gazin' crowd/That they may all be turned away/From gamblin' on the Sabbath day" (Randolph, 2:41-42). This type of conclusion is so conventional in ballads dealing with a criminal brought to justice that it frequently occurs in songs that otherwise have nothing to do with parent-child relations.5 In Andrew Jenkins's "Fate of Edward Hickman," for example, the condemned murderer's mother does not appear until the very last stanza:

There stood his anxious mother, with a teardrop in her eye
What a pity, what a pity that my precious son must die
Oh Edward, darling Edward, into your fateful doom
You'll be carried to a scaffold, to meet an awful doom.

("Blind Andy" [i.e., Rev. Andrew Jenkins], Okeh 54197 [ca. 3/28].)6

Even George Alley's mother makes a brief appearance in most versions of "The Wreck on the C. & O." to ask rhetorically, "'My son what have you done?'" and Frankie Lee's mother speaks an even more explicit moral: "Mister Engineer take warning, from that fate of that boy of mine/There's a-many poor man has lost his life, a-making up for lost time."7 In any case, this function of the Admonishing mother, as the
irreverent but always perceptive Samuel Hall has observed, is to politely say, "Sam, I told you so!"

In many songs, however, the Admonishing Mother does not appear, but in her place the song makes it clear that the child was "raised by honest parents," so his decision to leave home is in itself an act of disobedience. Many such songs open with a picture of the ideal home in which the criminal-to-be was raised. The narrator of "Bars, Bars" (1939, V256) recalls playing in his cradle while his mother sang lullabies—thus evoking the ideal home circle guarded by the Domestic Mother. Yet when he reached the teens he "thought [he] was so smart" that he began to frequent speakeasies (Dave McEnery [1939], pp. 42-43). In much the same way, "The Wandering Boy" (2) (1934, V095) was raised by parents that "petted this lad, and humored his wants/From the day that he was born . . . ." Yet as soon as the boy grew up, "he craved the noise of the city/The dazzling lights and the wine . . . (Goebel Reeves, ARC issues 35-09-11 [8/13/34]). No motivation is offered, but motivation in these songs is less important than defining immediately what the story is going to be about. The way we are introduced to a Reckless Child who is "On the pathway that leads down to hell" (V095) is simply by offering an example of his disobedience at the very outset.

ii. The Reckless Child

The most important scene in the Violation formula, however, is the one that follows: the entry of the innocent child into a life of sin,
shifting his allegiance from "home" to the more capricious "City" way of life. This is the process by which he becomes a Reckless Child: by committing acts that seem trivial in themselves, but which lead him directly to more vicious, anti-social acts. Occasionally there is a temptation scene, in which a demonic figure or a gang of "city folks" seduce the child into joining their company. In "The Drifter" (1929, V092), the child arrives in the city to meet "a painted lady," who invites him up to her apartment. There he finds that she is the "boss" of a dozen gangsters, who first fleece him of his bankroll at poker, then tell him, "come on kid, be game/We'll let youse join the gang..." (Goebel Reeves, Okeh 45365 [6/25/29]). Here hints of sex, gambling, and organized crime unite to strip the unwary child of his moral virginity. But such a scene is uncommon; more often the child simply meets up with an anonymous group of "bad companions," who gather round him in good times and drop him when he falls. The Reckless Child's initial "trivial sins" are standardized in early country tradition: for males they are drinking and gambling, for females, "wild living," a euphemism for sexual promiscuity. For both these sins are accompanied by minor acts of neglect, in particular a failure to stay in touch with Mother. But, as we shall see, all these trivial sins comprise "recklessness" precisely because they show the child denying his "home" morality and joining the alien "City" society. Once there, the child's ruin is certain: drinkers or gamblers die or kill others, promiscuous girls become prostitutes, and neglected parents fade away. Once the tradition is denied, that is, the Reckless Child's acts grow more and more deviant until he commits the climactic "fatal sin" that
brings down sure nemesis, social or supernatural, upon his head.

Drinking, gambling, or both together lead to the downfall of most male children. Doubtless there were historical reasons why these two practices were so strongly forbidden, while other sins like male fornication were not. Alcohol, for instance, was legally outlawed throughout the rural south for many years before and after nationwide Prohibition. But the songs are not particularly interested in describing the harmful effects of drunkenness or compulsive gambling; such activities represent only the outset of a life of sin that culminates, typically, in murder. The son in "Gambling on the Sabbath Day" begins his fall when he "scorns to hear a mother's prayers" and learns the art of dice and cards. One Sunday he suddenly draws a "bloody weapon" and stabs a comrade to death. Much the same progress occurs in later Violation plots, with varying motivations. "The Wandering Boy" starts out betting on horses, then, disappointed at his meager winnings, learns to cheat at cards. One day, "caught, with cards up his sleeve/He jerked his gun, and killed a gambling man..." The narrator of "I'm Just Here to Get My Baby Out of Jail, No. 2" (1936, V097) finds himself on the other side of the table: he sees a gambling man try to cheat him from "a crooked hand," catches him, then has to kill him in self-defense (Dixon Brothers, Bluebird B-6691 [10/13/36]). Drunkards follow the same path into a life of crime. "John Dillinger" (1935, V096) leaves his rural home and Mother to hang around "them City speaks" and starts "bummin' 'round with wimmen,/Drinking corn and apple-jack..." Finally he tells his mother, "I'm a leavin' a-never [sic] comin' back." Presumably high on apple-jack, he
robs a bank and kills three policemen (Roaming Ranger [1936], p. 25). In each case the killers soon suffer the consequences—only the Wandering Boy escapes for long, and even he, faced with the threat of certain execution, becomes a dope fiend.

Several songs do not present this entire progress from trivial to fatal sins. The narrator of "Bars, Bars" leaves his cradle to visit speakeasies, "where men and women came to drink outside the law . . . ." Suddenly we find him in prison for life. Even more abrupt is the story of "Crime Does Not Pay" (n.d., V243), in which the narrator leaves home "each night on my ramble," ignoring his mother's pleas. Without transition, he is in "a dark prison cell," awaiting the electric chair (Jenkins Sacred Songs TSS, C.5). The same sort of narrative gap occurs in many later versions of "Gambling on the Sabbath Day," in which the murder scene is absent, incongruously making the child's blue-law violation a capital crime. But the incongruity is only apparent: what is most significant about all these trivial sins is that they show the Reckless Child deliberately flouting his mother's instructions, and, in most cases, associating with the City crowd, "women and men/That he knew were lower down than swine" (V095). In this amoral society that encourages disrespect for tradition, the child starts to "ramble," and, as one child ruefully admits, "that is where I drifted and my trouble all began . . . (V256).

Because of social taboos against mentioning sexual intercourse, the progress of a Reckless Daughter could be described only through dark hints. The "lost sister" who loses her reputation "In the Heart of the City That Has No Heart" (1913, V322) is simply said to have gone
to town "And mingled with strangers there" until "The current of
vice . . . proved too strong . . ." (Emry Arthur and His Cumberland
Singers, Vocalion 5225 [ca. 1928]). "Somebody's Daughter" (1942, V337)
learns the wages of sin after "She went on joy rides and painted the
town, / And met with fast company . . ." (Bobby Gregory [1942a], p. 46).
The only song that explicitly states that the daughter was sexually
loose is "The Wayward Daughter" (bef. 1934, A025), where she is "A
lady of the evening" on trial. The kindly judge, who later proves to
be her father, tells her life's story:

She is not like her Mother,
And yet she might have been,
If it hadn't been for petting parties,
Cigarettes and drinking gin.

We took the night life off the streets,
And brought it in our homes.
Our girls beat time with lip-sticks.
To the screech of saxophones.
We opened up the underworld
To those we loved so well.
We made her what she is today—
Shall we send her to a cell?

(Loyle Pack [ca. 1934a], p. 38.)

Even so, all the girl is actually said to have done is smoke, drink,
paint her face, and listen to hot jazz. But the scene of the "petting
party," where the girls beat phallic lipsticks to the tune of
saxophones (sex-ophones?) shrieking orgasmically while underworlds open,
is probably as close as an early country song would come to describing
sex, at least in the moralistic mode. Yet the song also associates her
looseness with her joining the society of "fast company" and "night
life." It is not enough that she makes love to the boy next door:
she joins the more dangerous society of "strangers," who, along with
permissive parents, are responsible for making her "what she is today."

To give us an overview of how this particular stereotype functions in a whole song, let us turn to one of the most widespread Reckless Child ballads in folk tradition. "Bad Companions" (bef. 1925, V085,1) is one of several sentimental ballads in cowboy tradition, although it seems not to have been collected before traditional singer Carl T. Sprague recorded it commercially in 1925. Since then it has emerged in several parts of the country in versions not dependent on Sprague's recording, indicating that it had already enjoyed wide circulation before 1925. Sprague's text is as follows:

Come all you young companions
And listen unto me
I'll tell you all a sad story
Of some bad company
I was born in Pennsylvania
Among those beautiful hills
And the memory of my childhood
Is warm within me still.

I did not like my fireside
I did not like my home
I had in view far rambling
So far away did roam
I had a kind old mother
Who often would plead with me
And the last words that she gave me
Were to pray to God in need
I had two loving sisters
As kind and beautiful could be
And down on their knees before me
They prayed and wept for me.

I bade adieu to loved ones
To home I bid farewell
I landed in Chicago
The very depths of hell
'Twas there I took to drinking
I sinned both night and day
And yet within my bosom
That feeble voice would say
Oh fare thee well my loved one  
May God protect my boy  
And blessing e'er go with him  
Throughout his manhood joy.

I courted a fair young maiden  
Her name I will not tell  
For I would ever disgrace her  
As I am doomed for hell  
'Twas on one beautiful evening  
The stars was shining bright  
And with that fatal dagger  
I bid her spirit flight.

Then justice overtook me  
You all can plainly see  
My soul is doomed forever  
Throughout eternity  
'Tis now I'm on the scaffold  
My moments are not long  
You may forget the singer  
But don't forget the song.  
(Victor 19747 [8/4/25].)

Nearly all the elements of the Reckless Child's life of crime are present here: the childhood in a decent family, the child's reckless craving for "rambling," his trivial drinking in spite of his mother's echoing warning, and his sudden fall. The episode in which he suddenly takes up with a "fair young maiden" whom he as suddenly murders seems out of place only if we ignore the traditional formula. Once the Reckless Child has joined the "bad company," he is capable of anything; in this case he becomes a demonic "jealous lover" who murders an innocent girl and dams himself. In fact, the song is typically called "Bad Companions" or "Bad Company," yet no one but the narrator has his "sad story" told. The peculiar emphasis on "companions," though, serves to reinforce the formula's message: the main danger to the child is not so much alcoholism or compulsive gambling, it is moral transformation from the honest son of traditional parents to a doomed member of
"the bad company," or "the underworld." The fall of this Reckless Child is representative of all sons who turn their backs on home, as his final words suggest. The particular sinner being hanged is nobody in particular—it is the inerring pattern of sin and retribution that the listener must heed.

iii. The Suffering Mother

We have discussed the songs that show the Reckless Child committing sins against the tradition, but a body of songs, equally important, deal with sins of omission. In such songs the child refuses to do what he is expected to do: in particular, to show respect to his mother. Even when the story is told from the child's perspective, the things he does are expressed in fuzzy terms like "a wild and reckless life" (V084). Reckless sins like drinking, gambling, and painting the town are often mentioned, but in a different context than before. These songs make it clear that such acts are sins because they lead the child to forget his beloved mother. Most often this form of recklessness is described by a moralizing preacher-figure who chides the child for his failures:

Young man you left home and you went far away
You told your dear mother you'd come back some day
You said you would write her a letter each day
Some kind words to cheer her while you were away.

Now young man this promise you haven't quite kept
For day after day your dear mother has wept
It seems you have forgotten this dear friend so truc"Don't forget Mother" she won't forget you. . . .
("Don't Forget Mother," 1939, C335; The Tobacco Tags, Bluebird B-8351 [1939].)
The Reckless Child, it seems, is always seen from the perspective of the home. He has gone beyond the pale of his own society into a life that is little concerned with tradition. It is the child's implicit rejection of his home that creates the main conflict in these songs.

The most clearly defined figure in this formula is the Suffering Mother, who watches her child disappear from her view and mourns his loss, longing to restore him to the fold. Indeed, in these plots, her suffering is the fact that certifies the child's deeds as reckless. As it becomes conspicuous, it acts as the main psychological weapon by which the mother converts her child to his natural duties. The most frequent act of suffering seems at first entirely passive: she waits for the letter that never comes. In the song cited above, she weeps "day after day," while the neglected mother in "The Old Ladies' Home" (1932, VI62) is content to say, "It seems that the postman stopped coming this way" (Jimmy Wakeley, Decca [Australian] X1959 [ca. 1932]). In a few songs she even conceals her suffering, but in vain, for there is always a preacher-figure nearby who interprets her actions:

Has someone forgotten?
Sweet old Lady,
'Tho [sic] you won't admit it,
It's easy to see.
You're patiently watching from earliest dawn,
Expecting a letter from those who are gone.
You anxiously watch the Mailman go by,
You're counting his footsteps while your heart seems to die,
And all that you ask is a line that will tell,
That they've not forgotten,
And that they're all well.
("Has Someone Forgotten?" 1938, VI66; Elton Britt [1938], pp. 48-49.)

As in "The Mailman's Warning" (discussed on pp. 29-32), the Suffering Mother is Christ-like in her forgiveness. Alone "with a Cross that's
"heavy," she still carries on silently, "Adoring and loving/The one's [sic] who forgot." But it's easy to see and interpret her suffering. In most songs the preacher-figure concludes (or in one case begins) by making an explicit moral accusation: "I'm sending this plea to the sons who forget/To remind them they owe their poor mother a debt" (V162).

If the child remains too long beyond the pale, or if he refuses to heed the mother's or preacher-figure's plea, his neglect may shade into a more serious crime. If the mother dies while the child is absent, then, as one evangelist exclaimed, "Before the judgment seat you will be charged with murder--deliberate murder--the breaking of your mother's heart . . . ." In "The Drifter" (1) (1929, V092), the Reckless Son spends twenty years in jail without contacting his mother. After his release he finally sends a letter, but it returns to him unclaimed. After rushing back to find that his home has completely vanished, he learns that his parents "had many many years been dead/Died of sadness and grief they said/Brought on by a wayward lad." In despair, the drifter sets out for an endless life on the beat. Many songs also follow the pattern of condensation observed in crime narratives, making a seemingly insignificant act lead immediately to the mother's death. In "Three Thousand Miles from Home" (1936, V098), a cowboy ignores his family's request that he stay and help with the chores, even when his ailing mother warns him, "I'd rather you'd stay at home . . . ." Without transition the fall occurs:

But I didn't take heed to Mother
Not even one word she said
Now I'm just a rambling cowboy
My parents both are dead.

(Roy Schaffer, Decca 5274 [1936].)
More often, though, the Reckless Child gets one last chance to turn back home. In "A Mother's Welcome" (1892, VO84), a "wayward boy" runs off to sea "to spite his mother's tears." Although he sends no letters home, he occasionally sees in dreams "his dear old mother's face/And sadly she would weep." But he delays, and when he finally returns, longing for peace and rest, he finds that "like a flower neglected/She had faded away and died . . . ("The Wayward Boy," Charlie Poole, Columbia 15456 [1929]).

That this kind of neglect is equivalent to the social crimes committed by drunkards and gamblers is clear enough in songs containing a preacher-figure. We have already noted the conclusion of "The Mailman's Warning," in which the Reckless Child is told that even if he repents, he cannot escape hell. Less harsh, but equally explicit is the judgment in another Red Foley song (written in collaboration with Jenny Lou Carson), titled "There's a Wreath on the Door" (1941, V168). In it, the narrator informs his brother that their mother has just died, and he continues to explain why:

If you'd only written,
She might yet be here.
She hadn't heard from you
For over three years,
You left us while angry
And didn't repent:
Her poor heart was broken
Three years thus she spent.

I don't hold against you
The cruel things you did.
I know now you're sorry
I know that you're sad,
For brother, you loved her
As much as did I,
But what you were doing
You didn't realize.
The forgiveness in the second stanza quoted, clearly vindictive, emphasizes the cruelty of three years of such neglect, and the song concludes, not with a last word to the brother, but with a general warning to "You who are roamers" to write home before it's too late (Red Foley [1941], p. 11). A more extreme example of neglect leading to fatal sin is "The Holiness Mother" (1936, V165). Here Mother Mc Crea [sic] attends a holiness church to pray for her rich sons who stay "In the taverns each night making gay . . . ." When they hear of her acts, they "cruelly cast her out," and she soon dies of a broken heart.

"Her own soul was clean, pure and sound," the preacher-figure comments, and he predicts that on Judgment Day the sons will "weep o'er her green grassy mound" and beg God to "give back dear Mother Mc Crea" (Doc Hopkins [1936], p. 8). Given the severity with which the moralistic tradition punishes ungrateful children, it is doubtful the God will hear their prayers.

The most popular of the songs that used the Suffering Mother stereotype during this period was Bob Miller's "Rockin' Alone (In an Old Rocking Chair)" (1932, V163). It began its career in uptown arrangements by performers like Frank Luther, but was later adopted by many traditionally oriented artists. The original published text is as follows:

Sitting alone in' [sic] an old rockin' chair,
I saw an old mother with silvery hair,
She seem'd so neglected by those who should care.
Rockin' alone in an old rockin' chair.
Her hands were calloused and wrinkled and old.
A life of hard work was the story they told.
And I thought of Angels as I saw her there.
Rockin' alone in an old rockin' chair.
Bless her old heart, do you think she'd complain?
Tho' life has been bitter, she'd live it again.
And carry that Cross that is more than her share.
Rockin' alone in an old rockin' chair.
It wouldn't take much to gladden her heart.
Just some small remembrance on somebody's part.
A letter would brighten her empty life there.
Rockin' alone in an old rockin' chair.

I know some youngsters in an orphan's home,
Who'd think they owned Heaven, if she was their own.
They'd never be willing to let her sit there.
Rockin' alone in an old rockin' chair.
I look at her and I think what a shame.
The ones who forgot her she loves just the same.
And I think of Angels as I see her there.
Rockin' alone in an old rockin' chair.

(Bob Miller [1934b], pp. 4-5.)*

The song comes close to being an encomium, with the mother less a character than a religious icon. Christ-like she carries a "Cross that is more than her share," leading the preacher-figure to compare her to "Angels" and the orphans to "think they owned Heaven." Similarly, she "loves just the same" those who know not what they do. But although the song is strongly celebratory in nature, it is still a dramatic tableau, one that implies a past in which the Suffering Mother was "neglected by those who should care" as well as a future in which the promised letter might "brighten her empty life there." Characteristically, the Suffering Mother does not complain, but the preacher-figure steps in to make her forgiveness vindictive, placing the burden on the audience by suggesting they are wronging an Angel. A recitation sometimes added to the song makes this warning direct:

You'll only have one mother boy
No one her place can take
'Twill be too late when she is gone
Write, just for her sweet sake

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She'll take you to her warm heart still if you've gone to the bad
Don't be ashamed to call her name
Drop her a line my lad.
(Jack Savage, Decca [Australian] X1288 [1937].)\textsuperscript{11}

Neglect, as in the other songs surveyed, is equated with "going to the bad," and once Mother has died out of the Reckless Child's life, no one can replace her. The child then is in the position of the orphans, who have never possessed the heavenly home circle the Reckless Child is in danger of rejecting but may still regain for the asking: "They'd never be willing to let her sit there." Nor should the Reckless Child.

iv. The Fallen Child

Just as the various crimes are variations of a single violation—defying traditional mores—so the various punishments are ultimately types of a single sanction—exclusion from "home." Occasionally the Reckless Child is physically confined or even executed by the law, but more often his punishment is spiritual, much like the Catholic state of "despair," in which he recognizes that his life is depraved, yet cannot gather the force to change his ways. Thus he is forced to live away from home, outside the tradition that would give him a final goal or refuge. This figure, whom I term the Fallen Child, appears as a moralizing "voice from the abyss," warning his fellows away from the path that led to his fall. Such a warning is "The Dying Boy" (bef. 1937, V292), in which the Reckless Child commits the seemingly insignificant sin of going to a dance. On his deathbed, bound for hell, he recalls that "The other night as I left the meeting/God's spirit bade me stay." Nevertheless, he chose to put
off the call and "get converted" later on, after one more chance to "dance with the gay" (Randolph, 4:21-22).

The real sin, it becomes clear, is not "dancing" per se, just as in songs discussed previously it is not drinking, gambling, beating lipsticks, or failing to write home per se. It is the choice of a life ruled by one's personal caprice, thus rejecting "God's spirit," or socially-defined limits on behavior. But this decision, once made, cannot be reversed by a simple act of will. Alcohol, dice, and sex (at least as they are presented in these songs) are all hopelessly habit-forming: the first beer leads to alcoholism, the first wager leads to reckless betting, and the breaking of the maidenhead leads to prostitution. In much the same way, once a child disregards a mother's plea, is is in danger of losing her altogether. "The Dying Boy" carries the child from trivial wilfulness to damnation in a few days, but the same formula underlies all Violation plots. Once the child rejects the call of traditional morality, he is, ironically, no longer at liberty to save himself, but must travel to paths straight to hell unless pulled off it by a Redeemer like his mother. Such a recognition is placed in one Fallen Child's mouth:

Mother dear, Mother dear,
Oh, if only you were near,
To guide and guard me from the paths of sin;
I have played my cards and lost, and my soul has paid the cost,
And the freedom of my heart, has died within.
("Mother Dear," 1941, V336; Jack Turner [1942], p. 35.)

At worst, the child is on the verge of death, spending his last moments on earth admitting his guilt and warning others to avoid his fate. The later, more extensive version of "Gambling on the Sabbath Day" includes a lengthy gallows speech in which the condemned prisoner
admits to his mother that he disobeyed her advice and tells his sister that he will soon be among the demons in hell. The end of his speech, however, is addressed to his wife, telling her to teach their child

... how he should be,
How he should do and care for thee;
And every night to kneel and pray,
That you may meet in heaven some day.

The Fallen Child in "The Gambler's Dying Words" (bef. 1927, V291) acts in the same way. Although he is not executed for his sins, he is stricken ill at the gambling table and finds that he cannot pray—a sure sign that he is now damned. He then admits to "the man who ran the game," a demonic figure, that "I now see my mistake,/I've always thought I was a fool, my conscience has me told,/While I've been trying to beat someone, the devil has won my soul." After telling his mother, "I've done made Hell my home," he concludes by warning his fellows, "if you do not change, I'll see you when you come to Hell" (New Lost City Ramblers Song Book, pp. 98-99).

But these melodramatic scenes are only heightened versions of the more usual punishment, in which the Fallen Child finds himself unable to return home, whether he is shut up in a prison or is simply "three thousand miles from home." The punishment is less a sanction placed on the child by society than a spiritual exile that he recognizes and accepts. The narrator of "When It's Lamp Lightin' Time in the Valley" (1930, PO88) longs to be home with his mother, but he realizes that he has "sinned 'gainst [his] home and [his] loved ones/And now [he] must ever more roam." His punishment is less than damnation, as he still hopes to change his ways and meet his mother "Up in Heaven when life's race is run" (Round-Up Memories [ca. 1954], pp. 16-18), but few Fallen
Children are so hopeful. In "They're All Going Home but One" (1936, V251), the narrator is one of five boys who left home to try their luck in the City. On their scheduled day of return, four prove loyal and come home to Mother. But the narrator, who has wound up in prison, bitterly sees himself as "the one that disgraced her/A criminal better off dead" (Doc Hopkins [1936], pp. 12-13. He mentions no hopes of seeing Mother again, in this life or the next. The most extended expression of this despair was included as a recitation to Bob Miller's "My Mother's Tears" (1933, V325). The song is the confession of a son who has, ironically, done quite well in the City, but who at last recognizes that his life is spiritually bankrupt. Seeing himself as nothing but "a bad black sheep," he longs to be with his Suffering Mother once more:

And I remember growing up ... and how thru smiles you cried,  
And then one day, I went away, roaming far and wide,  
I searched the earth for gold, and fame, and things I thought were nice;  
And all these things I now possess ... but it isn't worth the price.

Life seems empty, and I've been so bored,  
For I know I've lost something that can't be restored.  
I'd give back all the gold, Mother, I'd give back all the fame—  
I'd gladly give my very soul ... just to kiss you ... once again.  
(Bob Miller [1933], p. 65.)

One of the most consistent features of the "fallen" state of mind, though, is the child's refusal to contact his mother, even when it would be to his advantage to do so. In "I'm Just Here to Get My Baby Out of Jail, No. 2," the Redeemer Mother has to seek her child out without any clues from him, for once he is in the pen, he keeps his silence: "I wouldn't let my mother hear from me/I wouldn't write her . . . ."

Considering that failure to write was often treated as a dangerous
sin, one would expect the song tradition to condemn such decisions. But songs rarely do. In fact, one song, "Please Don't Tell My Mother" (1938, V254), includes an observer much like the preacher-figures we have examined before. The Fallen Child, a convicted lifer, begs him:

Don't tell my mother where I am,
Don't ever let her know.

Please don't tell my mother
I am doing time
Tell her not to worry
I'm well and doing fine
Tell her I'll come back some day and nevermore will part,
Please don't tell my mother
I don't want to break her heart.

(Gene Autry [1938], p. 27.)

The observer, far from being surprised or anxious over his friend's decision, agrees at once to keep the secret and even returns years later to take the convict's body to "a lonesome graveyard far away" so that the secret will remain hidden. A somewhat more ambivalent choice is made by the gambler in "Old Black Sheep" (bef. 1927, VO86), when his honest brother begs him to leave his sins and return home. His mother, he learns, is praying night and day "that he be made to see /The error of his ways ..." and the honest brother even warns him, "You killed our dear old father/Now you'll break poor mother's heart ..." Still the gambler promises only to "do the best I can/But I will ne'er go home again/Till I'm an honest man" (McFarland & Gardner, Vocalion 5120 [1927]). What these Fallen Children seem most concerned about is avoiding direct contact with the moral custodian they have "disgraced." Their most common excuse is "I don't want to break her heart," but since often her heart is already breaking, the actual motive must be more complex. Such children perhaps fear
learning what they already suspect—that the society they rejected is now ready to reject them in turn if they attempt to return as anything less than "honest men."

This conclusion does explain many of the unspoken elements in Paul Dresser's mysterious song, "Just Tell Them That You Saw Me" (1895, V321.1). An enormous success during the 1890s, the song not only survived in hillbilly recordings, but established itself in rural folk tradition as well. The plot is unusually elliptical: the narrator is walking down the street when he happens on Madge, an old schoolmate "in a village far away." At first she turns aside, but when the narrator follows her, asking if she would like to send a message home, she simply replies:

"Just tell them that you saw me,"
She said, "they'll know the rest,
Just tell them I was looking well you know,
Just whisper if you get a chance to mother dear, and say,—
I love her as I did long, long ago."
(Paul Dresser [1927], pp. 12-15.)

The song is unusually difficult to interpret, as it shows a rare sentimental use of irony. It is possible, of course, that the song means what it says: the girl is doing quite well, thank you, and she will go home when she pleases: "'Tis pride alone that's keeping me away./Just tell them not to worry, for I'm all-right don't you know . . . ." Indeed, the brisk, unemotional performance by Clayton McMiken's Georgia Wildcats (Decca 5765 [1939]) suggests as much. But the story of its writing, during which Dresser openly broke down and wept, along with mournful performances by Vernon Dalhart (Challenge 167 [bef. 1930]) and the McCravy Brothers (Panachord 25358
[1931]), suggest that a more tragic plot is implied. Dalhart, who probably represents the music-hall performance tradition, sings the song's last lines, in which Madge assures her friend that she is "all-right," with such violent shifts in emphasis and with so poignant a tone that it is clear that the girl is trying to hide the real truth. Once this is assumed, we see that Madge is playing a role much like the convicts who ask their confidants to lie to their mothers. Although she sends word that she is "looking well," in fact the friend is shocked at her appearance: "'Your cheeks are pale, your face is thin, come tell me were you ill . . . ." The marks of sin (presumably prostitution) are plain on her face, and other contemporary songs, like "Fallen by the Wayside" (1892, V321), make it certain that her parents would indeed reject her if she did try to return: "Every door has closed against her/Not a friend for her will mourn . . . ." (Charlie Poole, Columbia 15179 [1926]). But Madge's real punishment is to love her mother as she did "long, long ago," when she was still an innocent child in the home circle; she may long to see them again, but at the same time she is trapped in a perpetual state of "not just yet." Her pride, or perhaps her fear of social realities, is part of her fate, and she now must learn to live outside the village now that she has drifted beyond recall. By choosing to live apart from the tradition, she, like other Fallen Children, has become trapped in a life of "drifting," of aimless, profitless activity without ultimate direction. Unless rescued by a representative of morality, she can never regain that state of grace once hers "long, long ago."
v. Intervention

So far we have seen the Violation plots as irreversible, leading inexorably from the home circle to disaster. But while the country song tradition always implies such a motion, individual songs often twist the plot back upward to a happy conclusion. A Peckless or Fallen Child, on occasion, is reformed by a Redeemer Mother, who brings him back to his moral senses. This plot element, which I have termed Intervention, is unlike the other functions surveyed in this chapter in that its narrative position is not fixed. While a child cannot fall unless he has first committed a trivial sin, nor can a sin be committed before an Admonishing Mother has given her warning, Intervention can drop into a Violation plot at any point, even at the very end, and still provide the story with a conventional ending. Its purpose, however, is not to provide a facile consolation, but rather to reassert the tradition's capacity to conquer and undo the problems caused by an individual's rebellion. By reintegrating even a Fallen Child, it proves that it can handle deviants as well as exclude them. Thus the moral of such songs is not denied when a life of sin still results in happiness, for the forces of morality are simply stronger than those of perversity.

But Intervention is by no means automatic, as many songs present it as promised but unaccepted, or even as unsuccessful. And even when the child is rescued, the society he reenters is not the same that he left. Some punishment, usually the mother's death, is still necessary. A large number of songs dramatize the mother's Intervention as an
unanswered plea, with no direct response from the child. The tradition that followed "Where Is My Boy To-Night" (discussed on pp. 64-65), presents only the mother's resolve to send someone after her boy and "bring him to me with all his blight . . . ." The more widespread song, "The Wandering Boy" (l) (bef. 1911, P150), makes it clearer that, although the son has promised to meet his mother "in that bright land so fair . . . ." now he is "far away from home" with "No one to guide him or keep his footsteps right . . . ." The mother begs someone to "search till you find him and bring him back to me . . . ." and admits that if she could only once "fold him to my breast:/Gladly I'd close my eyes and be at rest" (Loye Pack [ca. 1934a], pp. 53-54). The "someone" is more clearly dramatized in a later song, "A Mother's Plea" (1928, V161), in which the narrator chances on "A broken hearted woman,/A mother old and grey . . . ." Learning that he has just returned from visiting his daughter in the City, she begins weeping, for she has not heard from her own daughter since she too went to the City. She makes this plea:

If you should see my baby,
Please tell her to come home,
Her mother's heart is broken,
Since she has gone to roam;
No matter what has happened,
There's nothing she can fear,
Her mother's arms are waiting,
To hold her baby near.

(Carson Robison [1936a], p. 56.)

At the end, though, she warns the narrator to "send her to me quickly . . . I'm getting old and feeble,/And she might come too late." But both songs end on unresolved notes: the plea is presented, but no child's reply is given. This is appropriate to this kind of song,
though, since the song itself acts an an Intervention for those Reckless Children who happen to be in the audience. The narrative conclusions of such songs must be supplied in real life by the individual listener.

Yet songs like those surveyed in the previous section point out that even such an appeal may not be enough to save a child beyond recall. Even if we assume that both pleas are successful, moreover, the child must return to a home different from that he left. True, the mothers love their children in the same way, and the wandering boy's mother has even saved his baby shoes and cradle. But both are close to death, and if they rejoin their children, it may well be for the conventional "last embrace" before the child is again left "homeless" in the world. The homelessness will be only literal, for the mother in these songs acts as the representative of domesticity, not renewed childhood. She does not hope to draw her child back to the homestead and keep him there, but to offer him a chance to stop his aimless drifting and "settle down" in a lifestyle acceptable to his soon-to-be-Angel Mother.

Occasionally the Redeemer Mother's Intervention meets a positive response, but it is too late: the child has slipped beyond saving, or the mother has already died. The narrator of "The Crepe on the Little Cabin Door" (1926, V089) led a sinful life that broke his mother's heart, until at last she wrote a desperate letter, begging him to "come home to see me/Before I go away/Oh I fear I'll never see you any more . . ." The Reckless Child nevertheless "tarried day by day/Just wasting time on women wine and song . . ." until he returned to find her funeral crepe on the cottage door. Only then did he
recognize that "This kind of sinful pleasure/Lasts only for a day/And the sorrows of repentance last so long" (Vernon Dalhart, Victor 20387 [10/20/26]). The mother of "The Dying Boy" does not fade away, but the Fallen Child learns the same lesson. Having put off God's call "in fun," he suddenly finds himself dying in earnest. He asks his mother to pray for his soul, and she consents: "She knelt there and in a voice that trembled/She asked God to save her boy . . . ." But the son's dying words are "I perish, I am past eternal joy," and the preacher-figure warns his "unsaved friends" to come to God at once, for "You may call for mother's prayers/Only when it is too late."

Such songs make it clear that Intervention puts the responsibility on the child, not on the Christian Mother. When the "call" comes, whether through a letter, or a mysterious voice, or (let us not forget) an appropriate song, it must be obeyed at once, or else the child may fall still farther beyond redemption.

Indeed, it is rare to find a song in which the child is restored to his original grace without some loss. That is, Intervention rarely occurs without some moral sanction attached. The punishment is less than it might be: a child may be liberated from prison or sin by Mother's prayers, but his release is linked to the mother's death, leaving him to follow the path of morality without direct guidance for the rest of his life. Still outside the original home circle, he now has the spiritual capability to follow in Mother's footsteps and rejoin her in the new, eternal homestead in the afterlife. A typical plot of this sort is "Gambler's Return" (1932, P54), which opens with the narrator lost "so far away" in a gambling hell, where he, like
the other gamblers, is aimlessly "coming to and fro . . . ." Suddenly a lad appears to tell him, "your dear old mother's mighty low," and at once he leaves his comrades and heads for his home town. At the depot he greets "Friends . . . that I had not seen for many years . . . ."--his home society--but at the same time his father informs him that his mother now is dead. As she died, though, she "Said her heart would beat with joy/If she could meet you in the angel's home." Regenerate, the narrator kneels by her coffin and vows "to meet her in eternity" (Jimmie Davis, Victor 23778 [11/4/32]). The same plot, with some supernatural additions, occurs in "Your Mother Still Prays for You, Jack" (bef. 1925, P540). After an introductory scene in which an aged mother is shown gazing at her lost child's portrait and praying for him, the scene shifts to a "foreign land," where Jack, a rough soldier, decides to attend a "meeting" (presumably a revival) that night. While there, "something stirred the wild Jack's heart as sweetly the soldiers sung." Immediately after, the child receives a letter informing him that his mother died, asking "her boy thats [sic] roaming/To meet her on the streets of gold" (Loye Pack [ca. 1934b], pp. 13-14).13 A recomposition of this song, "Cowboy's Mother" (2) (1938, P545), makes it clearer that the mother's death supernaturally touches her child's heart:

A cowboy out West lay a-dreaming
Of a home and a mother so dear,
He dreamed that he heard her a-calling,
And he wiped from her sad face, a tear.
He fondled her close to his bosom,
In his dream that night as he lay;
Next morning he read the sad message:
The angels took Mother away . . . .

(Wilf Carter [1938c], pp. 12-13.)
the song ends with the child's lament, but it is clear that the mother's
dying prediction will come true: "My boy I'll meet you in Heaven/For­
ever we'll live happily."

The effect of the Intervention function, then, is much the same as
analogous acts in Assistance plots, in that the child is "saved" from
the consequences of his aimless actions. He is resocialized, not
into perpetual childhood, but into an independent social life within
the home tradition. In addition, he is given new hopes of an eternal
home in the afterlife, where he can fondle his mother to his bosom for­
ever, but the songs leave him, not pinned to his mother's apron, but
beside her coffin or on the believers' bench. For the ideal flouted
by the Reckless Child is not one that expects him to remain passively
within the original home circle, but one that demands that he perpetuate
traditional mores that inform the home circle. Through Intervention,
the child becomes an active follower of Mother, on the road through
life to the afterworld, careful to avoid breaking her interdictions
a second time.

An excellent illustration of how Interdiction operates within an
early country song is Slim Bryant's "Mother, Queen of My Heart" (1932,
V094). One of the most popular of Jimmie Rodgers's recordings, it
was covered by a variety of performers and has been collected from
oral tradition throughout the South. Rodgers's recorded text is as
follows:

I had a home out in Texas
Down where the bluebonnets grew
I had the kindest old mother
How happy we were just we two
Till one day the angels called her
That debt we all have to pay
She called me close to her bedside
The last few words to say.

Son don't start drinking and gambling
Promise you'll always go straight
Ten years have passed since that parting
That promise I broke I must state
I started gambling for pastime
At last I was just like them all
I bet my clothes and my money
Not dreaming that I'd ever fall.

One night I bet all my money
Nothing was left to be seen
And all that I needed to break them
Was one card and that was a queen
The cards were dealt all round the table
Each man took a card on the draw
I drew the one that would beat them
I turned it and here's what I saw.

I saw my mother's picture
And somehow she seemed to say
Son you have broken your promise
So I tossed the cards away
My winnings I gave to a newsboy
I knew I was wrong from the start
And I'll never forget that promise
To my mother the queen of my heart.
[Yodel.]
(Victor 23721 [8/11/32].)*

This song's popularity is due to the extraordinary craft with which it was put together. The first lines of the stanzas, for instance, outline the critical stages of the narrative—the initial situation, the interdiction, the violation, and the mother's intervention—while the rest of the stanzas develop these scenes along formulaic lines. The last lines of the first three stanzas, on the other hand, deliberately evade closure, drawing the audience on to expect "The last few words," the "fall," and "what I saw." This tight structure, confirmed by the

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way in which the song's last line circles back to the title, makes "Mother, Queen of My Heart" one of the most artistic of the early country songs. In addition, while the content is nearly all conventional in outline, the conventions are realized with a richness of detail that few mother songs could match. The mother's "last words," to be sure, echo the traditional warning against "drinking and gambling," while the son's fall moves from the trivial "gambling for pastime" to the near-fatal joining of the bad company, gambling recklessly "just like them all." But few songs included so dramatic a central scene as the poker game, in which the narrator stakes his entire bankroll on the hope of a single card. His opponents, as usual, need no characterization, for the Reckless Child (like his unlucky counterpart in "The Gambler's Dying Words") is gambling for his soul with the devil. Such a gamble relates to a widespread folk motif (Thompson E756.2), and it is significant that Bryant took his plot from a "story" he overheard as a child.\textsuperscript{14} What the narrator draws, then, is not only the card he needs to win his bet ("the queen of hearts"), but the one influence that could save him from damnation, his mother's moral direction ("the queen of my heart"). The child tosses his cards away, but, paradoxically, he wins his wager and walks away, "winnings" in hand. This explains how he can still offer his money to a poor newsboy\textsuperscript{15} even though, as any gambler knows, tossing in one's cards forfeits any chance of winning the pot. But what the child has won is another chance at living a clean life, and he marks the end of his gambling days by offering his money as an act of charity, instead of making a still more reckless bet. He has changed his ways, and proved that he
will "never forget that promise" to the moral tradition that now rules his heart.

vi. Conclusions: Formula vs. Stereotype

To conclude the discussion of the Violation formula, let us turn to a final song, one that at first might seem to contradict much of what has been said about mother-child roles in country tradition. In 1944, Eddy Arnold recorded his first commercial hit record, a sentimental song called "Mommy Please Stay Home with Me" (V032). The song has since remained a standard, even though it completely reverses the roles I have described as traditional:

A mother went out on a party,
She left at home her baby son,
He cried and begged her not to leave him,
But she would not give up her fun;
She kissed his cheek and tried to soothe him,
But would not heed his childish plea,
She heard him call as she was leaving,
"Please, Mommy, please stay home with me."

The mother joined the merry makers,
And soon was lost in trifling joy,
The mellow tunes and flitting shadows,
Made her forget her baby boy;
She danced and laughed and did some drinking,
The world for her was full of glee,
But now and then these words would haunt her,
"Please, Mommy, please stay home with me."

She left the party feeling dizzy,
The smell of drink was on her breath,
She hurried home to find her baby,
In raging pain and nearing death,
The doctor came and looked on sadly,
The case was hopeless he could see,
The baby died these words repeating,
"Please, Mommy, please stay home with me."
The mother now her life would forfeit,
To hear her baby's voice again,
She grieves to think she rudely left him,
To satisfy her wishes vain;
Now mothers' [sic] don't neglect your duty,
This story should a lesson be,
Do not ignore your baby's pleading,
"Please, Mommy, please stay home with me."
(Eddy Arnold [1944], pp. 16-17.)

All the conventional elements in the Violation formula are here: the
Reckless Mother leaves home in spite of her Suffering Child's plea
(Interdiction/Violation), and joins the bad company of merry-makers,
committing trivial sins of drinking and dancing. Haunted by her child's
words (attempted Intervention), she has a chance to give up her reck-
lessness, but returns home only too late: the child dies repeating his
Interdiction, and the mother is left in a Fallen life that she would
gladly "forfeit." One can justly say that "Mommy Please Stay Home
with Me" is an ultra-conventional song, as it touches every base of
previous conventions save one: the conventional stereotypes.

How significant is this reversal of roles? To a folklorist, it
may be no reversal at all, for the oldest British ballad tradition
included Reckless Mothers who, anxious to conceal their pregnancies,
go so far as to murder their babies, who, in at least one ballad,
reappear to damn her to hell. Even within the sentimental tradition
a few mothers appear who are unworthy of the ideal. In "There'll Come
a Time" (1895, V120), an innocent daughter learns from her father that
her mother long ago "Vanished from sight" after running off with
another man; later she returned, but only to die of her sins. (Doc Hop-
kins [1936], pp. 17-18). An even closer parallel to "Mommy Please"
is the story of "Little Mamie" (bef. 1900, P037), in which a dying child recalls how her mother once angrily told her she "was always in [her] way." Although the child admits that the mother "was sorry in a moment," she still passes on this warning:

"When my baby sister calls me
And you hear my voice no more,
When she plays among the roses
By our little cottage door
Never chide her when you angry,
Do it kindly and in love
That you both may dwell with Mamie
In the shining land above."

("When the Parley Dew Is Faded," Arnold, p. 59.)

It seems there was an undercurrent of songs that warned mothers to live up to moral duties, so the Reckless Mother was not entirely new to the Violation formula. Still, these songs comprised a tiny portion of the song tradition, and not a very stable one at that. "Little Mamie" was never performed or recorded commercially, and has been recovered from tradition only twice, while "There'll Come a Time" circulated most widely in a truncated version that did not include the stanza detailing the mother's sins. In this version, the child merely asks about her dead mother, and the father puts her off, implying that she will know more some day. A song featuring a Reckless Mother did not contradict the tradition, but for one to suddenly become a hit song is still an unusual event.

Before 1944 the stereotype of the Christian, Domestic, Suffering Mother was a conventional force that was stronger than the pull of the Violation formula. Children approaching adulthood needed moral reminders to keep them in their proper social place. Mother, on the other hand, was largely exempt from such reminders. She was the tradition, by and
large, and often she and the home circle were indistinguishable. When
a song appeared that warned even the symbol of the home tradition to
"stay at home," we can surmise that the old stereotypes by this time had
weakened. In fact, as we have seen, the war-time years were a time when
women, by necessity, had to take over masculine roles in society, and
many moralists worried that once women were sullied by contact with
the City, they would be prone to neglect their proper duties as mothers.
Indeed, some people today trace social problems to this breakdown in
traditional stereotypes:

I'd like to see some of this here crime and racket done away with.
There's getting to be too much of it. Now that's one thing that I
would love to see changed. I'll tell you one thing, and I'm going
to be frank with you. I've thought this ever since the second World
War. The mothers went to work on these here defense plants and
things in place of staying at home and taking care of the children.
of course, [the country] needed some help, and everybody pitched
in and helped all they could during the War. 'Course that's some­
th ing you kids don't know nothing about. Well, it left the child­
ren by theirselves. I think they just didn't have enough discipline
in other words, and they felt they weren't taken care of like they
should have been. Now I'd love to see more mothers stay at home.19

At the time, though, songwriters like Wally Fowler, one of the colla­
borators on this song, had already become concerned with the real-life
mother who is "always running around, going out at night and leaving her
seven- or eight-year-old daughter at home alone."20 That mothers now
needed to be warned, of course, did not mean that the ideal of Mother­
hood was in danger, but rather that larger numbers of individuals were
defying such an ideal. The City now was making inroads to females as
well as males, and the Violation formula accordingly grew by one more
variation: the Reckless Mother.

The case of "Mommy Please Stay Home with Me" offers us a perspec­
tive on the Violation formula that transcends the specific concerns of
mother-child relations. The sin it attacks is at once rather vague ("Her wishes vain") and yet definite ("don't neglect your duty"). In other words, the sin can be any number of self-indulgent acts, but the reason it is sin is constant: it defies socially-defined duties. It matters only that the sinner turn his back on his defined place in the community and choose a way of life based on "fun." Violation, then, instructs its listeners to remain loyal to their social positions at the same time as it shows what doom lies beyond the verge. Such instruction, as we have seen, nearly always comes from the mother or from a preacher-figure allied with her. But when, at the end of our period, songwriters like Wally Fowler felt Mother needed instruction as well, the formula could create new stereotypes in order to resocialize erring mothers as well as erring children. It is the innocent child in "Mommy Please" that warns the sinful mother, deriving his authority from the conscience God gave him, and reminding us that no one is exempt from his God given duties, not even Mom. The social force behind the Violation formula is finally stronger than even the strongest stereotype. The formula's basic purpose is everywhere the same: to perpetuate traditional mores by presenting (in Abrahams's words) "a movement of actions stamped by all with a sense of approval or disapproval."

We see, then, that this formula acts rhetorically, as Abrahams suggested, to reaffirm conventional mores and duties, and, in general, it guarantees that authority figures will be respected, so long as they represent the tradition. One might also observe that Violation operates on a broader level as well, one that protects the artistic
integrity (or, as Kenneth Burke might say, the dramatistic perfection)\textsuperscript{21} of the tradition itself. From our discussion it has become clear that virtue (the tradition) is far less defined than sin (defiance). When a child drinks, or turns his back on his mother, he is definitely committing a sin, even if the motives behind calling it so are not expressed in the song. But the most important virtues opposed to such sins are negative in nature. A good child does not drink, gamble, or leave home; he obeys orders without delay. Even the few positive injunctions, such as writing or visiting Mother, are signs that the child has not abandoned her and wants to avoid breaking her heart. It is fair to say that the moral tradition described in these songs is negative in nature, a way of gaining heaven by avoiding hell.

Yet it is hell, in these songs, that is fully described and which gives shape to heaven. The City is essentially a confining, meaningless world where dwellers drift and wander with no final goals, looking only for a moment of passing fun. The virtuous believer stands outside this society within a tradition that by definition contains certain meaning and goals. It places the individual clearly between heaven and hell, and points him, however vaguely, toward "home." The power to reject "flitting shadows," no matter how concretely they are described, simultaneously tells the believer that his social role is solid, goal-directed, and spiritually satisfying. In this sense, the Violation formula shows us a society anxious to project fears of sterility, repression, and meaningless onto a convenient scapegoat: the City and its "bad company." Only by directing attention to such a scapegoat can it prove its own attractiveness and compete for
believers in a pluralistic world. Perhaps, then, it is necessary for a mother's children to act recklessly, regardless of how well she may teach them. For Mother's purity and moral authority cannot be defined except through negative example: she does not live in the world "outside" the tradition, and she does not break the rules and meet the dooms of her children. If Reckless Children did not forget her song, the formula—and the lessons it embodies—simply would not exist.
Notes to Chapter Five

1 V. Propp does admit that his "violation" function may exist in a tale without an explicit interdiction (e.g., if a character returns home "late") (Morphology of the Folktale, 2nd edn., trans. Laurence Scott, rev. and ed. Louis A. Wagner [Austin: American Folklore Society, 1968], p. 27). He does not use the term, as I do, to describe a whole plot; even his "villainy" plot (pp. 75-76) is different from the formula I describe in that it necessarily involves an agon between a hero and villain, while many country songs present only the downfall of a villain.


3 This is not to say that all violations involve youthful subjects: a few songs, as we shall see, deal with villainous mothers, and there is a strong tradition of songs dealing with fathers, to be discussed in Chapter Seven.

4 The more heroic dimensions of George Alley are accentuated in yet another related ballad, "Billy Richardson's Last Ride" (Robison & Weeks, 1926). This song contains no mother's interdiction and makes the engineer a heroic "old and gray" figure whose only wish is to "die right in my engine cab . . . ." His wish is granted. One of Vernon Dalhart's recordings of this piece is reissued on Davis Unlimited 33030: Vernon Dalhart: Old Time Songs, and it has been reported from tradition in Virginia (Rosenberg, p. 7) and Tennessee (Boswell, p. 40).

5 Perhaps the prototype of such scenes occurs in "Botany Bay," along with its American recompositions, "The Boston (Louisville, Covington, etc.) Burglar" (Laws L 16). A broadside printed ca. 1800 and reprinted in Albert B. Friedman's Viking Book of Folk Ballads (New York: Viking Press, 1956) presents the scene in this way:

To see my aged father dear,
As he stood near the bar,
Likewise my tender mother,
Her old grey locks to tear;
In tearing of her old grey locks,
These words to me did say,
"O, Son! O, Son! what have you done,
That you're going to Botany Bay?"
(p. 221.)

An analogous scene occurs in "Charlie Quantrell" (Alan Lomax, Folksongs of North America [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1960], pp. 347-348), in which a "dear old mother" appears at her son's sentencing
to cry, tear her hair, and say "'It were better, Charlie, in your cradle you had died,'" With such a background of weeping mothers, it is not surprising that in a West Virginia oicotype of "Stackolee" both Bill Lyons and Stack collect "gray-haired mothers":

Old Bill Lyons said Mother gray, God don't weep nor cry
Old Bill Lyons said Mother, I'm bound to die, all about
That broad-brimmed Stutson [sic] hat.

Then Stackolee's mother said, son what have you done
I've murdered a man in the first degree, [with a ... gun?], all about
That John P. Stutson hat. . . .

Then Stackolee said Judge, have a little pity on me
Just one gray-haired mother dear, left to weep for me, all about
That broad-brimmed Stutson hat.

(Transcribed from a private recording made in 1946 by blind fiddler Ed Haley and reissued on Rounder 1010: Ed Haley: Parkersburg Landing.) The first and third of these stanzas were also recorded in 1928 by The Fruit Jar Guzzlers on Paramount 3121. Although nothing definite is known about this group, style and repertory suggest they too came from West Virginia. See Norm Cohen's booklet notes to JEMF 103: Paramount Old Time Tunes, p. 4.

6 Hickman was sentenced to death on March 12, 1928 for the kidnap-murder of Marion Parker, so the recording must have been made shortly after this date. For details on the case, see Olive Wooley Burt, American Murder Ballads and Their Stories (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 64. Jenkins's ballad, along with his "Little Marion Parker" on the flip side of this 78, has been reported from tradition in North Carolina (Brown, 2:604-607). Carson J. Robison's "Little Marion Parker" (Laws F 33) is a different, more widespread ballad.

7 A stanza from Cox's A text of "The Wreck on the C. & O." may have served as the model for the later song's moral:

Georgie's mother came again; with sorrow she did sigh,
When she looked upon her darling boy and knew that he must die;
She prayed for every engineer to take warning from her son,
In making any schedule to be careful how they run.

(P. 223.)

This stanza, however, does not appear in any other folk variant that I have seen. Since Cox's collection was used by at least two hillbilly singers, Ernest V. Stoneman and Bradley Kincaid, as a source for more complete version of this ballad, it is tempting that the author of "The Fatal Run" knew and drew material from Cox's A text.
Or wimmen. This song's account of Dillinger's life is entirely fanciful: in reality he grew up in the city of Indianapolis, was first arrested for a mugging, and became a professional criminal only after his first term in jail. See Bill Gaetz and Tom Mygrant, "'Almost a Household Word,'" Journal of the Ohio Folklore Society, N.S., 4 (1977), esp. 51-53.

I have referred to this ballad here and in my catalog under its more usual title. Laws lists it as "Young Companions," after a 1935 Library of Congress recording, but this is the only variant I have run across that bears this title. "Bad Company" is the most common alternate title.


Although Bob Miller often wrote recitations for his songs, including "My Mother's Tears" (1933, V325) and "The Lie He Wrote Home" (1933, V246), I have not been able to determine whether this recitation is his. No folio printing of "Rockin' Alone" includes it, and it did not appear in recordings until five years after its initial publication.

Perhaps not entirely profitless: in at least one early country song, "She Came Rollin' Down the Mountain" (various attributions; probably folk, bef. 1936), the innocent daughter is seduced in the hills by a "city slicker." Run out of town by her outraged father, she sets up shop in the City: "She's done with pots and kettles/Also cooking vittles/And the West Virginia hills can go to hell" (Callahan Brothers, ARC master POUSU [unissued] [12/22/36]). A test pressing of this recording may be heard on Old Homestead OHM 90031: The Callahan Brothers. A more explicit version I have seen (unfortunately unrecorded) makes it clearer that she is now a high-class call-girl.

Admittedly this sequence of events varies in some versions of the song. The Carter Family's recording, for example, places the death letter immediately after the mother's prayer, with no mysterious "touching of the heart." Their version then concludes:

His stony heart was broken
As he thought of his mother dear
And in spite of his comrades' laughing
He could not hold back his tears

In spite of the great tempelation [sic]
That once filled his heart with tears
So he started for heaven that evening
As sweetly the people did sing.

(Conquerer 8530 [5/6/35].)
This change (if it is one—the textual history of this song is still obscure and the second stanza quoted is surely corrupt) makes the song's plot more in line with the Intervention seen in "Gambler's Return."

14 Bryant's recollection, as printed by Dorothy Horstman in Sing Your Heart Out, Country Boy (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1975), is as follows:

"When I was just a kid, I was sitting in a restaurant and overheard a conversation between two guys who were evidently both gamblers. One of the guys was telling a story very similar to the story in this song, and he said that it had actually happened to him. I remembered the story, dressed it up and changed it around to make it into a song" (p. 353).

I later wrote to Bryant to ask how he had "dressed it up and changed it around," and he replied, "The story I heard is exactly like the song. Nothing was changed except that the fellow seemed to see the picture of his mother. I made it definite of course" (Correspondence to the author, April 6, 1976; stress Bryant's). That the story was told as a personal experience need not exclude it from folklore: such legends often are told in first person. Yet stranger things actually happened during the 1890s, when the moralistic tradition of song and popular literature was at its height. Given the circumstances—a huge pot and an impossible inside straight filled with just the right card—it is certainly not impossible that a serious gambler might seem to see things on the face of the card.

15 The sentimental motif of the poor newsboy, who is sometimes an orphan, sometimes trying to support a widowed or penniless mother, is widespread in country song tradition. See "The Newsboy" (A045), "The Little Newsboy" (A047), "Jimmie Brown the Newsboy" (A051), or "Paper Boy" (Wright & Anglin, ca. 1949). By offering aid to such a sympathetic figure, the gambler certifies his reform.

16 See especially "The Cruel Mother" (Child #20, 1:218-227) and the analogues Child cites. Most forms of this ballad include a prophecy spoken by the revenant children:

'O cursed mother, heaven's high,
And that's where thou will neer win nigh.

'O cursed mother, hell is deep,
And there thou'll enter step by step.'

(P. 221.)

17 This line echoes one from "Always in the Way" (1903, V029), where it is a stepmother who "is very cross and scold [sic] me ev'ry day, /I guess she does not love me, for I'm always in the way." If Byron Arnold's dating of his informant's ballet is correct, "Little Mamie" was written before 1903, but it is possible that his dating is only approximate and the song is an imitation of "Always in the Way."
Charlie Poole's recording (Columbia 15116 [1926]) was the first hillbilly recording; it did not include this stanza. Following his version were Roy Harvey (Brunswick 223 [1928]) and Wade Mainer (King 574 [ca. 1946]). Ernest V. Stoneman (Edison 52369 [4/25/28]) did sing the stanza about the mother's sins, but this recording utilized the then outmoded hill-and-dale grooves and so did not circulate widely. It seems that the only widely distributed recording to include this stanza was that of The Blue Sky Boys (Bluebird B-7846 [6/16/36]).


Wally Fowler, quoted in Horstman, p. 77.

My argument here and in the following section is based on Kenneth Burke's "Definition of Man," in Language as Symbolic Action (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 3-24.
CHAPTER SIX
"THIS WORLD IS NOT MY HOME":
PARTING

The early country songs that fall under the heading of Parting are similar in many ways to the elegiac parlor songs of the mid-nineteenth century, which pictured home as a tightly enclosed circle of security ruled by a protective mother, set against a dark exterior of dangers and frustrations. But the country elegiac tradition differs in one basic way from the earlier model: while the parlor song provided a domestic ritual by which one could reestablish the spirit of home, the country songs provide ways of compensating for the permanent loss of an earthly home. Such plots typically project the childhood home into the distant future or the next world; it is always to be regained, never regained in present tense. The dramatic focus is on the moment when the child recognizes his homelessness, and within the plots dramatized he remains in the vague area between an imperfect world and a perfect life, neither reconciled to the one nor arrived at the other. Since the return home, whether it be to one's earthly childhood home or to the glorified home in heaven, is projected and affirmed, but never accomplished, it is likely that these songs celebrate not only faith in the ideal home represents, but doubts as well.

Such an ambiguous vision was typical of the southern experience during the period surveyed. From 1923 to 1945 rural dwellers were forced from their homes at an accelerating pace, and the shadow of
the City was becoming still more difficult to avoid. During this period, it grew more and more obvious that the nineteenth-century ideals had become impractical, and nostalgia for "good old days" when such ideals were still alive, and for the "old-time religion" that tried to preserve them in an urban context, led to a nativist movement within country song tradition that began well before Howard Wight Marshall identified it within bluegrass music. It was also this period that marked a spectacular rise in the numbers of elegiac songs, especially in contrast to the moralistic songs once so prominent in oral tradition. But it was these songs, and especially those of Parting, that allowed urbanized migrants to come to terms with their new life, gazing fondly back at a just-vanished harbor of security while admitting that such a harbor could no longer be attained in this world. This pessimistic view of life increasingly projected home and mother into another world where old ideals were still valid: either some safe but unattainable nook of the hills, or, more often, "in the sky," where the individual who keeps faith in the tradition may dwell eternally safe from social change. Simultaneously, though, songs about a pilgrim's struggle to recover a lost home illustrated anxieties about changes in the nature of the tradition.

In addition to the social stresses reflected in Parting songs, metaphysical anxieties account for their appeal to country audiences. They illustrate a view of the world that is midway between a mythological and a theological stance. Berger and Luckmann define mythology as "a conception of reality that posits the ongoing penetration of the world of everyday experience by sacred forces." Strictly
speaking, then, a world in which one can encounter sacred beings like Jesus Christ directly and individually, is a mythological world, while one in which one must trust in an indirect "salvation" by obeying certain moral dictates in the hopes of eventually contacting sacred beings after death, is theological. The world of the early country song tradition is transitional: miracles and visions do occur, but contact between the everyday and the divine worlds is growing daily more uncertain. The mother plays an important role in such songs precisely because she is the traditional intermediary between the two worlds. Even on earth she assumes divine splendor, and after death she may return in transfigured form to encourage her disoriented child. For the child, though, the circle is broken, and contact with the Angel Mother is not automatic. He cannot at will return to his home or ascend with Mother to heaven. He must trust in the "old-time" tradition to bring him back to Mother sometime in the future.

Although these songs affirm that such a reunion will surely take place, their primary mood is grief and frustration. To bridge the widening gap between present suffering and future bliss, the songs reflect the beginnings of a theology that tries to account for this gap and suggest ways in which the homeless child can ensure himself a home in the afterlife. As Berger and Luckmann put it,

Mythological thought operates within the continuity between the human world and the world of the gods. Theological thought serves to mediate between these two worlds, precisely because their original continuity now appears broken. With the transition from mythology to theology, everyday life appears less ongoingly penetrated by sacred forces.

One of the theological tenets these songs rehearse is a view of the everyday world as drained of every form of pleasure, a stylized form
of existence that I have termed "The Dark and Dreary World." For the
less the individual loves the feeble and passing homes of this life,
the more glorious the afterlife will seem. And by stressing that the
individual must consider moral concerns, not practical social matters,
as all-important, these songs ensure that he can pass the ultimate
test of death and move into his eternal home with Jesus and Mother.

There is a huge variety of Parting songs, but all of them are
variations on a common theme: exploring the relation between the
child's present frustrating existence and the ideal life he hopes to
gain eventually. A Homesick Child may start back to an earthly but
unblemished rural home, or may long for such a home that has now
been destroyed. While separated, the child or the mother may die,
leaving the survivor to struggle toward a promised reunion in the
next world. The child may be turned out of his home by a mother's
death, making him an Orphan Child, doomed to wander in the graveyard
until death carries him back to Mother's side. Or he may choose to
become a Pilgrim Child, encouraged to bear earthly troubles stoically
by visions of the Angel Mother from beyond. Finally, the child may
be a Baby who still confuses the everyday and divine worlds. He is
"too young to understand" why the two are divided or why, in some
songs, he cannot call up his dead mother on the telephone or dig little
sister up. In all cases, though, the emotional core of the song is
the moment of shock when the child recognizes that his body is in one
world and his peace of mind depends on the existence of another. As
one popular hymn, "This World Is Not My Home" (bef. 1927, Ph04),
described the feeling,
This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing thru,
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue;
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.
(Stamps Quartet [1938], no. 22.)

1. The Homesick Child and the Light in the Window

In this variation, the child, wandering far from home, looks backward and longs to be where he came from. Sometimes he suddenly recalls that he has a mother waiting for him, sometimes he abruptly decides to begin his travel home, or sometimes he longs to return to a place that has by now vanished. Unlike Fallen Children, the Homesick Child has committed no sin, nor does he blame himself for his homelessness. Instead the child simply appears, with only the vaguest hints of what he has been doing since he left home. "Somehow tonight I'm lonesome . . ." begins one song (P228), while another merely refers to "Years that I've spent wand'ring alone . . ." (P174). Occasionally there is some sign that the Homesick Child's actions have not been pure, but rarely any more than a passing comment like "I've had the world of pleasure . . ." (P184). For such songs do not focus on sins or errors, but on the moment of reflection when the child decides to end his "wandering" and recognizes that this world is Dark and Dreary compared to the home he has left behind. As one late parlor song, "Take Me Back to Home and Mother" (1875, P162), put it,

I am weary wand'ring here,
There can never be another
Spot on earth that is so dear,
Tho' I roam 'mid scenes of splendor,
Yet my heart is fill'd with pain . . . .
(Gems of Minstrel Songs [1882], p. 1.)
During this moment of reflection, the child often projects what his return will be like. Travel plans are impromptu and vague, often no more than "riding a lonesome freight train/A thousand miles from home . . ." (P185), and more often no definite return plans are described. The important thing is the turn homeward, and unlike sinful children, the Homesick Child can expect an immediate welcome and an indefinite stay at Mother's knee:

I hear the whipporwill, [sic] the murmur of the rill
I see a couple kind and true,
And I start home today to kiss their tears away,
I want to tell the old folks "how do you do,"
I know that it will be a happy day for me,
My wand'ring days will then be done
And when I shake their hand I know they'll understand
And gladly welcome me back home.

("They'll Welcome Me Back Home," 1939, P228; Haden Family [ca. 1941], no. 55.)

Moreover, when the Homesick Child returns, he expects to live in perfect leisure, free from the City's demands. The narrator of "Blue Ridge Mountain Blues" (bef. 1924, P220) plans to "Hang around our cabin door/
No work or worry any more," his only responsibility being "to hunt the possum where the corn tops blossom . . ." (Ernest V. Stonemen, Okeh 45009 [8/25]). Often there is a "sweetheart" at home too, willing to marry the Homesick Child at once, so "home" contains everything he could want: maternal protection, secure leisure, and romance. But this vision of a perfected home is possible only because it is the child's projection of his desires. He rarely is shown possessing a mother, peace and quiet, and an ideal sweetheart; rather he hopes they are somewhere waiting for him.

The mother remains the guardian of this harbor of security, at least as the child projects it. Her roles are the conventional ones discussed
under Celebration, mainly Domestic, but with some Angelic qualities as well. While parlor songs and early hillbilly numbers tended to describe Mother in relatively realistic terms, as a kindly but human figure who provides comfort and lullabies, in the dozens of new songs written during the depression years and after, she becomes an otherworldly symbol, an angel waiting in a heaven-like home. "She's a Rose from the Garden of Prayer" (1943, P111) exhibits this new elegiac mother:

. . . I'm leaving and heading that way
To my mother so feeble and gray
Where she waits there alone
In our heaven called home
By the window she's watching for me
Soon my sorrow and troubles will end
Where all nature is blooming so fair
And I'll rest in the arms
Of the one that is true
She's my rose from the garden of prayer.
(Hank [Snow], the Yodeling Ranger, Bluebird B-4696 [ca. 1942].)

As the mother gathers more and more ideal qualities, the home recedes farther into memory, until it becomes not a real home, but a "garden of prayer," a lost Eden that the child hopes to regain someday.

The symbol of this ideal home is the conventional "light in the window." In this motif, the mother lights a candle or lamp and places it in the window to guide her child back home. At once it shows him that the home is still there and also that the mother is waiting to take him back. The motif shows up early in hillbilly tradition with "Blue Ridge Mountain Blues," where the Homesick Child dreams of "a window with a light," beside which his folks recite "Where Is My Boy To-Night?" (1877, P148). The use of the old hymn, of course, assures the child that his mother will welcome him in, even if he
returns "with all his blight." The motif is used more explicitly in "I Know There Is Somebody Waiting" (1927, P170), where the child assures himself that "there is someone who loves me/And there I'll be welcome again . . ." for "a light will be burning/In the window back home for me" (Loye Pack [ca. 1934a], p. 57). And in "They'll Welcome Me Back Home" (1939), a Stamps-Baxter hymn, we find the fullest treatment of all:

I hear a mother praying, gently praying
For her boy's returning,
And I will soon be going back again,
I'll never, never roam;
I know they wait for me for I can see a
Lamp so brightly burning
And when I say "hello" they'll take me back, I know,
And gladly welcome me back home.
(Haden Family [ca. 1941], no. 55.)

But such a cheerful welcome is presented not from the perspective of a contented homedweller, but from that of a homesick wanderer. The Homesick Child may get close enough to hear the church bells ringing (P184) or to see the lamp in the window (P228), but then the song ends. There is little difference in content between those songs that show wanderers starting to return and those in which the child recognizes that it is vain to return, for his mother is long dead. "Down on the Farm" (1889, P129) was one of the few parlor songs to take firm root in hillbilly repertories. It opens with the narrator's memories of "life's golden hours,/Running mad among the flowers,/In my boyhood's happy home . . . ." There his mother protected him "from all harm" as he gamboled about among robins, bees, and morning-glories in an idyllic rustic landscape. But now that he has grown, the narrator returns to find that
'Round the place there's many a change,
And the faces all seem strange—
Not a loved one now to greet me as of yore,
For my mother dear is laid,
'Neath the elm tree's quiet shade.

(Hi Henry [ca. 1889], p. 24.)

A similar scene is painted by Carson Robison in "Down on the Old Plantation" (1929, PO87), where the Homesick Child recalls a "land free from care" in which the river flowed peacefully, the moon beamed down, and the darkies rang the banjos, singing "Those good old songs." In his vision he seems to see his "old mother/Waitin' to welcome me there," but by song's end he soberly admits that "there's a stone 'neath a maple tree,/Where mother's laid down to rest" (Carson Robison [1932], pp. 38-39). The glorified vision of home remains in the child's mind so long as he wanders, but it departs when he gets close enough to see what the actual home place is like now.

And even the Parting songs that provide a happy ending still interpose the same elegiac note: either the child finds the longed-for home no perfect haven, or he finds consolation in thinking that his true home still waits in another world. One of the few songs in which the child actually does make it back home, "Sitting Round the Old Fireside at Home" (1935, P224), begins with a seemingly ideal situation. The child's parents are "aglow with love and pride;/All because a wand'ring boy is back at home tonight." But as he notices the gray in their hair that he "helped to put . . . there," and as he watches their "tired old faces" drift off to sleep, he recognizes that "They're getting old and gray,/Soon they'll pass away,/And no more we'll sit around the old fireside" (WLS [1935], pp. 6-7). All he can do, he decides, is to help make their last years contented, and he begins,
ironically, not by being babied, but by singing his parents to sleep with his mother's old lullaby. This song is unique in presenting this ironic ending, though—more often the return is frustrated, but then projected farther off into another world. "Where No Cabins Fall" (1938, P139) is more typical of the formula: the child recalls the "dear little tumble down shack" where he used to play and praise God with his parents. Now he longs for his lost mother's love, but recognizes that "time won't turn back" and that he must turn away from "that quaint little shack/Where the circle will nevermore meet ...." Instead he prepares to "meet them again one and all./There in mansions so bright where there'll never come night,/In that land where no cabins fall" (Red Foley [1948], no. 153). In the afterlife, unlike a world of Cities and Depressions, there will be nothing to frustrate the child's return, and, at last, his homesickness will end.

To illustrate the double nature of songs that celebrate both homecoming and homelessness, let us look at a folksong recorded both from tradition and commercially by the Carter Family. "The Wanderer" (bef. 1923, P003) predated the Carters' arrangement of it as "A Distant Land to Roam," but it is their version that has persisted in bluegrass tradition and also has filtered back into oral circulation in the Ozarks (Randolph, 4:374). Their recorded version is as follows:

I remember very well
On one dark and dreary day
Just as I was leaving home
For a distant land to roam
Chorus: Mother said (Mother said)
My dear boy (my dear boy)
I hope to see you next year again
Fare you well (fare you well)
Fare you well (fare you well)
So I left my dear old home
For a distant land to roam.

Now I've wandered far away
From my home I've gone astray
Now I'm coming coming home
Nevermore from thee to roam.

[Repeat Chorus]

And these words she said to me
As she took me by the hand
If on earth we meet no more
May we meet at God's right hand.

[Repeat Chorus]
(Victor 40255 [11/25/29].)

Short as it is, the song defines two critical events in the Parting formula: the separation of mother and child, and the child's moment of disorientation when he decides to return home. All else is left a blur. His work in the "far and distant land" is characterized only in negatives: he has "wandered" and "gone astray," and even the day on which he left is "dark and dreary." Now he is "coming coming home," but it is not clear which destination he will reach: his mother's side, "Nevermore from thee to roam," or "God's right hand." An earlier, independent version of the song collected from Arkansas tradition gives only this second ending. The son does not decide to return home, for

God called my mother home
While I was far away,
The word came o'er the sea,
On a dark and stormy day.

Yet while the two are prevented from meeting "This side of the grave," the mother's "precious words" point the child to the afterlife and
guide him to where "she is forever saved" (Allsopp, pp. 200-201). This version of the song is similar to the plot of "Where No Cabins Fall": the child is left in the Dark and Dreary World, but with bright memories of home and Mother that will console him until he reaches God's right hand.

In either version, Allsopp's or the Carter's, the song embodies many listeners' mixed emotions about "home": at once it is an ideal to be desired more than anything in this arid world, yet it is just beyond the grasp of anyone who seeks it this side of the grave. Once one leaves it, at the same time leaving the security of childhood, one can never recapture Mother except through death. The collector of Allsopp's version recorded these memories about Dave Littus, her informant:

This [song] was Dave's favorite . . . . I think Dave never went to bed at night without singing it and I know that no "singing" was ever ended without it. Any time in the day you might hear his great voice bearing up the wail of it from his hillside plowing or from where his ax rang as he worked in the timber. For that song was more than a mere "ballet" to Dave. It was the legend of his own experience. In his youth he had left his own mother back in the East Tennessee mountains and had not seen her again.

(Allsopp, p. 201.)

This song, like the others surveyed, was indeed the legend of a great many migrants' experience: at once a way of expressing a deep feeling of loss and a hymn-like statement of faith that one day they might escape this Dark and Dreary World back into the splendor of the old home place.
ii. Death and the Wanderer

Roger Abrahams has observed how frequently sentimental folksongs celebrate the deaths of lonely wanderers, and from the discussion of the songs above we can see how these deaths function within the Parting formula. The disorientation of being caught "far away from home" is intensified when the route home suddenly is cut off. Certain scenes and characters serve as emblems of this violent shock: the child who returns to find his mother dying or dead, the child who is killed trying to return home, and the child who is kept away by circumstances and who has to die longing vainly for a last glimpse of Mother. These scenes are extreme in their pathos, but the emblematic quality of the sentimental tradition demands that they be the most extreme cases imaginable, so as to objectify many listeners' feelings of being trapped in the Dark and Dreary World.

Under Violation we surveyed songs in which a child delays his homecoming and then finds his mother dead; an analogous scene occurs in the Parting formula. Here, though, the Homesick Child has returned without any urging from sick mothers or preacher-figures, yet unexpectedly he finds the house dark and empty. The projected welcome abruptly gives way to the shock of final homelessness. "Nobody Answered Me" (1937, P562) is the lament of a returned child who "Like the prodigal son . . . had wander'd back home": when he calls for his mother and awaits "the voice that would bid [him] come in," he discovers that the old home is deserted. There is no hint that the narrator has sinned, and in fact he expects the conventional "prodigal's welcome,"
but instead he is left to turn "away from that dear little home,/From
the place that perhaps nevermore would [he] see . . ." (Stamps Quartet
[1938], no. 6). This song portrays the uncertainty with which the
Homesick Child turns homeward: he may hope for a glad reunion, but
the formula does not assure him that anyone will be left at home to
rejoin.

For this reason characters who are rushing home to take a last fare-
well from their dying mothers are treated with particular sympathy in
the sentimental tradition. Since any delay may mean the child will
never see his mother on earth again, it is an unusually despicable
crime to hinder a child rushing homeward, even unintentionally. One
of the most popular songs on this topic was "Please, Mr. Conductor,
Don't Put Me Off the Train" (or "The Lightning Express," 1898, P165).
When a "stern old conductor" finds a little boy sadly reading a letter
on his car, he "gruffly" demands his ticket. Finding the lad has none,
he thunders, "'I must put you off at the next station then!'" at
which point the child explains that his mother is dying:

"She's expected to die any moment,
And may not live through the day,
And I want to bid mother good bye, sir,
Before God takes her away."
(Tex Morton [ca. 1940], pp. 18-20.)

The conductor makes no reply, but a little girl comes to the boy's
rescue by taking up a collection, and the bureaucrat is punished for
his gruffness by having the boy's words "ring in his ear" each time he
passes through the car. For the rest of the day? For the rest of his
life? We are not told, nor do we ever hear if the boy made it home to
his mother in time. Here the conductor's crime is partly inadvertent,
but the analogous figure in "When the Battle It was Won" (bef. 1928, P505) is genuinely villainous. In this plot the son leaves his aged mother for the army, but when he receives a letter begging him to return "once more before she dies," he deserts his post and races home for a last embrace. Immediately an officer arrests him, but the child angrily warns him,

... "Take care, sir, what you say.
My mother she is dying, on her death-bed doth lay.
I don't care if you shoot me, I'll never leave her so
Until she do recover, or to her grave doth go!"
(Mackenzie, p. 297.)

Unperturbed, the officer hauls him to a guard-house, where soon he is condemned to death and shot. One text ends with his protesting "last farewell," but another text collected later provides a more satisfying ending. The officer, it appears, had hoped to woo the dead soldier's sweetheart, but when he approaches her, she pulls a revolver and shoots the rascal dead (Greenleaf, p. 362). We may take the sweetheart as a mother-surrogate, though, since her appearance is unprepared for; the officer thus receives his just punishment for keeping dying mother and dutiful child apart. Like the conductor in the previous song, he stands for the world of petty regulations, an inhumane bureaucracy that is the antithesis of the humane world of the home.

The reverse situation is equally prevalent in early country tradition: a dying child longs to see his mother again, but is forced by circumstances to die far from home. The most durable tradition involves wartime songs, beginning with the many farewells to Mother written for the Civil War. "The Last Fierce Charge" (bef. 1885, P502) represents
the early form of this plot, although here as often the farewell to
Mother is combined with another soldier's farewell to a sweetheart. As
a "tall dark man" and a "boy" prepare to ride into battle, the man,
certain he will be killed, asks the boy to write home and tell his
sweetheart how he died. The boy agrees, but asks in return,

..."if you should ride back and I am gone,
You must do the same for me,
For I have a mother who must hear the news,
Oh, write to her tenderly. . . .

She prays at home like a waiting saint,
Her sad face wrapped in woe;
Her heart will be broken when I am gone,
I shall see her soon, I know."
(Eddy, pp. 301-304.)

Pathetically, both soldiers are killed, and the mother is left alone
to mourn "Until she crosses the river of death/And stands by [her
boy's] side again." Much the same plot, with gradual simplifications,
persisted through the Second World War. "Just as the Sun Went Down"
(1898, P510) retained the two soldiers who bid a sweetheart and a
mother adieu, but describes only their moments of death. "The
Dying Soldier" (bef. 1930 [refers to the war in "France"], P511)
presents a single soldier who sends a dying message to both mother
and sweetheart. Finally "Rock My Cradle (Once Again)" (1945, P524)
shows a single child longing to be with his mother alone as he dies.

A second scene that remained popular throughout the early country
tradition was that in which the mother claims her dead son's body.
Here the return home is frustrated in an even more pathetic fashion:
the wandering child returns home all right, but only as a corpse.
This scene thus reverses the situation in which the child returns to
find the house empty and his mother dead. Here the home is still there,
but the child cannot reach it alive. This motif probably derives from wartime songs as well, since the most widespread of the pre-hillbilly songs to contain it was "The Boys in Blue" (bef. 1900, P530), a ballad of the Spanish-American War that shows the father as the grieving parent. During the period surveyed, however, the plot most often involved a convict son who has "paid his debt" and is waiting for parole to set him free to return to Mother. But his wait is in vain. In "There's a Little Box of Pine" (1932, P512), a mother writes to the warden, demanding "How much longer must I wait/Before you send my boy back home to me . . . ." The saddened warden must inform her that "the angels/Had unlocked the prison gate" and "a pardon from above" already has freed his spirit. The double perspective typical of Parting haunts the song's ending: although the son has gone smiling to live with angels, his mother still mourns his fate. For her, "The sun is gone the world seems dark and cold . . . (Asa Martin & James Roberts, Romeo 5234 [2/4/33]).

The mother's reaction is still more violent in "The Ohio Prison Fire" (1930, P514), a topical disaster ballad by Bob Miller. After the horrible facts of the holocaust are related, the narrator asks us to "Picture an old lady there,/Climbing up the smoldering stair,/Looking for her boy . . . ." When she finds "his charred remains," the song is interrupted by this dramette:

**Man's gruff voice:** Is this your son's body, lady?

**Woman's voice:** (crying all the while) Oh, this might be him ... Oh, he's little and frail like that ... Oh, Jimmy, Jimmy, it's Mother, Honey, Mother ... Oh, Mother knows you were good ... You were always good to Mother, weren't you dear ...
Man's voice: Can you identify this body?

Woman: (still weeping) Oh, sure, sure, I'll take him ... I'll take my boy back now ... the state's finished with him ... The state's finished with all of these bodies, these poor charred bodies ... Oh, who's to blame for this awful, awful thing? Who's to blame? ... (Bob and Charlotte Miller, Okeh 45442 [1930].)¹¹

The song concludes by affirming that "Prison bars kept them apart,/Kept him from her lonely heart,/But they can't imprison his immortal soul."

Here more so than in the previous song the prison is seen not as a punishment for Fallen Children, but as a cruel social force that keeps a "little and frail" child who was "always good to Mother" away from "her lonely heart." In addition to condemning the impersonal bureaucracy that took away his freedom, the song warns us not to judge him, "For we'll all be judged some time . . . ."

Happy endings do occur in this formula, but only when separated mothers and children die simultaneously. In this case neither partner is left to mourn in the Dark and Dreary World, and both ascend to the heavenly home in unison. In one song the two deaths appear fated: "Tell Mother I Will Meet Her" (bef. 1927, P513) begins as a boy lies dying in the City far from home. He is no Fallen Child, though; indeed he proves he is the type of a faithful son by dying with pictures of home and Mother in either hand. As he ascends to "Where the good of earth are gathered with the faithful and the true," he sends word home, asking his mother to meet him up there. But no message is needed: "For that day the angels took her to the faithful and the true/And tonight she dwells with Willie/In the land beyond the blue" (Ernest V. Stoneman, Victor 21129 [7/25/27]). Less contrived is "The Hobo's Last Ride" (1942, P521), in which the son, trying to reach his mother's
deathbed, takes a chance by hopping an empty boxcar. He does not know it, but "his last drive was run, and Fate was drawing near." Fate is kind, though: the train wrecks, the hobo is killed, and, at the same moment, "His dear old mother gently smiled, and closed her eyes in death" (Hank Snow [1942], pp. 34-35). It appears that the one unmixed blessing that a wanderer could find away from home is a death that leads him directly to a reunion with Mother. The road to the earthly home is arduous, uncertain, and often fatal; by contrast, the road to heaven is smooth and direct, leading to eternal bliss, for the deceased if not for the survivor.

In this context we can understand the popularity of the cowboy ballad written in 1893 by D. J. O'Malley as "After the Roundup," but more commonly known as "When the Work's All Done This Fall" (P506).¹² The 1925 commercial recording by folk performer Carl T. Sprague was not the first waxing of the song, but it was the most influential, and many hillbilly or pseudo-hillbilly artists rushed to cover his version. By 1929 John I. White, New York professional radio singer, reported that the piece was "by far the most popular of the numbers sung by [him] during his career as an entertainer."¹³ The way it dominated the western repertory at this time, both commercial and traditional, indicates that it reflected widespread anxieties about being able to reach the state of being Mother represented, in the fall, or ever. The narrative presented falls into two clearly defined episodes, and, significantly, all but a few variants include stanzas from both, even though the length of the ballad fitted awkwardly into a radio spot or onto one side of a 78 rpm recording. The first scene presents our
now-familiar moment of disorientation, as the cowboy recalls the "good home" he once had in the South and recognizes that his "mother's heart is breaking" over his absence. The child owns some signs of recklessness in the "great big jags" he has committed and in disregarding his mother's pleas to stay at home. But the emphasis here is not on the sins the cowboy once committed, but on the good he hopes to accomplish, once his work is done and he is free to return home. Some versions make it clear that he has reformed entirely and plans to "walk the straight path" back to Mother, but in any case his delay is not so that he may indulge in one final "jag" before "getting converted," but simply so he can draw his pay and head home "ere all my money's gone."

The second episode, however, frustrates his good intentions "That very night," for he dies heroically trying to stop a stampede. Interestingly, O'Malley's original version gave the song a projected happy ending, since the cowboy dies saying "'I'll see my mother/ When work's done this fall,'" presumably in the "new range" that he says he is going to. But traditional variants are unanimous in rejecting this ending and having the child express the opposite sentiment: "I'll not see my mother, when the work's all done this fall" (Sprague, Victor 19747 [8/5/25]). Even though he assures his comrades that he is only obeying his Master's call to heaven, there is only pathos surrounding his lonely death. One suspects that he would really rather be in Dixie with Mother.
iii. Motherless Children

In those songs that confront the mother's death directly, the shock of disorientation is more intense, as the child is thrown out of his initial world of security into the Dark and Dreary World without an intermediate period of physical separation. Further, there is not even the hope of returning home to rejoin Mother, and the child must endure a lifetime before he can pass into the heavenly home above. But the formula remains similar to those we have surveyed before. The world of the Orphan Child, as I term this stereotypical figure, is initially harsher than that of the Homesick Child, but he too is consoled by the hope of eventual bliss in the afterlife, and the songs treat him as a privileged character, destined for heaven and protected from abuse. Many songs even confirm the Orphan's hopes with supernatural visions from the afterlife. The scenes most treated, however, are all two-sided in the conventional way, celebrating both frustration and hope. In portraits of the mother's deathbed, the Orphan's lonely wanderings, and his pathetic death, we are invited to sympathize with the child's suffering, yet told that he is destined for a better home. The songs thus suggest attitudes for coping with the sufferings of this world by projecting their opposites into the next.

In deathbed scenes grouped under Parting the mother may deliver "last words" of moral instruction, as in songs of Assistance and Violation, but here their context is elegiac, not moralistic. In "Mother's Dying Prayer" (1934, P223), for example, the song begins by establishing
the elegiac mood:

There was sadness in our cottage,  
There was darkness in that room;  
For the angels hovered o'er us,  
Taking mother to her tomb.  

(Boh Miller [1934c], pp. 48-49.)

Later on in the song the mother offers the usual instructions to say prayers and follow her example, but even though she ascends to heaven and even now "her spirit always guards" her children, the mood of the song is gloomy. The angels seem almost spirits of darkness, carrying Mother not to heaven but to the tomb. An older ballad includes a similar tension between faith and despair: "The Orphan Girl" (bef. 1870, P322) introduces the Orphan to us in the midst of the Dark and Dreary World, with no home, family or friends. She recalls her mother's dying words, which warned her that she "soon will be/A poor orphan left alone," and instructed her to

Take your Bible in your closet,  
Read and pray each night,  
Seek protection in your Savior,  
And no more be left alone.  

(Brown, 3:397-398.)

But the Orphan still is left alone: the song ends "When the night is coming on," as she wanders "in the lonesome graveyard." Her only consolation is an early death, so she can be buried by Mother's side and in this way "no longer be left alone." The scene of the Orphan wandering at nightfall in a graveyard is a powerful image used in several country songs, where it connotes a world ruled by an ever threatening challenge of death. Mother's advice will help the Orphan in the hour of death, though, but not before. Once the home vanishes above with Mother, the child must wander aimlessly in the graveyard.
until such time as the Savior decides it is time to help.

Many songs, in fact, make the Orphan's struggle for survival the center of attention, describing in detail the hardships that make this world a hell and the next world a haven. "Nobody's Darling" (1870, P321) was one of the more durable parlor songs in country tradition. In its original form it was the lament of a beggar child, "Parentless, friendless and poor," who has no one to love him on earth, but hopes that in heaven "Somebody cares for me." His "home," in this version, is a lonely garret where no one tucks him to bed but the "Merciless winds" that chill his body (Guitar at Home [1883], pp. 166-167). This form of the ballad did not include a deathbed scene, but the recomposition, which proved more popular in hillbilly tradition, added one:

When I was but a young lad
Mother was taken from home
Now I have no one to love me
No one to call me their own.

("I'm Nobody's Darling on Earth," Kelly Harrell, Victor 20657 [3/23/27].)

In seeming contrast, little Nellie of "Why Did They Dig Ma's Grave So Deep?" (1880, P327) still has a home, but in spirit it is no better than a chilly attic. All she can do is weep by the kitchen gate and long for a mother who cannot return:

Shadows are creeping around the lone room,
Early and late there's a feeling of gloom.
Out in the churchyard the wild breezes blow,
Seeming to echo her heart's grief and woe . . . .

(Read 'Em and Ween, pp. 102-103.)

Both these Orphan Children receive some consolation by song's end, when their glorified mothers appear to them, but still the core of such songs is despair and longing for death. In fact, "Nobody's Darling" loses its "vision" scene in the recomposition, replacing it with a
more dubious hope: "If I am fortunate enough/To get to that heavenly home..." (Harrell). That "if" will prove the most characteristic feature of early country attitudes toward death.

Nevertheless most songs dealing with Orphans end on an optimistic note: an orphan may die a pathetic death, frozen or starved to death, but real angels come to carry his spirit home to Mother. The two worlds, the everyday and the divine, are presented in absolute contrast, the Dark and Dreary World darkening into the graveyard, the afterworld brightening into the restored childhood home. In "The Two Orphans" (bef. 1925, P323), we are shown two ragged children, too young to work and with "no mama at home." After their father "got lost on the sea long ago," the same ambiguous angels came and took their mother away. But before she died, the mother told them those same angels "would come for her darling some day," and the girl wonders if "perhaps they are coming tonight" (Ernest V. Stoneman, Victor 21648 [2/22/28]). In a few variants, the girl actually doubts that the angels will come, for there must be no more room for them in heaven, but this unusual skepticism is omitted in most country variants. 16 The closing lines leave us with the stark contrast of the two worlds: the children freeze miserably to death on the steps of a church, which ironically provides no earthly shelter for them, but, the narrator tells us, "The angels made room for the orphans to dwell, in heaven with Mama that night."

The same formula is used in a more recent song, "There's a Picture on Pinto's Bridle" (1942, P355). Here there is one orphan, driven from home after his mother's death by his father's drunkenness. When
a kindly cowboy finds the boy beside his injured pony, the Orphan

tells how his mother departed:

She left me one bright morning, with the angels she does dwell
We'll meet upon that other range some day
As she kissed my little forehead, a picture she did draw
From a golden locket as I heard her say
My time has come to leave you, the best of pals must part
Please promise Mother always to be true
And through all lonely hours, when your little heart's forlorn
Remember there's an angel watching you.

Suddenly the child bows his head, and, asking the cowboy to bury the
picture by his heart, he says, "I'm now leaving just to meet her far beyond," and dies (Hank [Snow], The Yodeling Ranger, Bluebird B-4655 [ca. 1939]). These songs display a paradoxical sense of consolation,
as the more misfortune the Orphan suffers on earth, the more fortunate
his release into heaven appears. And, in a peculiar sense, the mother's
promise that she or Christ will watch over the Orphan almost demands
that he live a life of hardship and pain. Admittedly such songs are
emblematic, not realistic, and an adequate description of heaven's
glory demands a Dark and Dreary context. Yet the specific contrast
that emerges is significant. In this world the Orphan is homeless,
and everyone he meets, including the occasional father, is an imper­
sonal "stranger." Blown from place to place by freezing winds and
drifting snow, he wanders aimlessly to and from graveyards and churches,
finding no place to abide. As evening gathers, his only recourse is
death quickly. As one song, picked up by hillbilly performers from
Black tradition, describes this sort of life,

Motherless children sees a hard time when the mother's dead
Motherless children sees a hard time when the mother's dead
They are driven out in the cold, God knows where they'll go
Motherless children sees a hard time when the mother's dead.

("Motherless Children," bef. 1927, V040; Carter Family, Victor
23641 [11/22/29].)
No song better illustrates how popular this dualistic view of life was—and still is—than A. P. Carter's "Can the Circle Be Unbroken" (1935, P416). Soon after its initial recording it became a standard part of other performers' repertories, and today it remains one of the most commonly performed religious songs in country, bluegrass and folk circles. It has also been collected from oral tradition at least three times. Yet no religious song could be so ambivalent toward the beliefs it celebrates. The Carters' original text (preserving the unusual line breaks of the first recording) is as follows:

I was standing
By the window, on one cold and cloudy day
And I saw the
Hearse come rolling, for to carry my mother away.

Chorus: Oh can the circle
Be unbroken, bye and bye Lord bye and bye
There's a better
Home awaiting, in the sky Lord in the sky.

Lord I told the
Undertaker
Undertaker please drive slow
For this body
You are hauling, Lord I hate to see her go.

[Repeat Chorus]

I followed
Close behind her
Tried to hold up and be brave
But I could not
Hide my sorrow, when they laid her in the grave.

[Repeat Chorus]

Went back home Lord
My home was lonesome
Missed my mother she was gone
All my brothers
Sisters crying, what a home so sad and lone.
The song is a revealing example of A. P. Carter's ability to "work up" older songs into new ones. "Can the Circle Be Unbroken" is no folk song, but it is a mixture of several traditional elements. Most obvious is the debt to an older hymn, "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" (Habershon & Gabriel, 1907). The chorus is retained nearly word for word (with some intrusive "Lord's"), and the theme of the hymn is generally matched by the Carters' song. Although the hymn is an invitation to the listener to come to God and plan to meet "dear ones" in glory, it does refer to "tearful partings" as "One by one their seats were emptied . . ." (Warren Caplinger [1934], p. 47). But there is no special stress on a mother's death, and none at all on the facts of her burial. Nor are such details easily found elsewhere in folk or hillbilly tradition. True, the opening line echoes "The Letter Edged in Black's" first line, "I was standing by my window yester­morning . . ." while the "cold and cloudy day" reminds us of the "dark and dreary day" of "The Wanderer." But there are no antecedents at all for the crucial details of the song: the hearse driving up, the dialogue with the undertaker, the scene at the graveside. The theme of the song is wholly conventional, true, but the way in which this song embodies it was entirely novel to early country tradition.

Whatever its antecedents and origin, the fact remains that the song became one of the most repeated responses to a mother's death. The stanzas focus on the reality of death in the family: watching the
hearse pull up, "hauling" the "body" in a mortician's impersonal way, open weeping at the burial, and enduring the empty days that follow. The circle is broken, and the home is now "sad and lone" for the whole family. At the same time, though, repeated between each stanza comes an undefined promise of "a better/Home awaiting, in the sky . . ." as the tentative "Can . . .?" makes the promise even vaguer. In the older hymn, the tentative "Will . . .?" was directed at the listener: God is waiting; now will you take the proper steps to complete the circle? But in the Carters' song the question is directed to the sky. Can the circle be unbroken—can the seeming finality of death be reversed? the promise is extended by the chorus's last two lines, but as always in this formula the song holds the two worlds in tension. The "cold and cloudy" world that ends in inevitable death and the world "in the sky" where families stay united perpetually have no point of contact—and for once we are not told that the mother ascended to heaven with angels; she just died. The song affirms the certainty both of unearthly joy and of earthly grief. Perhaps this is the reason for the song's universal popularity, even among college revivalist circles that would not accept fundamentalist doctrines. "Can the Circle Be Unbroken," more than any other elegiac country song, embodies the uncertain common ground between faith and doubt in the face of mortality.
iv. The Angel Mother and the Pilgrim Child

Many songs, of course, try to bridge the two worlds, in particular by using the Angel Mother as mediating figure. In some plots she returns from the grave in a vision or dream to encourage an Orphan to endure, and others express the child's determination to make it to the heavenly home where Mother surely has gone. The mother's role is thus similar to many Celebrations, but here her angelic function is fitted to the Homesick Child plot: her influence keeps the child headed "homeward," that is, toward the boundary between everyday life and the other world. As always, the child's return to an eternal mansion is only projected, never accomplished, and we see the Angel Mother only in dreams and glimpses of the future. But this makes little difference to the Orphan Child, who is anxious to be done with life and who relies on faith to carry him through to where Mother waits at heaven's gates. In these songs, unlike those just presented, the afterlife is described in detail, and everyday life appears only as a necessary frustration to inevitable consolation.

Earlier I noted that songs lamenting an orphan's life of sorrow often end with a vision of the Angel Mother. After Nellie's gloom is described in "Why Did They Dig Ma's Grave So Deep," for example, the last stanza shows her dreaming of her lost mother.

[She] Sees her again in a vision of light, 
Praying, "God bless little Nellie to-night!"
Smiling upon her with glorified face, 
Calling her home to that bright resting place . . . .
(Read 'Em and Weep, pp. 102-103.)
Similarly, the Orphan in "Nobody's Darling" tells how he prays to his mother "to smile/Down on her child from the skies . . . ." His prayers are answered, for "Mother and heaven" he sees in visions—the world where "Somebody cares for me" (Guitar at Home [1883], pp. 166-167). These visions are alike in showing heaven as the place where present griefs are remedied and where the wandering Orphan can find rest. This view of heaven remains constant in the country elegiac tradition, even when no life of sorrow is depicted and we see heaven alone.

One such song is "Last Night I Heard Mother Calling" (1939, Ph23), which opens as the narrator relates how he "heard the footsteps of my mother" in a dream. She calls his name, and he sees her

... standing there
Beside me just like an angel,
Her face was so peaceful and fair;
Her voice was as sweet as a golden chime,
Her brow was smooth without care . . . .

(Bill Boyd [1939], pp. 18-19.)

She represents the peace that comes when earthly troubles are no more, and her brow, conventionally "wrinkled with care" is here "smooth without care," a conscious reversal of the cliche. More explicit in describing heaven is "I Dreamed I Met Mother and Daddy" (1936, Ph50), a hymn by Albert E. Brumley. In this dream it is the child who visits heaven and seeks out his parents. When last he saw them on earth, he tells us, "They dwelt in a cabin so bare . . . /With their wrinkles and silvery hair . . . ." but now, although they remain "an old couple," they reside in "splendor untold" in "a spacious white mansion." At song's end, the narrator, a cold and hungry orphan, vows to "labor/Till the end of life's long dreary day," so he too can live in "a palace of gold" with Mother and Daddy (Bailes Brothers [ca. 1942], no. 77).
This stoic response, typical of the Pilgrim Child's attitude toward this life, is the subject of a string of songs, expressing his resolve to follow Mother's footsteps to heavenly mansions beyond death. The Pilgrim is especially anxious to avoid trivial sins, but the songs do not deal much with his acts of virtue. The main attribute he is given is rugged endurance and unfailing faith in the afterlife. "Just a Few More Days" (1938, P021) begins with the mother's "last words," but the rest of the song is the child's response. Although he is "sorely tempted" in this world, and "the path seems rugged" to heaven, he always takes time to resist sin and pray, for he says, "I know if I keep trying/I'll see my mother some sweet day." The song's chorus repeats that it is "Just a few more days of pain" before the Pilgrim can leave with the angels: Jesus has his home prepared, and "Mother will be waiting there" (Carter Family, Decca 5632 [6/8/38]). From the same late-Depression period comes another song on the same theme, "Only One Step More" (bef. 1938, P422). Here the Pilgrim looks up from his "life of sorrow" in which his "weary feet have stumbled/On some rough and rocky road . . ." yet he recognizes that it's "One step more from earth to heaven" where his mother awaits him:

She'll be oh so glad to see me
Glad to know that I've pulled through
She will be the first to greet me
When I enter heaven's door . . .
(Blue Sky Boys, Bluebird B-8552 [1/5/40].)

The last step, that of dying, is the most difficult, but the Angel Mother here performs her usual duty of standing in the doorway, making the trial of death more attractive. The hope that she is there at the threshold of the new world, cheering on his courage, is enough to keep
the Pilgrim going onward.

In fact, the same incentive is offered by preacher-figures in several hymns, warning sinners to start their own pilgrimages now. The most durable is "Meet Mother in the Skies" (bef. 1898, P401), which reminds the audience that their own mothers may be "slumb'ring 'neath the clay," but they are still "waiting for you in that happy home . . . ." If you turn from sin, then "He who saved dear mother, surely will save thee," and once you "make the sacrifice," you are guaranteed eternal life with "no parting, no more bitter cries . . . ." The responsibilities of virtue are never mentioned except in cliches like "upward lift your eyes," but the reference to Mother implies the whole range of ethical injunctions discussed under the stereotype of the Christian Mother. Thus when the song repeats its message, "If you love your mother, meet her in the skies" (Conquest Hymns [1902], no. 170), we are not asked to reduce religion to mother-love, but to recognize the metaphoric link between the two. If the Christian and Angel Mother represents the earthly link to the divine world, and, after she dies, she becomes the force that entices her children upward to religious consolation, then it makes perfect sense to appeal to the sense of her loss to bring a sinner to Christ. For loss of her influence simultaneously means the child's moral disorientation in this world.

Another hymn makes this connection more definite. "Heaven Is Nearer Since Mother Is There" (1937, P421) opens with the familiar description of the Dark and Dreary World: "Dark are the windows, no flickering glow/Lights up the old home that we used to know . . . ." Yet even in this world's darkness "a sweet face so fair/Smiles down from
heaven for mother is there." The Pilgrim now senses that his "earth
ties are broken and heav'n is more fair" now that Mother is waiting
with Jesus "just inside the gate" on the other side of death (Daniel
Quartet [ca. 1942], no. 28).

Appropriately, when the Pilgrim Child projects what his reunion
will be like once he takes that one last step, his expectations are
much like those of the Homesick Child. In this case, however, there
is no doubt that he will eventually arrive "home" and that he will
never have to work or part again. In "I'll Be There" (bef. 1929, P408),
the narrator recalls his mother's last words and feels that she is
even now calling him "Just across the crystal sea." He predicts that
he has "not long on earth to wait" until he walks the "glitt'ring
streets . . ./There to meet my dearest friend/In the world that ne'er
shall end . . ." (McCravy Brothers, Victor V-140265 [12/16/29]). In
this song the Pilgrim asks an angel to bear this news to his mother,
but a similar hymn, "Shake My Mother's Hand for Me" (1937, P420),
the message is given a dying friend. "When the saints . . . come out
to meet you," the Pilgrim tells his friend, he will meet friends and
loved ones. After "a talk with Jesus," the friend should seek out
the Pilgrim's mother and tell her to rejoice: "Time can't keep . . .
me here much longer," and the two will soon be reunited (Selections of
Stamps-Baxter Songs [ca. 1939], no. 9).

Another well-known hymn briefly raises some questions about this
reunion. "Will My Mother Know Me There?" (1906, P402) points out that
in the years since Mother's death the Pilgrim has "changed . . . with
changing seasons" and now is "bent . . . with toil and care . . . ."
When the Pilgrim arrives amid the angels, he wonders, will his mother be able to recognize him? (One might also wonder if he will recognize her without her wrinkles and gray hair.) But the doubt is soon brushed away: "Mother's love ... can ne'er forget me, ... /And I'm sure ... she'll know me there" (Selections of Stamps-Baxter Songs [ca. 1939], no. 13). The rest of the song elaborates on this certainty, describing how in life Mother "wrestled" in prayer to save her boy from sin, and how after death her face proved "a beacon, /O'er a sea ... of deep despair ... ." If the Angel Mother represents the certainty of faith, it would be next to sacrilegious to suggest that she too might change with the seasons and forget her child's face. Put another way, if the mother-child relationship proves the unchanging beacon that guides the Pilgrim through "deep despair," only a return to that relationship, to that childhood world of security, could adequately define the perfection of heaven.

The Pilgrim thus gains in heaven what he lost after childhood. Memories of the perfect enclosed home circle are projected into the next world to form the ideal "home beyond the sky" where the child can return to his unindividuated, carefree life. It might not be too much to say that life in heaven is much like life in the womb: both homes expect nothing in return from the child, and both shield him from even the slightest difficulty in life. And, of course, there are no good-byes. In this sense, then, these songs that long for a quasi-natal existence in a transfigured life after death are essentially fantasies about escaping from the stresses of everyday life into a state of being that is as close to non-being as possible without
evoking the fear of the void. The heavenly home is eternally free from
any demands on the individual to adapt to novel social conditions or
accomodate anyone other than the eternally familiar Mother and loved
ones. The fantasy is tempting, perhaps universal, but the view of
everyday life it complements is necessarily nihilistic. The hope of
a dream home in the next world, it seems, necessarily turns this world
into a nightmare.

v. "No Telephone in Heaven"

Although these songs emphasize the threatening gap between the world
of the divine and of everyday life, with heaven described as a renewed
childhood home and with so many supernatural manifestations by the
Angel Mother, we might expect the song tradition to vacillate between
mythology and theology. That is, in Berger and Luckmann's terms, we
might expect some songs to imply that one can in fact reach heaven
directly, not by dying and going to another world. The two homes are
kept distinct in most songs, however the literal cabin may take on
heavenly splendor or however the mansion in the sky may resemble the
tumble-down shack. But a curious group of "baby songs"—plots that
describe a young child's inability to grasp adult concepts like death
--do equate these two worlds. In them, the "Baby" mistakes the
mother's death for her departure to a distant, but earthly land, and
he can grasp what "heaven" means only in these terms. The songs
differ greatly in their endings: in some the child finally grows up
enough to recognize the truth, and in others he remains confused and
inconsolable. In a few he is comforted by a hoax, or, rarely by a
real miracle. In any case, the dramatic core of these songs explores the boundaries between the everyday world and the divine and thus express deep adult anxieties about the gap that separates the two.

In its simplest form, this type of song presents a child "too young to understand" what has happened to his mother (or, sometimes, his father). So the Baby starts asking strangers for directions and wanders around nearby streets, trying to find out where she has gone. An early version of this plot, "Where Is My Mama" (1916, P242), shows a sympathetic lady finding the Baby on the street and asking why she is so sad. The child responds by asking where her mother is gone: "Papa is broken-hearted/Mama left us alone/So if you see my mama/Tell her to come home." But that night the child learns the truth. She approaches her father and demands, "Tell me where is Mama/Before I go to bed . . . ." Only then does the father tell the child that Mother has "gone to join the angels," but the song ends without giving the child's response ("Al Craver & Charlie Wells" [i.e., Vernon Dalhart & Carson Robison], Columbia 15218 [1/4/28]). A later country song that uses the same formula extends the story somewhat. In "Is My Daddy up in Heaven" (1940, P250), the Baby meets another sympathetic lady and makes the same plea, but his story is more complicated. He has "searched all over for him/But he's nowhere . . . ." the child begins, and he tells how neither his mother nor his neighbors reply when he asks about his father: "they only shake their heads,/They don't seem to want to tell me . . . ." The lady, who coincidentally is an old friend of the father's, promises to tell the truth if the child will not cry, then explains that his daddy is happy up in heaven, where "there was work
for him to do . . . ." The child accepts the news bravely, then, setting
his shoulders, he begins to take on adult responsibilities. "Some one
has to care for mama," he says, "so I guess it's up to me. I'll make
up to her for daddy, just as he would want me to . . . ." (Lola Smith
[1940], p. 19). Not all Babies respond so maturely, but often enough
the child's acceptance of death is the first step toward the theology
that will enable him to meet his parent again after death. The
work-ethic affirms the split between the two worlds, yet offers the
child a set of values that will eventually allow him to regain the
home as a reward.

Illustrating this theological solution is a curious song, "Three
Little Babes," printed only recently, but in oral tradition as early
as 1912. In it, a mother and child hold a dialogue over the grave
of another recently buried child. The Baby, unable to understand what
little sister is doing down there, asks his mother if they might
"dig little sister up and lay her on my bed/And feed her out of my
sweet little cup and then she won't be dead." But the worldly-wise
mother patiently teaches the child about death: "'if you are good
and true/You can only go to her, she can never come to you.'" The
worlds of life and death are separate, bridged only by a life of
"good and true" actions. In the longer printed version, however, the
Baby is still confused, and invokes the fear of death still more
bluntly: "'Now, mama, won't she be afraid to lie in that cold grave
tonight,/And won't she get cold and cry because there is no light?'"
The striking image suggests that after death one does not ascend to
a happy home but remains in a pitch-black void—an anxiety natural
enough, but which no adult would express—or could—within the sentimental song tradition. The mother dries the Baby's tears with the standard answer: the sister was called to the sky by God, and some day "we'll meet to part no more." Even with this pat ending, this little-known song probes deeper into the gap between the everyday and the divine, exposing many of the anxieties that gap evokes, and it is only the authority of the Christian Mother that can calm these fears and instruct us how to face it.

To this point our baby songs have concluded by defining and accepting the gap between this world and the next, but other songs blur the distinction. A complex cluster of songs, for example, invoke the child's belief that seemingly magical devices of human technology can help him get in touch with Mother: by calling her on the telephone, for example. This tradition is cognate with a tradition of hymns that equate God's powers with recent inventions. "Life's Railway to Heaven" (Abbey & Tillman, 1891) was doubtless not the first of such songs, but it survived to set the model for later hymnic and country songs like "The Royal Telephone" (Lehman, 1919), "Turn Your Radio On" (Brumley, 1938), and the most recent variation on the theme, "I Heard Jesus on My C.B." These songs, however, do not attribute divine powers to telephones, radios, and the like; rather they suggest that "God's telephone" (presumably revelation to the individual) is far more reliable than man's:

There will be no charges,  
Telephone is free,  
It was Built for service,  
Just for you and me;
There will be no waiting
On this royal line,
Telephone to glory,
Always answers just in time.
("The Royal Telephone"; Benzinger & Dickinson, p. 114.)

The baby song simply reverses this contention: if the telephone is like
God's power to contact His believers, then surely someone with faith
can use a real telephone to reach to heaven. The adult knows better,
but the child assumes no gap between earth and heaven greater
than a telephone line can bridge.

The first important song of this particular formula was Chas. K.
Harris's "Hello Central, Give Me Heaven" (1901, P241), in which "a
tearful little child" decides to comfort herself and her grieving
father by putting in a call to heaven:

Hello Central, give me heaven,
For my mama's there;
You can find her with the angels
On the golden stair;
She'll be glad it's me who's speaking,
Call her, won't you please;
For I want to surely tell her,
We're so lonely here.

What happens next is not clear—the child is thrilled to receive an
answer to her call, and the song concludes with these peculiar lines:

I will answer just to please her,—
Yes dear heart, I'll soon come home;
Kiss me, mama, kiss your darling,
Through the telephone.
(Charosh & Fremont, pp. 92-95.)

The easiest way to interpret the first line of this passage is to assume
that it is an aside by a sympathetic operator, who then impersonates the
dead mother. Certainly this is the sense that Sigmund Spaeth gathered
from the line, as he reprinted the song with the wry comment, "It seems
a pity that the operator didn't become the child's stepmother . . . ."21
Such an operator, nevertheless, is never specifically introduced in the song, and the first hillbilly recording of the number simply disposes of her by changing the first line to "I will answer just to please you..." thus fitting it neatly to the following line (Riley Puckett, Columbia 15068 [1925]). In this version the dead mother does miraculously pick up the other phone and assure her Baby that she will be soon home. Admittedly the textual tradition of the song does not always make this change and therefore does not affirm a technological link between heaven and earth. But a song that denies such a link through shadowy imposter-operators and ironic implications based on single words clearly denies it in the weakest way imaginable.

And songs written along the same tradition in the country elegiac tradition sometimes validate the Baby's technological quest and explicitly show him contacting his dead mother. "Telephone to Heaven" (1941, F248) begins with the same "Hello Central..." formula, but in this case the call gets through to the pearly gates:

Hello heaven, is this you St. Peter talkin'
Will you kindly call my mother to the phone,
Hello "Mom" gee it's great once more to hear you,
Your voice is like an angel sweet and clear
I am lonely now that I'm left here without you
But I'll soon be up there with you Mother dear.

This song ends with renewed certainty, and no indication that the Baby is being hoaxed by a solicitous operator. Few sacred songwriters, after all, would deny the child's conclusion: "some day, we will all meet there in heaven,/And then forever happy we will be,/We will reunite and always be together..." (Bobby Gregory [1941a], p. 45). But few songs show the child able to contact his mother so easily. More often it is the Angel Mother alone who is capable of initiating the miracu-
lous phone call. In "Station G-L-O-R-Y" (1939, P42b), the child wishes aloud to his departed mother, "If you could broadcast from Glory, and I could hear your voice on High,/You know my radio would be turned to station G-L-O-R-Y." But the song continues to suggest that the mother is already a featured performer on the Intergalactic Country Cavalcade:

I have dreamed of Angels singing, in their voices sweet and clear, On a program up in Heaven, and dear mother you were there. I heard the gold harps a-ringing, as the Angels softly play, Then I would awake from sleeping, and your voice would fade away. (Buskirk Family [1939], p. 5.)

Despite the use of the heavenly "radio," though, this is the same sort of vision Angel Mothers typically offer their Orphan Children. And it is only a tenuous link between earth and heaven, for the Angel Mother is far more capable of crossing the boundary than the child. She can give him brief visions, intimations, or dreams, but they quickly fade. To reverse another mother's teaching, "She can only go to you, you can never come to her." The only certain way to bridge the gap between the two worlds, in all but a few songs, is to endure this world's suffering, then die. There is little two-way communication between the worlds: a lonely child can receive a message, but he cannot count on sending one and receiving a reply.

One of the finest expressions of the inexplicable division between the everyday and the divine is "No Telephone in Heaven" (bef. 1910, P243). Probably a Tin-Pan-Alley imitation of "Hello Central, Give Me Heaven," it was in oral circulation early in the century and gained popularity in hillbilly tradition through a recording by the Carter Family. Following is a transcription of the Carters' text:
Now I can't wait on babies
The smiling merchant said
As he stooped and softly toyed with
Its golden curly head
I want to call up Mama
Came the answer full and free
Will you telephone and ask her
When she's coming back to me.

Chorus: My child the merchant murmured
As he stroked the anxious brow
No telephone connection
Where your mother lives at now
No telephone in heaven
And the tears sprang in her eyes
I thought God had everything
With him up in the skies. 22

Tell her that I get so lonesome
That I don't know what to do
And Papa cries so much I guess
He must be lonesome too
Tell her to come to Baby
'Cause at night I get so 'fraid
With no one there to kiss me
When the lights begin to fade.

[Repeat Chorus]

All through the day I want her
Since my dolly's got so tore
With the awful punching brother
Give it with his little sword
They ain't no one to fix it
Since Mama's gone away
And poor little lonesome Dolly's
Getting thinner every day.

[Repeat Chorus]

(Victor V-40299 [11/24/29].)

This song begins with the Baby's attempt to use the "magical" telephone
to heaven to find out when the lost mother is coming back, but in this
version the merchant has to disillusion her, and the song ends with
the child's uncomprehending response. The use of the conventional
formula, however, is less revealing than the unconventional fears it
expresses. The Baby is upset about the "lonesomeness" that has taken
over the previously secure home, and the images used express profound anxiety about death. The child especially needs Mother at the twilight hour, "when the lights begin to fade," and now no one is there to reassure her. Her father, passive in his weepings, does nothing to comfort her, while her brother is openly hostile. Finally, the strange last verse tells us that with no mother to bind up the wound, "lonesome Dolly," like lonesome Baby, grows thinner and nearer death each day. Disenchanted, the child's shocked exclamation sums up the fear that looms behind the song: "I thought God had everything/With him up in the sky."

God, presumably, does not have everything, and there is no way of avoiding the fear of death by pretending there is an easy open line to heaven. True, the words are those of a Baby, who has not yet learned to acquiesce in the mystery of death and of a distant heaven, but her words raise complex, adult questions that remain unspoken behind the many songs surveyed in this chapter. If there is a better home already waiting in the afterlife, why must the earthly home be destroyed by death and separation? If this home is there for the asking, why must the good and true suffer before claiming it? Finally, if God is all-powerful, why does He refuse to have more than a figurative telephone connection installed for His believers? The songs of the Parting formula provide no definite answers, for it would be expecting too much of a popular genre to demand that they frame what would need to be a complex, theological reply. The songs' function is limited to stating these questions, channeling them into safe and satisfying expressions. These songs defuse, in other words, man's most dangerous emotion: his
need to have some response to the threat of individual death. And in
the lack of any clear assurance from the skies that our response is
the correct one, perhaps we are all Babies.

We have observed that the songs in the Parting category make up
a series of variations on a common anxiety. They show the children
in a moment of disorientation, recognizing that the security they once
felt has disappeared and that they must project this security onto
a "better home" of the future, whether in an unspoiled hollow of the
hills or, more often, in the untouchable fields of heaven. But the
question posed by the hymn "This World Is Not My Home" perpetually
recurs: "If heaven's not my home then Lord what will I do"? If it is
true that one can always find a mother's welcome back home, then
why not now? Problems of the broken family circle, the suffering
Orphan, and the unbridged gap between this world and the next are
defined in these songs and solved only by putting the solution off
until some future date. The projection of a womb-like home becomes
a fantasy-escape from the suffering actually expressed in most songs.
Howard Wight Marshall has observed that bluegrass gospel songs (which
preserve the early country tradition outlined here) "help resolve the
community's anxiety by verbally presenting their fears, hopes, and
attitudes about the inevitability of death . . . ." Yet he also notes
that when a mother dies, "even though she's 'surely' gone to Heaven,
the survivors feel intense grief."23 If the function of the songs is
to resolve such anxieties, why do they celebrate the anxiety as well?

The answer might be that the Parting formula objectifies the world
in a way not quite removed from mythology and yet reluctant to deny
any contact between this world and the next. The songs evoke a feeling that once there were direct links to the divine world, and only recently have they been broken. The mother, the human intermediary between God and the individual, has just died or been missed, and the old-time religion has just recently lost favor in the world, and still there is no way, short of withdrawing to an early death, to reestablish this mythological way of life. Even the few connections that still exist—such as a literally "true" Bible, for instance—must be defended constantly, otherwise the community would lose yet another reliable link to the other world. Some pentecostal sects insist that the individual must be baptized by the Holy Spirit not once, but continuously to remain in touch with the divine. Parting was the formula that produced the largest number of mother songs during the period surveyed, and in its popularity we see a society that was in the process of losing its controlling mythology, yet unwilling as yet to replace it with an intellectualized theological code that would make the relation between life and death less threatening. In this transitional state, then, it was important to keep Mother "waiting now for me in heaven's open door" (P404), but, inevitably, the formula also kept the grieving child waiting in the twilight graveyard.
Notes to Chapter Six

1 W. J. Cash, in The Mind of the South (1941, rpt. New York: Vintage Books, n.d.), gave a contemporary documentation of this move to the towns and what it meant for the migrants. He noted that between 1900 and 1910 urban population in the South more than doubled, and the rush of rural-born migrants to the city continued into the period surveyed. By 1920 "nearly three million persons born in the South were living outside its borders" (p. 283), and WPA jobs during the depression and defense plants during World War II brought many more from the farm (p. 418 ff.)

2 Nostalgia in popular and hillbilly culture during the first years of recordings has been examined by Archie Green, "Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol," JAF, 78 (1965), 204-228, esp. 219-221. Howard Wight Marshall, in "'Keep on the Sunny Side of Life,'" New York Folklore Quarterly, 30 (1974), 3-43, brings the pattern of nativism up to the present.


4 Berger and Luckmann, p. 111.

5 Included in this chapter are some songs that pair the father with the mother as "the old folks." Typically in such cases the mother alone is an active figure, while the father is supportive or passive. The conclusions drawn from such songs should not be different from those derived from pure mother songs, although I have placed "parent songs" in a different bracket in my catalog. Roles unique to the sentimental father will be discussed in the following chapter.


7 A related song, "Mother's Last Farewell Kiss" (bef. 1930, P166), says that the child did make it home in time, but an Australian song, "That Dapple Grey Broncho of Mine" (1940, P198) uncharacteristically has him arrive "three minutes too late."

8 I discuss this song as part of the country elegiac tradition, even though it is reported only from oral tradition in the maritime provinces of Canada, for several reasons. First, the song resembles several American Tin Pan Alley numbers like "Please, Mr. Conductor . . ." and may derive from print. Second, even if it is folk in origin, the maritime oral tradition was strongly influenced by sentimentality. Greenleaf and Mansfield collected "Break the News to Mother" (1897,
"The Fatal Wedding" (Windom & Davis, 1893), and "The Drunkard's Dream" (Anonymous, bef. 1850), as well as a unique recomposition of "I'm Lonely Since My Mother Died" (1863, P082). Finally, let us not forget that some American country artists, most notably Hank Snow, were born in the Canadian maritime area. Thus it is not far off base to use an occasional example from north of the border, especially if it illustrates the formula in an unusually dramatic way.

9 I have traced this song's history in "The Boys in Blue": Mother Song to Protest Song and Back Again," forthcoming in The Journal of the Ohio Folklore Society. It is interesting to note that a later version of this plot, "Teardrops Falling in the Snow" (McCarty, 1949), restored the role of mourner to the mother alone.

10 At first glance this song would seem more related to the Violation pattern, in which a Reckless Child is incarcerated for his sins. Indeed, the song suggests this at one point: "The preacher told the story/Of a boy who followed sin/The heavy load his loved ones now must bear ..." (Martin & Roberts). But such a suggestion must have seemed incongruous to country performers, for the version current in bluegrass tradition replaces the sinful child with a paragon of virtue: "The preacher told the story/What a good boy he had been/For one mistake the price is so unfair/He oft sang in the choir/While the organ softly played/And in this very church he always prayed ..." (Mac Wiseman, CMH-9001: The Mac Wiseman Story).

11 The transcription printed here is by Donald Lee Nelson, who provides the historical background in "The Ohio Prison Fire," JEMFO, 9 (1973), 12-15. Compare the mother's bitter comment in the contemporary corrido, "Suicidio De Juan Reyna":

"Ah, hijito de mi vida,"  "Oh, little son of my life,"
decía la mama de Juan,  Juan's mother would say,
"Yo te esperaba con vida  "I waited for you alive
y hoy tu cadaver me traen," and today they bring me your corpse."  (Nacho & Justin, Vocalion 5425 [ca. 1931]. Transcription and translation from the booklet to Folklyric 9004-5: Corridos part I-II, ed. Philip Sonnichsen, p. 17.)

12 John I. White has traced the early history of this song and its author in "D. J. O'Malley, Montana Cowboy Poet," in Git Along, Little Dogies (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), pp. 73-100.


14 The text cited is mainly Sprague's, but I have quoted a few phrases from O'Malley's original, printed on pp. 73 and 85 of White's Git Along, Little Dogies, and from White's own version, The Lonesome Cowboy, pp. 2-3.
The graveyard scene seems to have been perpetuated through the influence of an old Baptist hymn, "Village Churchyard" (bef. 1911, P331), which seems never to have been recorded in its original form, at least commercially, but which inspired several hillbilly recompositions. The original scene went as follows:

> Oft I wander to the churchyard  
> Flowers to plant with tender care  
> On the grave of my dear mother  
> Darkness finds me weeping there.

> Looking at the stars above me  
> Waiting for an early dawn  
> There by mother I'll be buried  
> And no more be left alone.

(Roscoe Holcomb, Folkways FA-2374: Close to Home.)

Carson Robison skillfully reworked the song into "Mother's Grave" (1925, P332), a song that has since reentered oral tradition through a popular Vernon Dalhart recording:

> Oft I've wandered in the churchyard  
> Tenderly I nursed the flowers  
> There beside my mother's tomb stone  
> I've passed many weary hours  
> Looking at the skies above me  
> Wondering if it will be long  
> Till the angels come and take me  
> To that home where mother's gone.

(Vernon Dalhart [1928], pp. 28-29.)

And the scene entered bluegrass tradition, although in an abbreviated version, in Ralph Stanley's "White Dove":

> As the years roll by I often wonder  
> Will we all be together someday  
> And each night as I wander to the graveyard  
> Darkness finds me where I kneel to pray.

(Stanley Brothers, Columbia 20577 [1949].)

These skeptical lines, found in a number of scattered texts, run as follows:

> "Perhaps they've no room in heaven," she said,  
> "For two little darlings to keep,"  
> She then placed her hand on Jim's little head,  
> She kissed him and both fell asleep.

(Loye Pack [ca. 1934a], pp. 16-17.)

The influential recording by McFarland and Gardner (Brunswick 202 [1927]) simply omits this section, and most printed and recorded versions after them do so as well. Stoneman, in the recording quoted in the text,
simply revises the girl's words so that she says "there's no room here . . . /Two little orphans to keep . . . " (stress mine)—a much more conventional sentiment.

17 It is possible, though unproved, that A. P. Carter took his antecedents from Black analogues, since he often took well-known secular ("The Cannonball") and sacred pieces ("Motherless Children") from Afro-American tradition and arranged them in the usual Carter Family style. The scenes in "Can the Circle Be Unbroken" are reminiscent of a widespread number usually called "Death Letter Blues," and a section of a contemporary version recorded by "Leadbelly" (Huddie Ledbetter) especially parallels the Carters' song:

So many hacks and buggies was a-standing around
So many hacks and buggies was a-standing all around
Waiting to take my baby to the burying ground.

[Chanted] Sure enough they taken his baby to the burying ground
When they went to let her down he walked up to the preacher and put
his hand on the preacher's shoulder
And here what he said to the preacher:

Yes you taken my baby to the burying ground
You done taken my baby to the burying ground
You gon' break my heart Lord as you let her down.

[Chanted] He goes to the graveyard and falls down on his knees
After everybody's done gone home:

Yes he went to the headboard fell down on his knees
I [sic] went to the headboard fell down on his knees
If you'll speak one word babe you can give my heart some ease.
(identified ARC master [1/24/35], reissued on Columbia C-30035: Leadbelly.)

A. P. Carter was not above changing the characters in songs he found to make a dying sweetheart song out of a mother song and vice versa. "In a Little Village Churchyard" (Decca 5386 [6/8/36]), is "Village Churchyard" (P331) with the word "mother" replaced by "darling"; conversely, "Sad and Lonesome Day" (ARC releases 7-04-53 [5/7/35]) is the Black quasi-blues "See That My Grave Is Kept Green," with the dying narrator replaced, curiously, by a dying mother. It is therefore at least plausible that Carter could have picked up some version of "Death Letter Blues" through his Black informant and helper, Leslie Riddles. With a bit of imagination, one can even turn the lyrics of "Can the Circle Be Unbroken" into a fair set of blues stanzas, complete with intrusive "Lord's":

Lord I told the undertaker undertaker please drive slow
You know I told that undertaker won't you please drive slow
For this body you are hauling Lord I hate to see her go.
18 John Lair's original version, as printed in Dorothy Horstman's *Sing Your Heart Out, Country Boy* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1975), pp. 52-53, the stanzas about the Pilgrim's rocky road and his mother waiting in heaven are flanked by two more that tell of Jesus and a deceased "baby" who also wait for the traveller by the door. But these two stanzas are invariably cut in recordings and folio versions, suggesting that country performers saw the Mother/Pilgrim relationship as the core of the song.

19 This song was called to my attention by Chuck Perdue, folklorist at the University of Virginia, in correspondence to the author, November 11, 1977. The song has been printed in *The New Baptist Song Book*, pp. 115-116, but Mr. Perdue's mother, Mrs. Eva Sampler Perdue, learned it ca. 1912 from her father in Carroll County, Georgia. The passage about digging sister up is quoted from Mrs. Perdue's text, given in the correspondence, as it is not in the songbook's version. The rest is quoted from the printed version.

20 This song is recorded by Jimmie Skinner on Vetco 3027: *Jimmie Skinner Sings Bluegrass, Vol. 2*; I do not know its author or publisher.


22 This "chorus" at first appears to have been a fourth stanza that has been pressed into service awkwardly as a refrain. But all variants print or perform the song this way, and there is a rhetorical advantage to breaking the "suspense" of the song this way. If the news that the mother were dead were withheld until after the stanzas, one might suspect that she were an unfaithful wife, thus missing the point of the child's anxieties. This way, the audience knows the child's real dilemma at the end of the first chorus, and can appreciate the symbolic irony of the rest of the song. In addition, the repetition of the merchant's explanation and the child's shocked reply heightens our sense that the Baby is incapable of dealing with the concept of death.


CHAPTER SEVEN

"A LITTLE LOVE FOR DAD":
THE SENTIMENTAL FATHER

Previous chapters have dealt with the female parent, mentioning her male counterpart only in passing. It is clear that the mother, by encompassing home security, morality, and faith in the afterlife, left little for the father to represent. Accordingly, in the earliest stratum of sentimental songs, fathers are nearly always foils for the mother or for her faithful children. This dualistic division of powers could be seen purely as a rhetorical necessity: the more angelic the mother, the more sullied the male scapegoat must be to encompass the sins denied the female. But Murray G. Murphey, in a study of nineteenth-century child-rearing practices, suggests another valid reason for this dualism. While the mother's assigned role, both in prescriptive manuals and in accounts of real life, was to provide care for the child and encourage his wants,

The father's primary task appears to have been providing for the family as a whole. He was, however, expected to administer corporal punishment to the child when the need for it arose and, as the child grew older, to assume the responsibility for his education and for preparing him to make his way in the world.

This later education, Murphey observes, "was usually more severe and exacting than the mother's, particularly in the areas of work and practical knowledge." One consequence of this division of labor we have already documented: the idealization of the mother and her association with religion and morality. But Murphey also suggests that
"Father's discipline should be perceived as more severe than mother's discipline, and should be more resented."¹

Murphey correlated and documented this resentment only with other adult males "in situations of threat," that is, real-life situations later on in life. But judging from the traditional role of folklore and popular culture in venting socially repressed frustrations and resentments, we should not be surprised to find hostility projected onto father-figures in songs as well. This social condition offers a tangible reason why the nineteenth-century song tradition deposed the father as a powerful head of the family (as he normally appears in earlier broadsides) and portrayed him either as a clumsy villain who, when not under the power of demons, can easily be manipulated by his angelic wife or children, or else as a helpless old man, driven from home by his resentful children. This sentimental tradition provides an outlet for latent resentment by allowing the listener to identify with a fantasy child who gains physical or psychological superiority over a corrupt father. But child-rearing practices shifted during the early twentieth century, and so did popular stereotypes. By 1930 division of labor between parents was no longer the rule, and in fact it was the mother who most often took on the job of corporal punishment. Even before the depression years, when many fathers were forced back into their homes full-time, job conditions no longer kept the provider away from domestic life and the children.² As a result, the distant, overbearing father no longer was a realistic figure, and new stereotypes had to be created to fit new roles. Consequently, large numbers of "daddy songs" entered popular tradition, portraying
the father as a positive, admirable figure. He never became so popular a subject as Mother, probably because his roles never were so charged with religious symbolism, but at least the black/white dualism had begun to dissipate, and the two acted in song formulas more nearly as equals.

Starting in 1929 the early country song tradition followed the lead of popular culture at large. On the trail of hit numbers by Jimmie Rodgers and Gene Autry, a flood of daddy songs entered performers' repertories, and by wartime the Domestic Father was well established as a conventional stereotype. Still, the mother-song tradition remained dominant, and a large number of songs apologized for the gap that still remained between the two figures. When the father was idealized, it was usually along the same lines of the mother songs, and there seems never to have been a distinctive tradition of fatherly roles that he could play. Rarely praised for his moral strength, he is typically celebrated as a figure who deserves love without earning or demanding it. In addition, the older, more hostile songs persevered in tradition during this period and inspired new songs along the old lines. It seems clear that the Domestic Father never was as strong a convention as the Domestic Mother. He was praised out of guilt, not admiration, and many daddy songs even acknowledge the mixed feelings with which the child praises his father. One such song, "A Little Love for Dad" (1936, C351), begins with a conventional stanza of praise for Mother, who "knew just what was wanted by every little cry/As she'd tuck the covers gently/Around the cradle with a sigh . . . ." The narrator then warns his listeners:
But don't forget poor daddy,
When praising mother, dear,
He loves you just the same as she,
Though may not seem so near.
He works out in the rain or snow,
Don't seem to care how bad,
Now don't you think that you should save,
Just a little love for dad.

(Warren Caplinger [1936], p. 17.)

Even at their most laudatory, the early country songs present this view of the father: distant, hard-working, second in rank to Mother, and loved out of duty, not gratitude. When the early country song tradition revised its conventions to "save/Just a little love for dad," it did so in a conservative way, apologizing for the older tradition's hostility without compromising its preservation of nineteenth-century Motherhood.

1. Heavy and Helpless Fathers

The oldest of the sentimental father's roles derives from temperance propaganda, in which he is a neglectful drunkard who spends his wages in the bar-room, leaving his wife and children to fend for themselves. The provider thus defaults on his responsibility, and often the child is forced to take over as bread-winner:

When I was a lad, I had a bad dad,
Bad in his ways was he;
Every dollar and cent for whiskey he spent
Till death came and took him away.

("Ragged Pat," bef. 1915, A046; Arnold, p. 107.)

My father was a drunkard sir
I heard my mother say
And I am helping Mother
As I journey along the way.

The situation is usually more critical even than these vignettes: the father lives on while the mother dies, suggesting in an emblematic way that the mother's morality departs as the father settles into his cups. Thus most of these songs present a Violation plot in which the child is entirely at the father's mercy. He is in effect an orphan, for his life is spent struggling for some form of home security. This role of the father (which I term the "Heavy Father" stereotype) is one that shows him disrupting the family circle through reckless neglect, often combined with physical abuse. Even when the songs in this tradition do not insist on his drunkenness, he is a bumbling petty tyrant whom the child must circumvent, defeat, or convert. Most often the child is successful, and the Intervention function that we studied in connection with the Redeemer Mother is, if anything, even more prevalent in father-child plots. Few such songs end without having the angelic child make some effort to convert the Heavy Father to morality. Secure in his memories of Mother's instruction, the child assumes her role as Redeemer and forces the father back to "his old self"—that is, back to a maternal role in the home. What we see in these plots, then, is a reversal of the usual parent-child relationship, in which the child, unspotted in his original moral purity, dictates to his submissive, degraded father—an ideal fantasy of taking revenge for past resentment.

In outline, the progress of the Heavy Father into ruin and conversion follows the Violation formula described in Chapter Five. The father's initial breaking of the code and his lapse into a fallen state are not usually dramatized, though. The emphasis is on his reckless career,
culminating either with a fatal sin or with an Intervention by the child. What such songs describe, then, is the part of the father's sinful life when he is causing suffering in the family, but is not yet beyond hope. The child's response to his father's recklessness is the main dramatic interest, not the nature of the father's sins. Most ballads of this kind end happily, but a few end with a tragic fatal sin, most notably "The Drunkard's Doom" (bef. 1905, Vol1) and "Licensed to Sell, or Little Blossom" (bef. 1904, Vol2). In the first of these, we find a father standing "Down by the grog shop door" while his son, like Little Mary, begs him to return home: "Father, mother is sick at home, /An' sister cries for bread." Faced with the choice between drink and duty to family, the father makes no reply, but enters the grog shop and demands "one glass more!" The choice is a fatal sin, as the following stanza makes clear:

He took the glass in his tremblin' hand,  
An' drunk the liquor foul,  
He drunk while wife an' children starved,  
An' he ruined his pore soul.

The Ozark text quoted here also includes a rare stanza that seals the "drunkard's doom" with a mother's vindictive forgiveness:

Oh God forgive my husband dear,  
The dyin' woman said,  
Although he's been unkind to me  
An' his children has cried for bread.  
(Randolph, 2:392-393.)

Sure enough, the father (whom many texts now term a "foul murderer") is dead within the year, certainly damned.

The climax of "Licensed to Sell" is even more horrific. The narrator of the opening stanzas is a little girl, worried and lonely because her
father has stopped in at "a great big long store filled with bottles" and she knows he often returns from there sick and angry. "And once when he came in the parlor/He kicked at my poor little chair." But, like Little Mary, she decides to go after him, "For I know he will gladly come home/And then it won't be dark and lonesome . . . ." When she reaches him and cries out for joy, however, this tragic climax occurs:

A moment the red eye gazed wildly down,  
Into the face sweet and fair  
And just as the demon had passed him  
He grabbed off the back of a chair.

Like a moment the second was over,  
And the work of the deed was complete  
For poor little innocent blossom  
Lay broken and crushed at his feet.  
(Arkansas Woodchopper [ca. 1931], pp. 56-57.)

The longer version printed by Randolph (2:403-405) includes a postlude in which the father returns to his senses and repents, but then is hauled off to jail by the same officials who shield the barkeeper, the song's true villain. But all country versions end with the child's death, then ask the audience to "fight hard" for Prohibition. In most versions of both songs, then, the father is a vicious sinner who kills his children either through neglect or violence. Although a child tries to intervene and bring the Heavy Father "home," his addiction to liquor is too strong and his will too weak to resist the temptations of "demons." This is the most extreme form of the stereotype, in which the father is scarcely human, but most later songs mitigate his vicious traits with more redeemable qualities.

In particular the songs that focus on the Redeemer Child's appeal to the father's "better nature" usually end with his moral surrender.
Like the preacher-figure in previous songs, the child confronts his father, points out through conspicuous suffering that his acts are disrupting the family, and steers him to the path of morality. "The Drunkard's Child's Plea" (bef. 1870, V005) is one such appeal:

Oh, father, once you loved your child, and we had much to eat; Mother and I were nicely clad, and life it seemed so sweet; You never spoke unkindly then nor dealt an angry blow; Oh father, dear, 'tis hard to think that rum has changed you so.

The child then demands that his father never touch drink again, but ask God to "save [his] sin-sick soul," thus saving his child "from a life of want and woe . . ." (Randolph, 2:427-428). A later product of this same propagandistic tradition, "The Prayer of the Drunkard's Little Girl" (1927, V015), contains much the same appeal, except that the actual plea is directed not to the actual dad, but to God the Father:

Oh Lord if You'll stop my poor father from drink
My heart would be free from all pain
Since he has been gone there is one missing link
Oh Jesus I know You're my friend.

God answers the child's prayer, and the father miraculously comes "back to his old self again," repenting of his sins and vowing to shun drink from now on (Blind Alfred Reed, Victor 21191 [12/19/27]). Although this song revolves around a miracle rather than a psychological victory, the effect is the same: the father returns to his "normal" decent self once again, as he turns back to God—and to Mother.

For in both songs the mother plays a major role. In "The Drunkard's Child's Plea" she is "sleeping in the tomb," but the child's ultimate appeal to the father is that he "follow in dear mother's steps to mansions bright above." In "The Prayer of the Drunkard's Little Girl," the mother is still alive, but her life is "fast faring away" until
the moment the father announces his change of heart. Then "a sweet
voice from the Lord seemed to say/Your Mama will live she'll not die."
The same motif of the mother's imminent death averted by the husband's
conversion forms the climax of another hillbilly composition, "A Picture
of Life's Other Side" (1930, AOII\frac{1}{4}). The Heavy Father is caught in a
web of difficulties: arrested by an officer for public drunkenness,
his little daughter appears to tell him his wife is dying. As the
girl pleads with the officer for her dad's release, she draws the
conventional picture of the father before he lapsed into sin:

"You say he is a drunkard now and just another bum
But Daddy was a nice as you before he took the rum
He used to be a handsome man and treated us so kind
No better man in all the world than that dear Daddy of mine."

The plea not only wins over the policeman (who looks away long enough
to let his charge escape) but converts the Heavy Father as well.

Taking the child's hand, he rushes home, "Resolved to be a better man,
to break the curse of rum/And for the right to take his stand for God,
for love, for home." On arrival, they find the mother alive and well,
"for God had answered prayer" (Golden Gospel Songs [ca. 19\frac{1}{4}3], pp. 1-2).

In each of these songs we see the same conflict and resolution: the
Redeemer Child appeals to the father's "old self," but it is a self
that is associated with the Domestic Mother. If she is dead, the
father must assume her role and treat her children as she once did.
If she is alive, he must keep her from dying by returning from the grog
shop or city street to her side. Her way of conducting the home is
the ideal to which the father's "better side" conforms.

While the Heavy Father plot usually involves drunkenness, there are
several songs that characterize his stumbling acts as less damning sins.
The child's or the mother's life is not threatened, but he uses his
domestic authority inflexibly and cruelly. "Don't Whip Little Ben"
(1883, VO1.1) comes closest to illustrating the conditions Murphey
described. The Heavy Father is preparing to thrash his innocent
child for using some "very bad words" that he "learned from some old
wicked men." But another child overhears Benny's devout prayers and
intervenes, reminding his father of what Mother would do:

Remember how Mama loved Benny,
How she kissed him the morning she died
She told him to love and obey you,
And I know dear Benny has tried.

Oh what if dear Mama in heaven
Should be looking way down from the skies,
And see you a whippin' poor Benny,
I know it would make Mama cry.
("Little Benny," Lulu Belle & Scotty [1944], pp. 22-23.)

The father, tearfully looking to heaven, forgives Benny. More often
the Heavy's Father's actions are to spite a child close to adulthood.
In many songs already mentioned, including "The Letter Edged in Black"
(1897, PS42), "If I Could Only Blot Out the Past" (1896, V321.2), and
"The Wanderer's Warning" (1929, VO91), it is the father's harsh words
that drive the child from home, while the mother represents a more
forgiving influence. Other songs develop this dichotomy: in "The
Picture That Is Turned Toward the Wall" (1891, P159), the daughter
leaves her home for the City and disappears, presumably into prosti-
tution. It is the father who then turns her picture and remains
"unforgiving," while the mother, her heart half broken, "prays to see
her child once more" (Charosh & Fremont, pp. 230-233). The mother
more directly opposes the father's harshness in "Two Sweethearts of
Mine" (1897, AI71), in which the son's marriage plans are thwarted by
the Heavy Father's demand: "You must marry an heiress instead." But
the mother (the child's second sweetheart) takes up his cause:

Mother was young she knows how it is
When Father met her she was poor
Ned don't fret she'll be your wife yet
For he will consent I am sure.
(Carter Family, Victor 23791 [10/13/32].)

The father is the one who lays down the law, tries to direct his child's
life, and stays behind his decisions inflexibly, while the mother,
more concerned with the child's happiness, helps circumvent the father's
severity. The father, in other words, in associated with impersonal
discipline, while the mother represents family harmony.

A second, more important difference begins to emerge here between
the two parents' abilities to help themselves and their children. The
mother, as we saw in previous chapters, is relatively active in caring
for her children, giving them vital instructions, sending encouragement
or reminders to the City, plucking a lost sheep from a dangerous predi-
cament, and, as we now see, helping them circumvent an unreasonable
father's command. The father, on the other hand, can initiate little
constructive action: not only does he try to frustrate his children's
desires and neglect their needs, but when he finds himself in diffi-
culties, he is rarely able to assist himself. Fittingly, he is left
at the mercy of those he has previously refused to help, and whether
they reject him or vindictively forgive him, the children take their
revenge. Such revenge is the core of the "Helpless Father" tradition,
in which it is not the child who finds himself homeless, but the old
man:
As we walk down the street, oh! how often do we meet
Some poor old man whose life is naught but woe;
And with age his form is bent, in his pocket not a cent,
And for shelter he does not know where to go.
With relations by the score, who pass him from the door,
And meeting on the street they pass him by;
If you ask him why it's done, he will answer you and say,
I'm poor, I'm old, and only in the way.
("Old, and Only in the Way" [1], bef. 1889, V183; Our New Clown
Songster [1889], p. 32.)

This figure, admittedly, is a sympathetic figure, and rarely is presented
as a former tyrant or drunkard, but it is worth noting that no parallel
tradition exists with mothers, and when songs do show Mom turned out
of home, as in "The Holiness Mother" (1936, V165), they treat it as
a damnable sin. In the case of fathers, though, "It happens every
day, 'tis nothing strange" (V183). Furthermore, such an act of rejection
is rarely punished in these songs, and when the ungrateful children
are sanctioned, it is either when they also abuse the mother (as
in "Poor Old Dad" [1886, V182]) or when one of the children casts
aside his resentment to act as Redeemer. Otherwise these songs are
a veiled form of fantasy-revenge: the grown children push aside the
authoritarian father and start their own homes. The songs that
recommend pity for a Helpless Father do not do so in moralistic terms
("If you spite Daddy, you'll burn for it") but purely in pragmatic
terms:

So let us cheer them on, they can't be with us long,
Don't sneer at them because they are old and gray.
And remember while you're young, that the day to you may come
When you'll be old and only in the way.
(V183.)

The earliest examples of this type of plot show the Helpless Father
driven out of home to the poorhouse by his grown children. Unlike
mothers, whom otherwise dutiful children have temporarily "forgotten,"
the fathers cannot appeal to their sons to come "home" and take care of them: the children are home, and they are deliberately expelling their fathers from the circle of security. "Over the Hill to the Poor-House" (1874, V181) is the most influential of these songs in country tradition, and still persists in bluegrass repertories. The old man's story sets the pattern for later songs: after a happy life of playing with his little babes, his wife died, and "the light... died out of [his] life." He then turned over all his belongings to his children, including the family house and farm, but now the new generation rejects him. Toward the end of his lament the father comes close to cursing them: "... but hark! Though my heart breaks, I'll say it's you've driven/Me out here to die in the dark," but in the end he acquiesces, going to the poorhouse without resistance, saying "perhaps, they'll live happier without me..." (Hi Henry [ca. 1879], pp. 44-45). This passivity superficially resembles a mother's conspicuous suffering, but with one important difference. While many neglectful children live to regret having caused a mother sorrow or death, few children ever are brought to remorse over a father's suffering; they simply live happier without him.

A few songs provide happy endings, in which the Helpless Father is rescued after all by a child's Intervention. Such songs offer the audience the best of both worlds: the father is put in his proper submissive place, and yet the younger generation has no need to feel guilty. Still current in bluegrass tradition is the most popular of these songs, "The Black Sheep" (1897, V185). The plot and the characters are divided into two complementary portions: in the first
stanza the father's one "honest" son is banished, while in the other two
the other "sly" sons conspire to banish the father. In the first epi-
isode the father plays the usual Heavy role, heeding the wicked counsel
of the bad sons and finally telling the honest one, "'Begone, you're
heartless to the core.'" Although the rejected son begs for "just
another chance" to show that he loves his father "Far better than the
rest," the father remains inflexible. For this tyrannical behavior,
the father is punished in two suitable ways. First, the sly sons,
along with a new-made bride (the counterpart of the blind girl's step-
mother) decide that "'the old fool's in the way' . . ." and plan to
pack him off to the poorhouse. As soon as the father learns of this
plot, his response is not to resist or confront his sons, but to
ruefully think of the honest son's words that come "ringing in his ear."
The evil plot never comes off, though: the good son reappears just in
time, berates his brothers for their thanklessness ("'You even sold the
little lot containing his wife's grave . . .'"), and vows to stand by
his wayward father forever. The tables completely turned, the Help-
less Father assumes the same posture of begging that he earlier had
forced his son to play:

Don't be angry with me, lad
I turn'd you from my door,
I know that I was foolish,
I've repented o'er and o'er
I wish I gave to you my gold,
For you have stood the test,
And I've found the black sheep loves his dad,
Far better than the rest.

(Tex Morton [ca. 1940], pp. 3-5.)

No artistic revenge could be more finely wrought: the honest son may
not get the old man's gold, but he at least wrings from him the
admission that the son has in fact been the moral leader of the family—"far better than the rest," including the father.

It is this kind of revenge, in both Heavy and Helpless Father plots, that most clearly presents the emotional core of these moralistic songs: the reversal of the normal parent-child relationship. Whether with the mother’s aid or not, the child finally gets his own way and forces the father to admit that his domestic actions were wrong in the first place. A revealing example of this reversal is "The Skeptic's Daughter" (bef. 1894, A120), in which the Heavy Father perversely brings up his little girl an atheist. She goes to a prayer meeting to ridicule their illogic, but suddenly finds Jesus and goes to the altar a convert.

When she tries to bring the good news to her parents (her mother, also a skeptic, plays a minor role), her father coldly forces her to choose between him and God:

Well, my daughter, your behavior
Seals your doom without delay,
You must either leave your Savior
Or your father's house today.

There's your likeness, clothes an' purses,
Take 'em, an' at once depart
For your prayers seem more like curses
To your father's broken heart.

Rather than deny her religion, the daughter chooses to be "an outcast orphan/With no home or friend on earth," and departs, but as she leaves, the hymns she sings penetrate the Heavy Father's soul. Rushing after her, he begs her forgiveness and asks her to save his soul. The whole family, guided by the daughter's holy influence, finds favor with God and goes "rejoicin' on their way,/To their home high up in heaven . . ."

(Randolph, 4:25-29). Here, ironically, it is the daughter who acts
to reestablish the "home" atmosphere by guiding her father back to the way of social traditions. We can see now that this reversal is the norm within these early father songs: while the Redeemer Mother usually converts a Reckless Child, it is normal for a Redeemer Child to save a Heavy Father. Interestingly, most songs follow conventional sex lines: a daughter typically (though not invariably) saves a father, and a mother usually saves a son. Examples of fathers saving daughters or sons saving mothers are practically absent in early country tradition. But whether it be son or daughter who acts as Redeemer, this formula is something of a paradox within sentimentality as a whole: the younger generation is expected to guide the older in the "old-time" way of family conduct!

The tradition of the tyrannical or ineffectual father persisted into early country tradition not only in the many older songs that stayed in the repertory, but also in many new songs that followed the old formulas. Perhaps the most widespread of these is the anonymous "Drunken Driver" (bef. 1937, V020). Popular among Appalachian holiness celebrants as a hymn and among radio performers both as a song and a recitation, the ballad reached a broader audience through the singing of Molly O'Day in the mid and late 1940s. Her text, as printed on the broadside she sold at personal appearances, is as follows:

Now listen, you drunken driver,
While here on earth you dwell:
You never know when the time will come
You'll have to say farewell

To your dear old mother and sister,
Tho they may be miles away;
So don't be drinking whiskey
While driving on your way.
I saw an accident one day
That would charm the heart of man,
And teach them not to drink a drop
While the steering wheel's in their hand.

This awful accident occurred
On the twentieth day of May,
And caused two loving children
To sleep beneath the clay.

These two little children walked side by side
Upon the State Highway;
Their loving mother, she had died
Their father had run away.

They were talking of their lovely parents,
How sad their hearts did feel,
When around the curve came a speeding car
With a drunk man at the wheel.

This drunk man saw these two dear kids,
He hooted a drunkard's sound:
"Get out of the road, you little fools,"
And the car, it brought them down.

The bumper struck that little girl,
Taking her life away;
While the little boy in a gore of blood
In the ditch line there did lay.

The driver staggered from his car
To see what he had done;
His heart sank within him
When he saw his loving son.

Such mourning from a drunken man
I never saw before.
While the little boy, in a gore of blood
Said "Daddy has come once more."

He then picked up his loving ones
And carried them to his car;
And kneeling on the running board
He prayed a drunkard's prayer.

Saying, "Oh please, Lord, forgive me
For this awful crime I've done;
His attention then was called away
By the words of his dying son"
Saying, "Take us to our mother, dad,
Who sleeps beneath the ground;
It was you and her we were talking about
When the car it brought us down.

And please, dear Daddy, don't you drink no more
While driving on your way,
But meet us with our mother, dad,
In Heaven some sweet day.

(Tribe & Morris, p. 33.)

At first there might appear to be a disjunction between the song's opening moral and the story that follows: the main character does not bid farewell to a mother or sister, he accidentally kills his own children. But the story is an emblematic projection of the worst fatal sin a reckless drinker might commit— all lesser sins against mothers and sisters are contained in this allegorical tableau. It is not enough that this Heavy Father starts drinking, thus disrupting the family and causing the mother and her moral influence to die off, but he also runs away from home, leaving his children to wander along the road, "talking of their lovely parents . . . ." Through the use of coincidence the song's author adds the final touch to this worst-of-all-possible parents: demonically he comes roaring around a curve, hooting wildly and running his children into "a gore of blood." Yet this same coincidence permits the demon to be exorcized: when the Heavy Father is confronted face to face with what he has done (and has been doing), he recognizes "this awful crime I've done." And once he feels remorse and kneels to pray, he needs only the dying child's "last words" to guide him back to his old self and prepare him to "meet [them] with [their] mother . . . ./In Heaven some sweet day." One reason for the song's popularity may be because it presents the Heavy Father in its most extreme form, the
most despicable father imaginable who can still go to heaven through
his little child's act of Intervention. The boy's dying words, opening
with the savage irony of "'Daddy has come once more,'" complement the
father's moment of truth, defining his immorality and leading him back
to his better maternal self.

To summarize this older sentimental tradition, the role of the father
within the domestic circle was incompetent in nearly every way. He
might be the Heavy Father who brings the sins of the outside world
to the home circle, introducing suffering to the once secure haven,
allowing Mother to die, and leaving the children to wander as orphans
in the Dark and Dreary World. The other side of the stereotype is the
Helpless Father, who is trapped out in the world himself, unable to
better his condition or even to appeal to his children for help and
security. Without directions of his own, he must rely on their
generosity to guide him back to the family circle. The Redeemer Child
may forgive his father's sins, follow him to the bar-room or gutter,
appeal to his "old self" (represented by Mother's influence), and win
him back to morality. Or the child may not, leaving the father to die
of his sins without any fear of supernatural retribution. The child,
in brief, takes over the role the parent should normally play, and the
father, if he is wise, takes the subordinate role, confesses his guilt,
and acts as the child bids him.

ii. Domesticating Daddy

Before turning to the series of new daddy songs that presented
the father's more sympathetic side, we must admit that the history of
paternal roles before 1923 was not totally negative. True, most fathers in the British-derived ballads are the same sort of autocratic villains, frustrating their children's love affairs, but some songs, like "The Lass of Loch Royal" (Child #76) and "John of Hazelgreen" (#293), show him actually helping out the child's romance. In some early Violation ballads he engages counsel or pleads for his imprisoned child (see "Botany Bay" and its descendants [Laws L 16], "Gambling on the Sabbath Day" [Laws E 14, V242], and "Rose Connoley" [Laws F 6]). In such pleas, however, he is always unsuccessful, and the child either goes to the pen or is hanged—a surprising contrast to the many ballads in which a mother or sweetheart gets the convict released. Other songs, like "Don't You Go, Tommy" (1868, V081) and "Just Plain Folks" (1901, V190), show the father delivering a stern moral lecture to his son, converting him to "home" morality. Add to these "The Boys in Blue" (bef. 1900, P530), in which a grief-stricken father mourns the loss of a Reckless Son, and we can safely say that there have always been some songs, even during the heyday of the Heavy/Helpless Father, that presented sympathetic father-figures. The problem is that there was no distinct tradition of daddy songs that showed the father as a self-sufficient head of the family circle, and it is significant that in all the songs cited the father acts ineffectively or is supported by a mother's authority. Many songs from the pre-1923 period survive into hillbilly repertories that idealize Mother and either ignore or belittle Father, while practically no songs survive that idealize Father without mentioning Mother as well.
I know of only three such songs, two that retell the Biblical story of the Prodigal Son, and a stray (and strange) Celebration. The two Prodigal songs follow Luke 15:11-32 with few narrative changes, so we need discuss only the more elaborate of the two, "The Prodigal's Return" (bef. 1926, P213). As in the Bible, the father acts as a domestic welcoming figure much like the mother who waits, candle in window, for her wandering boy. Although the Prodigal has "gone wrong with a riotous throng," the father greets him with shouts and songs of joy, at once ordering the robe, diamond ring, and fatted calf ("Honest Confession Is Good for the Soul," Uncle Dave Macon [ca. 1938], No. 19). This song and its fellow did not affect the song tradition at large, however, and there are no other "welcoming father" plots until after the hillbilly tradition had generated its own formulas. Perhaps the reason is that the Prodigal Son story, even in its original form, centers around the happy ending—the dancing and feasting that marks the child's return—and the elegiac tradition avoided dramatizing such reunions. It might well describe a Prodigal's wandering or his longing to return home, but a plot that showed him actually making it back home would have been unconventional, did it not have scriptural sanction. The Prodigal Son plot was more likely to inspire imitations more along the lines of "Lord, I'm Coming Home" (Kirkpatrick, 1892), which shows the weary Prodigal Pilgrim preparing to meet God the Father in a heavenly home:

I've wandered far away from God,  
Now I'm coming home;  
The paths of sin too long I've trod,  
Lord, I'm coming home.
Chorus: Coming home, coming home,  
Nevermore to roam,  
Open wide Thine arms of love,  
Lord, I'm coming home.  

(Victory Songs [ca. 1920], no. 239.)

The other song, a Celebration called "The Old Hickory Cane" (1891, C285), shows up several times in hillbilly repertories, yet it is the only nineteenth-century song to persist that idealizes a father alone. The roles that the father plays in this song, however, are so bland as to discourage imitation. We find the father described in two scenes: in the first, he sits with "good natur'd face" after a hearty dinner and tells "a story"—about what, the song fails to say. He seems to be no Bible-reader or lullaby-singer, but merely after-dinner entertainment. The other scene is more precisely characterized:

The spirit of mischief seem'd ever in play,  
We tried to keep still but in vain  
The signal for quiet I ne'er shall forget  
The thump of the old hick'ry cane.

The nineteenth-century role of father as disciplinarian is not far behind the scenes here, and the keepsake that represents him—a cane that is "knotty and worn"—is also troublesome. Did he wear it down by thrashing mischievous children, or by using it to support his tottering footsteps? All the song tells us is that "Its absence he ne'er could have borne" (Cliff Carlisle [1936], pp. 37-38). By the song's conclusion he has died, a sympathetic but not especially revered figure. Given the rarity of songs that idealized Fatherhood before 1923, hillbilly artists during the first years of recordings had to make do with vague or villainous fathers. Yet during the second five years of country recordings (1923-33) a lively tradition of daddy songs that followed new formulas suddenly sprang up.
This abrupt shift in country song tradition probably reflects changes in child-rearing practices that had taken place since the old formulas had been established. A government survey taken in 1929 among families with small children revealed a family structure quite different from that described by Murphey. It was true that among the three lowest socio-economic groups surveyed (farmers, blue-collar workers, and unskilled labor) the surveyors found that the father spent relatively less time with the children than did upper-class fathers. Likewise, children in lower-class families were more likely to react with jealousy when the mother paid attention to a sibling than when a father did so, indicating that the mother was still, on the average, the more beloved figure in such homes. But these statistics do not reveal the whole picture. By this time, the survey also reported, punishment was no longer exclusively the father's responsibility. In fact, more than a third of mothers were the only parent to punish the child, and in no more than one percent of families, even among rural homes, did the father alone administer correction. Combining this shift with the growth of the public school system, which further relieved fathers of day-to-day punishment and vocational guidance, we can see that by 1929 there was much less social reason for the resentment documented by Murphey.

The same survey presents further evidence that supports this suggestion. Surveyors asked who the child's "favorite" was most likely to be, and, while the figures are perhaps slightly distorted (the surveyors did not ask the child, but the mother), they do show that the father was not particularly disliked by either sex. More than fifty percent of
families reported the modest (and safe) "no favorite," and of those children who did choose one, both boys (22.9%) and girls (20.0%) chose Mother. But fathers were not far behind: 15.7% for boys and 13.9% for girls. Children from farming families were most likely to prefer mothers (27.0% for both sexes), but they were also the most likely to choose Dad as well (16.7%). But the figures proved surprisingly even across social boundaries; that is, a rural boy or girl was not much more likely to prefer Mother or Dad than his city counterparts. What these figures suggest is that by the late 1920s the typical home, even among the most conservative classes, was no longer the mother's exclusive domain. The father's roles were no longer limited to correction and providing, and he was spending more time in the daily process of child-rearing. The mother was still a formidable figure, more likely to be preferred by the child, but the father was now no longer a distant tyrant. Yet, as of the late 1920s, the hillbilly song tradition had no stereotypes to celebrate these new roles. The new, likeable father had no songs.

This situation began to change in 1928, when Jimmie Rodgers recorded the first successful hillbilly daddy song, "Daddy and Home" (CO50). Rodgers was not consciously trying to sing a new kind of song—in fact it was one of several numbers penned by his sister-in-law, Elsie McWilliams, during a frenzied period of song-writing. In the wake of his first enormously popular recordings, Victor was pressing the Blue Yodeller for new material, and in desperation Rodgers was trying to work up as many potentially successful songs, new or old, as he could. His wife later recalled:
he rushed off frantic word to the Williamson family poetess. Elsie scurried to Washington, bringing with her all the sweet, ancient ballads and quaint ditties she could find in the stacks and stacks of old, once-popular sheet music at Mother's. Bringing too some of her own little verses which, as a more than capable musician, she had set to music. And the music factory started. Day and night; night and day.\textsuperscript{11}

The June 12, 1928 session was largely devoted to rowdy originals like "Never No Mo Blues," but along with these more characteristic numbers appeared "Daddy and Home." Elsie McWilliams later recalled that before the recording date Rodgers had begun reminiscing about his early life with his father. (His mother had died when he was four.) She thought at once that the subject might make a song, and quickly worked it up in time for the session.\textsuperscript{12} Certainly the lyrics betray haste: they are a series of familiar verbal formulas from the established elegiac mother-song tradition. A son, "weary of roaming around," longs to return to "an old southern town/And the best friend that [he] ever had." This friend, whose "hair has turned to silver," is the one who "made [his] childhood happy" and who "tried to bring [him] up right." Now that the Homesick Child has "had [his] way" out in the world, he admits, "I long for you and for home" (Victor 21757). Even the title, an obvious adaptation of the cliche "Mother and home," proves the song a close imitation of a standard\textsuperscript{Celebration} formula: all that has been done to make it a father-song formula is to drop the word "Mother" and replace it with the metrically identical "Daddy." The one difference, and that a slight one, is that the father is sympathetic, but hardly divine. He is simply a "best friend" and "just one of the boys."

But the song quickly became one of Rodgers's best-sellers,\textsuperscript{13} and the best friend/one of the boys angle became a standard motif around which
other performers spun their own imitations.

During the next five years a wave of daddy songs flowed from songwriters, mainly within the "western" tradition that was then becoming an important subdivision of the country song tradition. All the acceptable variations of Rodgers's new formula were quickly explored. As early as 1929 Arthur Fields and Fred Hall, two Tin Pan Alley songwriters who catered to "artificial hillbilly" performers, composed "Pappy's Buried on the Hill" (C100), a conventional elegy for Dad. Apparently intended for Vernon Dalhart (who eventually did record the piece), it was originally given to New York radio performer John I. White, in the studio to record some of his celebrated cowboy songs. "Somehow my heart wasn't in it," White recalled later, but the song proved successful. It too is a collection of stock maternal phrases, beginning "Everything is lonesome, round the cabin door somehow..." and concluding, "We know we'll all see him again/When we all meet someday." And along the way we find our new cliche in a new context: "We have lost the best friend/That we ever had..." ("Lone Star Ranger" [i.e., John I. White], Romeo 1268 [12/4/29]). If Dad could be associated with home life, then his death could also be related to the loneliness of the Dark and Dreary World, consoled, of course, by the hope of a heavenly reunion. Whether through White's or Dalhart's recording, the song eventually worked its way into oral tradition in western Kentucky, indicating that even a Tin-Pan-Alley daddy song was acceptable to traditional performers wanting to celebrate the new dad.

Gene Autry stepped into the picture about a year later, as he was trying to make a splash in the new industry by covering Rodgers
hits on small labels like Gennett, Grey Gull, and the American Record Company. Along with his partner, Jimmy Long, he turned out dozens of new songs of his own along established formulaic lines. His first daddy song, "Dad in the Hills" (C051), was waxed for ARC in January of 1931. It begins, somewhat incongruously, with the "second sweetheart" trope we found earlier in "Two Sweethearts of Mine":

Back in the hills there's a pal
One that is so dear to me
You may think
This is my gal
But it's my dear old daddy-ee.

The rest follows the usual Homesick Child's lament: he hears his Dad "calling" him back to where he belongs and longs to be. Recognizing he was "wrong" to leave home, he vows to return, "never to roam" from the side of the one who was "more than a pal/ . . . [his] best friend . . ." (Romeo 5053 [1/29/31]).

At this point many other western performers were joining the new trend. In 1932 Cliff Carlisle wrote "Dear Old Daddy" (P550), a song that at the time gained a modest circulation among other performers. This song takes the idealization a step farther by letting the father die like the conventional Suffering Mother after his son has let him sorrow "all alone." Now the child realizes that he has "done him wrong," but it is too late: he is left in the Dark and Dreary World, longing for "Dear old daddy . . . and home." The song concludes with a vignette of the new Domestic Father rocking his child to sleep on his knee. The mother is never mentioned, and Dad, at last, is alone and unchallenged at the head of an ideal rural home: "I was the only boy . . ./He was a real daddy to me" (Cliff Carlisle [1936], p. 21).
The final step in Dad's recovery came the next year, when Wilf Carter began his career with a series of conventional songs, including one with the not-so-original title, "Dear Old Daddy of Mine" (C053). The beginning evokes a strong sense of *deja vu*:

As the shadows are slowly falling  
Among the whispering pines  
I see a light a-burning  
In that dear old shack of mine  
I hasten down the pathway  
To see a face divine  
And waiting there to greet me . . .

"Is . . ."? In any of the songs surveyed to this point, the next phrase would have to be something like "... that gray-haired mother of mine," but now "... that dear old daddy of mine" has become just as acceptable a convention. This song contains nearly every attribute of the Domestic Mother, down the the shimmering aura of divinity, but applied to the new father stereotype. Daddy, we are told, has "been a real pal to me/Guiding my faltering footsteps . . ." and even if death should part father and son, "I know we'll meet up in heaven . . ." (Regal Zonophone G23149 [ca. 1937]). As the father faithfully lights the lamp in the window that guides his child homeward and fades into the glory of the afterlife, we recognize that his roles are by now completely domesticated. Within five years of the first hillbilly daddy song, performers felt free to apply almost any attribute of Mother's to this sympathetic, home-loving, lamp-lighting, dying father, and the early country song tradition gained a new genre of sentimental songs.

Still, the new daddy songs did not displace the older tradition of incompetent fathers, nor did daddies remain mere formulaic shadows of mothers. Shortly after the appearance of this Domestic Father, a
series of songs explored the relationship between the two stereotypes.

A prototype of such songs, "Don't You Love Your Daddy Too?" (C350), was recorded as early as 1926, but it cannot be said to be a daddy song in more than title. It presents no portrait of Father, but simply reminds us that he is there, somewhere:

Mother's love to me is holy
Ever precious, warm and true
And I never will forget her
But I love my daddy too.

(Jack Pickell, Columbia 15117 [1926].)

All we ever hear of Daddy in this song is that he is "Kind-hearted, brave and true," but we never see what he has done to make him worthy of praise as the "holy" mother. Later songs, however, begin to right this imbalance. In the wake of "She'll Be There" ("What a Friend We Have in Mother," 1935, C016) appeared another domestic imitation of the old hymn, "Yes, We Have a Friend in Daddy" (bef. 1942, C353). Here the father is active, faithfully laboring alongside Mother "For the family and the home . . . ." There is no rivalry between the parents, for Mother's sphere is the home, while Father's is the farm, railroad, factory, or mine, and the two function as a team:

Dad has been a pal to Mother,
She has often told us so,
Side by side they've toiled together,
Since the days of long ago . . . .

When they die, we are told, they'll be buried side by side, while their spirits ascend together to "the regions of the Blest" (Franklin Brothers [ca. 1942], n. pag. [inside back cover]).

Still more revealing are the songs that show the father's work in the home after Mother has died. The earlier tradition, beginning with "The Blind Girl" (bef. 1860, V002), shows the father unable to replace
a mother's love, often acting thoughtlessly to cause the child added
grief. Other songs, like "Motherless Children" (bef. 1927, V0h0),
suggest that Father does "the best he can," but simply "does not under-
stand" his children's needs (Warren Caplinger [1934], p. 20). Later
country songs modify this attitude, however tentatively. In "Dad's
Little Pals" (1941, P2h6), two lonely sisters demand that Daddy write
their absent mother and tell her to come home, for their "dolly's been
sick and her clothes are all torn,[and] There's no one to help [them]
to play . . . ." When the father patiently explains that their mother
is in "a land that is far, far away" and promises to "do what [he] can"
to fix Dolly, the sisters cheer up and offer to help him keep house:

... we'll help you daddy, since mother is gone,
We'll be just as good as can be,
--we'll grow up big and we'll help with the house,
We'll put our play things away
Since mother is gone we must help carry on,
We're Dad's little pals ev'ry [sic] day.
(RED FOLEY [1941], pp. 16-17.)

Another song on the same topic, "Since the Angels Took My Mother Far
Away" (1940, P3h8), presents only a slightly different picture of home
after Mother's death. The child misses his Mom's "bedtime song/That
she sang each evening as [he] knelt to pray . . . ." but he also notices
that Father too is grief-stricken. Suddenly his hair has turned gray,
and his eyes are "dim with tears as he dreams of bygone years . . . ."
Like the sisters in the previous song, the child vows to help out,
greeting his dad with an extra-bright smile and tight hug when he returns
from work and doing what he can to make home life "worthwhile/Even
though it's hard to smile . . . ." (BLUE SKY BOYS, BLUEBIRD 33-0516
[10/7/40]). In these songs the children still bear the burden of the
mother's death, and they realize that home is no longer the same without her. But they also recognize that the father too has to suffer, and his grief is even more debilitating than the children's. They are the ones who make plans to live on after Mother's death, while the father acts passively, murmuring only something about "the angels know what's best" (P348). Significantly, there are few songs that deal with the mother's incapacity to deal with the father's death. The father is sympathetic, not a thoughtless clod, but he still needs the child's active help to carry on. As another daddy song, "Left All Alone" (1932, A190), put it, "There's no one like mother to bring up her child, old dad will do what he can, but mother has ways all her own, they are different from a man . . ." (Cliff Carlisle [1936], p. 28).

We can now see why Gene Autry's second effort at a daddy song, the huge success "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" (1931, C052), made such an impact on early country tradition. Perhaps only the second recording in the new industry's history to sell a million copies, the recording established Autry's career and simultaneously confirmed the Domestic Father as a conventional stereotype. The lyrics of his best-selling ARC recording are as follows:

In a vine-covered shack in the mountains
Bravely fighting the battle of time
Is a dear one who's weathered life's sorrows
'Tis that silver-haired daddy of mine.

Chorus: If I could recall all the heartaches
Dear old Daddy I caused you to bear
If I could erase
Those lines from your face
And bring back the gold to your hair
If God would but grant me the power
Just to turn back the pages of time
I'd give all I own
If I could but atone
To that silver-haired daddy of mine.
I know it's too late dear old Daddy
To repay for the sorrows and cares
Though dear Mother is waiting in heaven
Just to comfort and solace you there.

(Repeat Chorus)

Even considering the praise this song offers the father, two major differences separate it from the conventional mother song. First, although the father is noble in his old age, "Bravely fighting the battle of time," he is no transfigured parent, growing more divine as he approaches death. He is simply old and wrinkled. Most devoted children bless Mother's gray hair and furrowed brow, but the narrator longs for the power to "erase" these signs of age and make his father young again. The divine partner in the family is still the beloved mother "waiting in heaven/ . . . to comfort and solace [the father] there," just as she would comfort the Pilgrim Child after his life of sorrow. Second, the narrator feels guilty because he has neglected his father, and he wants to "atone," yet he makes no move to return home, nor does he offer an excuse. The child words, "I'd give all I own/If I could but atone . . . " (emphasis mine), indeed suggest that he could not possibly atone, but the song fails to say why. Perhaps the song's symbolic value was at the time more important than its strict adherence to the Homesick Child plot. It was the first Celebration that went out of its way to apologize to a father for past neglect, and, in effect, the song itself atoned to Fatherhood by reversing the injustice of the previous song tradition. Thus Autry's song marked the moment when

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performers began to be self-conscious about the history of the father stereotype and consciously strike out in a new direction. The tremendous success of the song, not only for Autry but for performers as various as citybilly Frank Luther and genuine folk performer Henry Whitter, and the imitations it evoked in the next years indicated that audiences recognized and approved this new formulaic direction. Without affecting the status of Mother in heaven, "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" gave early country audiences a chance to express their dissatisfaction with previous stereotypes and to appreciate new paternal roles in song.

iii. "Daddy Loves Me This I Know/For My Mommy Told Me So."

After the initial rush to try out new variations on the stereotype, performers and songwriters settled down during the next years (1933-45) to see what else the Domestic Father could do. A series of narrative songs appeared that borrowed so heavily from mother-song conventions that they could have been either with the change of a single word. One song, "Doorman of Heaven" (1942, P354), even included bracketed phrases so the singer could choose whether he wanted the orphan to ask an angel to "tell my \{mother\} I miss \{him\} so" (Blaine Smith [1942], p. 31). On the other hand, a small tradition, mainly confined to western performers, included songs that show the father beginning to carve out a heroic place of his own, either dying heroically or representing a more exciting life than an eternally peaceful home. The country tradition as a whole, like children of the time, still preferred Mother, but by 1945 Father was not automatically relegated to the background. Even the Heavy Father, as we shall see, was less than despicable, and
the song tradition expresses less a feeling of resentment than a
longer sense of imbalance—a feeling that Dad still had to be content
with second place in the home hierarchy.

Many songwriters handled the challenge of creating new paternal formu-
alas in the same as did Elsie McWilliams, simply by inserting the word
"daddy" into conventional mother-song formulas. Another Jimmie Rodgers
song is one of these, a typical Violation plot with an Admonishing
Father. "Fifteen Years Ago Today" (1933, V248) tells of a lad who
was once content in his southern home, but who chose to leave against
the advice of his dad:

When I left him
In the gloaming
I recall I heard him say
You'll be sorry
That you're roaming
Fifteen years ago today.
(Bluebird B-5261 [5/24/33].)

Sure enough, the Reckless Son meets bad company, winds up in prison, and
longs hopelessly for his old home. In the same way Parting mother songs
were easily adapted, whether they involved Homesick or Pilgrim Children.
"I'm Goin' Back to My Little Mountain Shack" (1937, P215) shows a child
anxious to return to his "silver haired daddy" who "lives high in the
blue hills of Virginia . . . ." The bucolic vision of home is entirely
conventional, except that Daddy is at its center and Mother is nowhere
in sight:

Among the rocks and rills, it's nestled in the hills,
Resting there beneath a tall pine tree;
Wild hollyhocks are blooming 'round the door,
And honeysuckle tempts the honey bee,
That's why I'm goin' back to my little mountain shack,
Where Daddy is waiting for me.
(Al Clauser [1937], pp. 19-21.)
Similarly, an Angel Father by now can wait patiently for his Pilgrim Child at heaven's gate. "When I Find My Dear Daddy Is Waiting" (1939, P440) presents the narrator preparing for the day when he will reach the other world and see "my Dad in his golden chair," with, of course, "my dear Mother by his side" (Bill Boyd [1939], pp. 36-37). But in this song the mother plays only a nominal role, and the father is the one who draws the child to a heavenly reunion. Admittedly there are no songs that show the father actively helping the child over the barrier of death or reappearing in spirit form to encourage the Pilgrim on, but by 1939 he was undoubtedly part of the "better home" up yonder.

There were, however, other songs that tried to bring the father out of Mom's shadow, giving him roles more adapted to a worldly, working provider rather than the home-loving shelterer. Several songs late in the period surveyed presented the father in heroic situations, unafraid to risk his life for children and home, ready to live an adventurous life beyond the constraining home circle. The risk involved meant that most of these songs are laments, either for the father's physical absence "over there," or, more often, for his death. The orphan tells the tale of "Dad's Little Texas Lad" (1939, A020), in which the father gives his life to save his baby's life. As the child is playing by the side of a busy round-up, he is suddenly endangered by a stampede. The father rushes to snatch him out of the path, but he too is trapped when his pony stumbles.

When the dust had finally settled
And the boys had gathered round
They gathered up a body
That was trampled in the ground.
There beneath the horns and cattle
Guarded by a faithful dead
Who gave his life to save me
His little Texas lad.

(Wilf Carter, Regal Zonophone G24742 [ca. 1939].)18

But compared to the many heroic mothers, there were comparatively few
heroic-father songs, suggesting that audiences preferred songs that
"atoned" from a safe emotional distance to those that presented Dad
acting in a distinctively fatherly way. Still, such songs helped to
turn early country tradition away from its emphasis on Father's passivity
or maternal nature by showing that in some roles he was more than
capable.

To illustrate these two approaches to writing daddy songs, the
maternal and the heroic, let us contrast two songs that depict reactions
to a father's death. Both songs were written in the early 1940s, but
one depends entirely on pre-existing maternal conventions, while the
other tries out new formulas. "Dear Daddy I'm Coming" (1944, P441)
was written by the young Eddy Arnold in the company of Nashville
composers Wallace Fowler and J. Graydon Hall. It follows the "dying
mother" formulas closely, even slavishly. The Pilgrim Child's "precious
old daddy was taken from [him]," and has gone "with the angels," but,
one day, the child reassures himself, he will go to heaven to "shake
[his father's] dear hand" once more. Thinking back to childhood, the
child recalls how Daddy "was loving and gentle and kind,/To children
and home he was true," and he admits that now there is "No one to
replace him on earth . . . ." The song concludes with the Pilgrim
kneeling by the father's deathbed in the time-honored fashion, promising
"to meet him some day,/In heaven with him to abide" (Eddy Arnold [1944],
The song seems never to have caught on in Arnold's repertory like "Mommy Please Stay Home with Me," but it resembles that song in the way it sacrifices old stereotypes to arrive at a new variation on a formula. It is more important, by this time, to have someone waiting in heaven for the homeless Pilgrim, and elevating the father to the established role of Angel Expectant allows the song tradition to express anxieties about death in a wider range of socially accepted ways.

But this example is relatively old-fashioned compared to the second of our songs, "My Daddy Was a Cowboy" (1941, C105). The same anxieties and escapist philosophy are expressed, but in a novel way. The narrative formula is the same: the Pilgrim laments that "The sky boss" decided He needed another father up there, so He "sent angels down" on "one cold mornin'" to carry Dad away. His child, nevertheless, looks forward to rejoining him some glad day and "hold his hand again" where there are "no more troubles . . . ." The difference is that the father does not ascend to a static "home on high," but to "that ranch up in the sky," where he continues his daily labor through eternity.

I almost see him ridin'
Astride old Pinto's back
A talkin' over old times with his old pals Joe and Jack.
They're ridin' herd together,
Just like in days of yore,
Now they're all sky range cowboys upon high forevermore.

The Pilgrim Child, likewise will go to heaven, but not to inherit a mansion; rather he will "mount and be ready,/To ride the milky way,/With daddy and the cowboys . . . ." (Red Foley [1941], p. 16). Unlike the perpetual womb of the "better home," this narrative shows heaven as an endless series of male adventures, with all the hassles of the
mesquite deleted, but with no ultimate "home" goal. The afterlife in
this song is more like a Huck Finn fantasy, in which one escapes from
the immediate troubles of this life by lighting out for the territories.
The Milky Way, unlike the Mississippi, has no end, and there is no
meddlesome shore life to bring the transfigured adventurers back
to reality. Like the previous song, "My Daddy Was a Cowboy" presents
an escapist desire to secede from the Dark and Dreary World and project
perfect happiness into a world after death, but the father here embodies
a distinctively male fantasy. By extension, songs like this one contra­
dict the conventional attitude about life outside the home. Before, the
father sullied himself with the world's corruption when he went to work,
but here the sphere of work is divinely sanctioned to the point that
the father is allowed to continue it after death. Neither this song
nor Arnold's gained much popularity, but "My Daddy Was a Cowboy" was
still being performed and listed in the BMI Performindex as late as
1956-57, indicating that even after the period surveyed this newer
formula was holding its own.

To conclude our discussion, let us return once again to a Heavy
Father, as portrayed at the very end of our period surveyed. The folio
printings of "Have You Seen My Daddy Here" (1944, P126) term it the
"Companion song to: Mommy Please Stay Home With Me," but this charac­
terization is probably no more than an advertisement: "If you liked
"Mommy Please," you'll like this song too!" In terms of its histori­
cal significance, though, the song does make an appropriate companion
to the first Reckless Mother song, since both show the old stereotypes
changing, yet remaining vital at their cores. The lyrics below are
A little boy in blue
Walked along the avenue
He was searching hard for someone on the way
He scanned each passing face
And of tears there was a trace
So I called to him
Then sadly he did say:

Chorus: Have you seen my Daddy here?
He has lost his way I fear.
Oh, he means the world and ev'ry thing to me
Daddy loves me this I know
For my Mommy told me so.
Oh, please tell me have you seen my Daddy here?

When Daddy went away
He called me from my play
And he kissed me very hard and hugged me tight
He told me to be brave
That I mustn't misbehave
Then he said good-bye
And vanished from my sight.

[Repeat Chorus]

Now many years have pass'd
Since I saw my Daddy last
And I might not know him if we chanced to meet
My Mommy says that he
Looks an awful lot like me
And then once again
These words he did repeat:

[Repeat Chorus]

I looked at him again
And to me it was quite plain
That it was my own dear child whose tale I heard
How could I then confess
I had wrecked his happiness
And my heart ached as
He sweetly said these words:

[Repeat Chorus]

I held him close once more,
This dear child that I adore
And I cursed the day I left my family
How strange the hand of fate
Led his footsteps to my gate
Then once more he said
These fateful words to me:

[Repeat Chorus]
(Wally Fowler [1944], pp. 26-27)*

The subject matter here—separation of husband and family, presumably through divorce—was not new to the song tradition, but this treatment is decidedly novel. Previous songs regularly condemned the parent who left the family circle, whether it be the mother, who is punished by death in "There'll Come a Time" (1895, V120), or the father, who receives this rebuke in "My Father Don't Love Me" (bef. 1930, V201):

He says he's Christ's apostle
But do you reckon it can be
Do you think if he was a Christian
That he'd hate Mother and me.
("Roy Martin" [i.e., Lewis McDaniels], Romeo 5004 [3/27/30].)

Yet in the modern song, even before we discover that the narrator is the Heavy Father himself, we are given an unusually sympathetic view of the separation. The father's last words are tender, and even the mother afterwards admits that even though he is gone for good, he still loves his child. Even the formulaic phrasing of the chorus's lines, "Daddy loves me this I know/For my Mommy told me so," recalls the ubiquitous children's hymn, "Jesus loves me this I know/For the Bible tells me so." Whether this echo was intended or not, it gives the father's essentially kind nature a quasi-scriptural confirmation.

It would be hard to side with Mother against this father—like choosing God and not the Bible. And when the coincidence makes the true situation clear, the father's good heart again is obvious. The lad is "this dear

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child that I adore," and while the father curses the day he left home, he never explains why he did so. The ending thus focuses not on his wilful recklessness that "wrecked" the child's happiness, but on "the hand of fate" that separated father and child and in a "strange" way led them together again so the boy would speak his "fateful" words. Superficially this coincidence is like the climax of "The Drunken Driver," but in that song the father must atone for a life of drunkenness and neglect, and the fated meeting is the one thing that could point him back toward Mother in heaven. The coincidental meeting in "Have You Seen My Daddy Here" has no such conclusion. Just as the father's crimes are never made explicit, so there seems no need for a conversion, and the song ends without resolution, with the father unwilling to tell the child the truth, and the child unwilling to give up his quest. There is no suggestion that the father could follow the child home, even if he wanted to, or that he hopes to rejoin the family circle in a brighter world above.

Instead the effect of the song is one of uncertainty. Songwriters like Wallace Fowler (who co-authored this song as well as "Mommy Please") were becoming fascinated with the social implications of divorce and more willing to abandon the one-sided moralism of earlier songs. Frank, unambiguous treatments of broken marriages were not to become popular until ten years later, and, in the meantime, new attitudes did not fit easily into old formulas. This song shows the strain: the story is told from two unreconciled perspectives, the suffering child's and the unfaithful husband's, and no judgment is passed at the end. Lack of an explicit moral separates this song from the earlier Heavy Father
plots and classes it as part of a more complicated elegiac view of crumbling mores. Later songs describe the separation of mother and father as a happening that causes the child grief, but for which no one definitely is to blame. In "Have You Seen My Daddy Here" though, two conventions from the earlier traditions still show up in close to original form. The child goes on a quest for his daddy, like the Baby in songs that confuse death with absence, and while Mother's love is so intense that the child could never forget her face, Daddy's memory is less persistant: "I might not know him if we chanced to meet . . . ."

On this ambiguous note, with the father rehabilitated but difficult to recognize, we reach the end of our surveyed period. Despite the efforts we have seen to revise the daddy stereotype to offer him distinctive, heroic roles, we must admit that he never approached the status of the sentimental mother. In songs of Celebration he is most often worshipped from a distance as a static, pathetic figure. While mother songs warn that children have an obligation to keep in touch with Mom, at the risk even of damnation, daddy songs ask the child only to give the father a thought at times. Judging from the sheer numbers of Violation and Parting songs that present mothers at the center of the child's spiritual and social lives and the relatively sparse numbers of daddy songs along the same lines, we see that a father's influence did not count for much within the sentimental song tradition. His teaching did not have the same socializing effect in the child's life, nor did his death have the same disorienting impact. Finally, many songs point out that the father has trouble preserving a home after Mother's death, unless he can enlist the active sympathy of the
Orphan. True, the good fathers make it to heaven, and some Pilgrim Children look forward to rejoining them, but he never returns to bridge the threatening gap between the two worlds. At best, then, the sentimental father is the model of what the male child could be like in old age if he follows the right set of footsteps. In a minority of songs, the path is a heroic model based on Father's work out in the world; in most, it is indistinguishable from Mother's teaching. Finally, songs with Heavy Fathers, some as despicable as the nineteenth-century models, some as sympathetic as in our last song, were still composed and performed even at the very end of our period. It is safe to say that while the tradition was extensively revised to allow for social changes, even by 1945 it did not present a consistent picture of what an ideal father should be like, nor did it embody any clear attitude toward Fatherhood as an institution.

We may conclude that the dominant mother-song tradition was the main reason that the father was idealized to the extent he was. That is, the female had already been granted such high goals and praise, because of nineteenth-century social conditions and twentieth-century religious movements, that she remained a powerful stereotype in the song tradition even after real mothers had ceased to be the sole power in actual family circles. Rather than depose Mother from her quais-divine position, it was more politic to keep promoting Dad until some sort of parity was reached, more as an act of atoning to real fathers than as a way of idealizing Fatherhood. Thus the tradition of daddy songs is not only inconsistent, since the stereotypes reflect no single religious or social ideal, but it was apologetic as well.
Many of the most popular daddy songs express keen guilt for having slighted Father in the past, and many others find it necessary to keep urging children to save Dad his portion of filial affection, simply out of fairness's sake. But there are few songs that show fathers actually doing anything admirable for their children. In the uneasiness of this song tradition we see the lingering effects of nineteenth-century attitudes, which originally transfigured mothers at the expense of satanizing fathers, and even in so laudatory a song as "A Little Love for Dad" we still see the resentment behind the respect:

His babes are never off his mind,  
From morning until night.  
He wants to make your future days,  
More happy and more bright.  
Perhaps he'll even scold sometimes,  
And seem as though he's mad,  
But in your heart must always be,  
Just a little love for dad.

The early country tradition certainly softened the resentment of earlier songs into apologetic admiration, yet its incapacity to replace the old stereotypes with new ones that would wholeheartedly endorse his way of life meant that, even in the end, Dad had to be content with "Just a little love."
Notes to Chapter Seven


3.../A-waiting for mama to come." What has become of the mother in this song? The opening stanzas make it clear that something peculiar is going on, but it's not clear what:

O dear I'm so tired I'm so lonesome,
I wonder why mama don't come
She told me to close up my pretty blue eyes
And when I awoke she'd be home.

And mama was all pale and frightened,
And held me up close to her breast
She called me her blossom
And I guess I've forgotten the rest.

Since the usual mother in Violation plots stays home and cares for her children, it's peculiar that here she goes off, leaving her daughter alone. I'm tempted to think that there is some sinister motif at work here (e.g., the mother has taken to prostitution to support herself and her children), but without more background on the song it's impossible to tell. The stanzas do make it clear that the home situation is far more desperate than the child realizes, setting the scene for the violent climax.

4 Songs that present an appeal but conclude without a response from the "villain" present a problem for the interpreter. Appeals to the audience, or to distant wanderers are commonly left unresolved, since the song is contrived to play on the listener's own emotions. But with appeals that are dramatic monologues, like "Come Home, Father" and American versions of "Don't Go Down in the Mine, Dad," there seems to have been an unspoken convention that unless the song says otherwise,
the appeal is assumed to have been successful. Certainly the evidence of sequels or recompositions, all of which show the villain yielding to reason, suggests that this is the way we should read these songs' endings—as happy, not unresolved. Of course, songs like "Little Blossom" and "Have You Seen My Daddy Here" depend on the shock that results when such appeals are shown failing.

This song is an unusual one in several ways, since it not only shows a father actively resisting eviction, it also includes a rare instance of matricide. Tossed out the front door, the father openly curses his son: "You'll wish you'd never served us so, when we're both dead, my lad, when your own children treat you like you've treated poor old dad!" The son, trembling with rage, lashes out at his father, but "Just then the poor old mother came with tot't'ring foot-steps slow"; she intervenes, takes the blow, and falls at their feet, dead of a broken heart (Our New Clown Songster [1889], p. 20). The single hillbilly recording of this song (Uncle Dave Macon, Vocalion 5159 [5/10/27]) omits this violent scene and by careful cutting and splicing manages to obscure just who speaks the curse—it could as easily be the observing preacher-figure as the father. In this version the father acts conventionally, going to the grave without resistance, but the curse still takes effect. In both versions the son is later found dead on the father's grave, while the words of the curse are heard floating on the breeze.

"The Wayward Daughter" (bef. 1934, A025) has already been discussed: here the father, even though he is the presiding judge, cannot save his daughter from jail for prostitution. This is the only song I have found in which a father even attempts to save a daughter, and the earliest song that shows a son saving a mother is "My Little Son's Plea" (O'Neil & Holmes, 1951). In this song, the little boy neatly turns the tables on a hypocritical mother:

Mommy won't you please stop drinking
Throw your cigarettes away
It would make me feel much better
To see my mommy kneel and pray
You have told me there's a heaven
And that Jesus loves me too
If He died for everybody
I am sure that He loves you.

(Mattie O'Neil & Salty Holmes, King 963 [1951].)

The mother, recognizing what the formula demands next, falls to her knees and receives God's forgiveness.

It is possible that there was a minor tradition of "father's advice" songs in folk tradition before Jimmie Rodgers's first daddy song. "On the Road to Happiness" (A101) was first recorded in 1929, but McFarland and Gardner ascribed it as "traditional" on the record label. It is a father's "last words" to a son who is now "old enough
to know a thing or two." Although the father promises to show his boy "just what is good and bad," his advice is not at all like the conventional mother's:

Keep away from the gals and those good fellow pals
As long as you've got money they'll be true
Treat every one fair always be on the square
And everybody everywhere will welcome you
Settle down for life with a good little wife
Remember that's the day you'll always bless
You'll find sunshine and flowers
And many happy hours
On the road to happiness.

(McFarland & Gardner [1931], pp. 4-5.)

This Admonishing Father is anxious that his boy have a good time out in the world, and his words give practical advice on how to get along with fast company. Marriage and being happy are the highest goals; there is no mention of a straight and narrow path, returning home, or preparing to die by reading the Bible. Two stanzas included by one Tennessee informant in "The Rambling Cowboy," a variant of "Logan County Jail" (Laws E 17), provide similar advice:

My papa always taught me well
And give me good advice
To quit my rough and rowdy way
And choose me a loving wife.

Then take her in some secret room
And by her side set down;
For the only pleasure a man can have
Is with his loving wife.

(Henry, p. 358.)

These stanzas, however, were not collected until 1929, and I have not found them in any other version of the ballad. Such an advice-giving role would have been consistent with the father's position as man of this world, not the next, but apparently this pleasure-loving creed did not fit the generally moralistic sentimental tradition. More recent fathers have advised their sons along firmly maternal lines, as in Lester Flatt's "Father's Table Grace" (Columbia CS 9055: The Fabulous Sound of Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs [1963]), in which the father frowns on the son's decision to leave home and strike out on his own.

8 White House Conference on Child Health, pp. 211-213, 218.

discussion focuses on a single individual (a minister in a snake-handling cult) the family situation he describes seems typical in fundamentalist homes: the mother is the strict moralist and disciplinarian, while the more indulgent father winks at the child's vices.


12 McWilliams's account is given in Dorothy Horstman's Sing Your Heart Out, Country Boy (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1975), p. 10. The story she gives seems a little confused, and it is not clear whether she wrote the song on the way to New York for the session or while driving Rodgers from a gig in the Washington, D.C. area. From the background given in Bond, I have considered the latter more likely. In either case, "Daddy and Home" was undoubtedly written under "music factory" conditions.

13 Douglas A. Green, in "The Country Music Hall of Fame: Remodeled & Expanded," Bluegrass Unlimited (June 1977), describes a short film that Rodgers made in 1929, in which he performs his three biggest hits at the time: "Blue Yodel," "Waiting for a Train," and "Daddy and Home" (p. 27).


15 For example, "Little Poplar Log House on the Hill" (bef. 1934, C227) tells of the trials of a family after the father's death. While the narrator admits that his father "died a good man like we all would like to do" and that he hopes to meet Dad up yonder some day, the rest of the song, including the chorus, tells how the mother "kept us settled on the hill":

When our day's work on the farm was done she'd gather us around
And would have us get down on our little knees
She would pray for God to keep us through the night and the next day
In our little poplar log house on the hill.
(Callahan Brothers, Romeo 5376 [9/20/34].)

16 Autry recalled that this record was his first million-seller and the one that started his successful career (Horstman, p. 23). However, Norm Cohen cast some doubt on this and like statements in a note on Vernon Dalhart's bestselling recording of "The Prisoner's Song" b/w "The Wreck of Old '97" (JEMPO, 6 [1971]). Observing that although this record sold heavily among both hillbilly and sophisticated audiences its sales totaled just over one million, Cohen doubted that "any other hillbilly disc prior to the end of the depression could have sold a million copies ..." (p. 172). Later he revised his skepticism to say that Jimmie Rodgers's "Blue Yodel" b/w "Away Out
on the Mountain" almost certainly sold a million-plus, although the sales records now are missing. (For comparison, "Waiting for a Train" sold ca. 365,000.) (Johnny Bond, The Recordings of Jimmie Rodgers [Los Angeles: The John Edwards Memorial Foundation, 1978], pp. v-vi.) Autry, of course, may have inflated his memory of his record's sales, but it is true that the ARC recording was kept in print and promoted through mail-order catalogues for several years after 1931. It is thus possible that the recording could have sold a million through steady sales over a period of ten years or so. It is also curious that in the same quote Autry says "It's been such a long time ago I cannot recall how or where the idea came to me." Such loss of memory, unique among the performers and songwriters questioned by Horstman, suggests that the song either was largely written by Jimmy Long, the acknowledged co-author, or was composed along with dozens of others during a "song factory" session.

17 Hank Snow questioned this attitude of resignation in his sequel to Autry's song, "The Answer to That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine" (1942, P158.1):

You said, son, that you'd give this wide world,  
To atone for my heartaches and cares;  
You don't need to erase, those lines, from my face,  
Or bring back the gold to my hair:  
Just say that you'll come back and see me,  
Down the trail to our old mountain shack;  
Where your silver-haired Daddy's still waiting,  
From my heart, son, I welcome you back.  
(Hank Snow [1942], pp. 24-26.)

18 This song is patterned after the traditional cowboy ballad "Utah Carroll" (Laws B 4), in which a heroic cowboy gives his life to save his boss's daughter from a stampede. It is curious that Carter's is the only imitation that makes what one might think an obvious change by having the cowboy save his own child.

19 See Horstman's discussion of the history of "Cheatin' Songs" (pp. 182-183). Elsewhere she notes that the first frank treatments of divorce in love songs appeared in 1953-54 (p. 139).

20 In earlier songs involving separation of parents, songwriters assigned clear blame. In "The Little Raganuffin" (1935, V019), the father explains that he was left childless because "My wife took him and left me/Because she was untrue" (Hank Keene [ca. 1935], p. 11.) And when the child in "Tell Me Why My Daddy Don't Come Home" (1941, P121) asks the fatal question of the title, the guilty wife thinks of "love she'd cast away," and later writes to her husband, "Oh, won't you please come home again/I know I am to blame" (Bill Boyd, Bluebird B-8910 [1941]). Later in the 1940s, though, such songs grew more complicated and hesitant to assign morals. "Where Is My Daddy" (1943, P124) avoids the question by having the father burst through the door
just after the child's question, vowing "never to leave them again" (Charlie & Mary [1943], p. 9). Another way of handling the problem was to show the naive child praying to a higher being to solve the question, as in "The Little Boy's Letter to Santa Claus" (second version, 1947, P125) and "A Boy's Prayer" (Davis, ca. 1947). The latter song makes the point especially clear:

Mama and Dad had a quarrel  
And then they broke apart  
They didn't stop to realize  
That it would break my heart  
I don't know how it started  
Or really who's to blame  
I just hope You can help me God  
Make everything the same.  
(Gene Davis, 4-Star X-77 [ca. 1947].)

Who has sinned is no longer important, only how to end the child's suffering. But only God can figure out how. Such songs show performers and composers still unsure about how to resolve such social dilemmas within moralistic formulas.
CHAPTER EIGHT

MOM IN MINI-SKIRT:
CONTEMPORARY RESPONSES TO MOTHERHOOD

We have seen how the sentimental mother became a prominent, indeed sacred figure in American popular culture during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and how she remained a force in the country song tradition long after popular culture at large had ceased to idolize her. At first the concept of Motherhood arose as a progressive, middle-class role model, modifying Emersonian individualism with a vision of the country as an aggregation of families, cooperating through small-town, paternal (but not paternalistic) bonds of affection. But as the United States became industrialized, such a vision proved unrealistic, and the mother became a figure of reaction, especially for the South. Connected with the bliss of infancy, the infallibility of Scripture, and the union of lost childhood and religious consolation in the afterlife, the sentimental mother became the projection of a vanished, ideal way of life. During the depression, as the last vestiges of nineteenth-century culture were being challenged, country songs increasingly portrayed elegiac visions of the lost home and the dying mother, and with them, the fading religious and social myth of sentimentality.

This myth, in essence, showed the child walking a prescribed path from the bliss of the cradle through the shadow of the Dark and Dreary World back to the bliss of a heavenly home. At first he
stumbles, wanders, even sins, but guided by Mother's last words or her timely Assistance, he succeeds in finding his way through life. He is left homeless, of course, as Mother departs to prepare a mansion bright above, but even though he must struggle by himself, he is encouraged onward by his mother's teachings, often reinforced by celestial visions. At life's end, the most serious challenge to the individual, he is again assisted over the threshold by Mother, the intermediary between this imperfect world and the perfected afterlife. If the child is not careful, he might fall off the prescribed path; persisting in his reckless ways and losing touch with Mother's influence, he could find himself shut out of heaven, lost in a threatening world with no comforting myth. But for loyal believers this myth allowed one to make a coherent pattern out of a period marked by disorienting social changes. "Sinful" desires or competing ideologies could be projected onto scapegoats whom audiences could watch as they fell to destruction or were resocialized after all by Mother's help. Feelings of helplessness in the face of change could be comforted by the hope of another world, in which all the good things of the rural home could be recovered without fear of any further change. Such a myth was pessimistic in that it almost required the child to wander so that Mother could guide him aright, and in that it painted this world as nightmarish to further glorify the dream world of the future. Yet it served its social function during the period 1923-45 by ensuring that the most important mores and ideals of the last rurally-oriented generation would not be lost, but could be passed on to the new generation.
What did this new generation make of this myth? The comprehensive part of this survey tails off at 1945, an arbitrary but suitable point to end a study of early country music, as the immediate post-war period brought a series of major shifts in the musical tradition. The proliferation of small recording companies, the growing influence of "the Nashville sound," and the parallel growth of bluegrass as a counter-style transformed the tradition almost as much as the depression had altered hillbilly music. The sentimental mother, however, persisted, and in fact early this year the country charts included "Roses for Mama," a C. W. McCall hit about a neglectful son who finally realizes that he has a duty to stay in touch with Mother.\(^1\) My own survey of the past year's bluegrass releases reviewed in \textit{Bluegrass Unlimited} shows that at least forty-seven different songs dealing with sentimental parent-child (mostly mother-son) relations appeared on LP.\(^2\) Twenty of these date from 1923-45, including the two most popular numbers, "When It's Lamp Lightin' Time in the Valley" (1930, P088), and "Can the Circle Be Unbroken" (1935, P416), although the latter was once performed in a revised version celebrating the Baha'i Faith. Mother has indeed retained a place in the country song tradition, even if it is not the dominant role she held in the earliest years. Perhaps it is not too much to say that mother songs, old or new, comprise the most traditional of the secular formulas still active in country music today.

The period after 1945, unlike the twenty-three years surveyed, produced a variety of responses to the sentimental myth, though: most reverant, some skeptical, a few covertly critical. In this last chapter
we will survey some of these responses, though hardly in the detail they deserve, to show what more recent songs have to say about the place of Motherhood in the late twentieth century. While many songs could have been written before 1945—certainly they have their hearts in this period—many indicate altered feelings toward the early country attitudes. Some suggest a masculine rebellion against Mother's arbitrary moralism by taking motifs and formulas associated with the sentimental tradition and perverting them—though none go so far as to attack Mother Herself. Others reexamine the realities behind home and mother, suggesting that the popular fantasies are no longer enough to explain the complex nature of actual home life. And at least one hit song goes so far as to attack the standard definition of Mother, though in such a way, ironically, as to reaffirm one of the oldest of Mother's standard roles. This period needs intensive study, but it is clear that the stereotype of the sentimental mother not only persisted, it has continued to evolve with changing social conditions.

This is not to say that the old song formulas have been discarded: in fact most of the songs produced today use the same sentimental formulas that we isolated in earlier chapters. The gradual trends that we identified continued, however: mothers became more and more idealized, becoming less actors than symbols of lost perfection; fathers were depicted less as drunkards and more as kindly, home-loving sorts; and "parent songs" like "Mom and Dad's Waltz" (Frizzell, 1951) and "The Roots of My Raising" (Sipes, 1976) finally achieved the same popularity as individual mother and daddy songs. In general the parent-child relationship was increasingly linked to nostalgic longing
for the rural home, and while the mother remained the centerpiece of the home, she tended to become only one part of the total picture. The link of nostalgia with fundamentalism—the old home with the old time religion—remained strong, though, and the greatest number of traditional mother songs are still performed in the bluegrass gospel tradition. In fact, it is still rare to see a bluegrass gospel album that does not include at least one mother song per side. This link is especially appropriate, for the main popularizers and arrangers of the oldest sentimental songs were the groups most associated with gospel singing. The Angel Mother's role as intermediary between life and death remains an important part of gospel conventions, as illustrated by "I Just Saw the Rock of Ages," a number on Ralph Stanley's latest gospel album:

I was standing by a bedside
Where my feeble mother lay
When she called me close beside her
And I thought I heard her say.

Chorus: I've just seen the Rock of Ages
Jacob's Ladder hanging down
I've just crossed the River of Jordan
Now my son I'm homeward bound.

(Rebel SLR-1571: Clinch Mountain Gospel.)

The strong role played by female vocalists in today's country music also relates to earlier country attitudes toward Motherhood. The maternal performer, first assumed by Sara and Maybelle Carter and then by many other pre-war female singers and groups, has since become a fixture of the country scene. Of the early post-war performers Molly O'Day was the most influential: in her short but successful career she popularized dozens of sentimental and religious numbers before illness led her to retire to a ministry in a pentecostal church.
Her husky voice and powerful delivery were emulated by later vocalists like Wilma Lee Cooper, Rose Maddox, and Hazel Dickens, and even so refined a vocalist as Linda Ronstadt still performs an occasional sentimental piece like "The Sweetest Gift" (Coates, bef. 1948). Admittedly these hymns to pure Motherhood are by now no more than a small part of a much tougher contemporary repertory, with strong emphasis on high life and cheating, but the link with the past has never been abandoned. While these singers admit that their careers have had to involve constant compromises with male agents and backers, 4 females have reached so firm a state of parity with males in the country entertainment industry that it seems clear that the conventional link between mothering and singing opened doors to women that have since remained closed in more economically threatening fields.

The post-war song tradition produced many songs that followed exactly the same formulas that we have seen before: detailed Violation and Assistance plots (though not with so much frequency) and poignant Celebrations and Partings. The more conservative moralistic tradition can be illustrated by Johnny Cash's 1958 hit, "Don't Take Your Guns to Town," which portrays "A boy filled with wanderlust, who really meant no harm." One day Billy Joe dresses up to head for town, laughing at his mother's warning to "Leave your guns at home . . . ." Assuring himself that he is a man at last, he stops at a bar for "his first strong liquor . . . to calm his shaking hand . . . ." But when an older cowpoke ridicules his inexperience, he reaches for his guns in a rage and is shot down on the spot. Dying, Billy Joe ruefully repeats his mother's "last words" (Johnny Cash [1959], pp. 12-13).
All the elements of the Violation formula are there: the Admonishing Mother's Interdiction, the child's trivial sin of drinking, and his abrupt fall. The motif of the enraged child grabbing his guns is more often associated with gambling, in which he catches (or is caught as) a swindler. Still, the senselessness of his death dramatizes his mother's warning. His basic sin is choosing to try to make his way as "a man" instead of prudently obeying her advice and leaving his badge of masculinity in her care.

Typical of post-war elegiac songs is Carl Perkins's "Daddy Sang Bass" (1968), a song of Parting that includes not just the mother, but the whole family, down to "little brother." The narrator begins recalling when "times were hard and things were bad," but what gets described is the "silver lining behind ev'ry cloud"—the family's nightly songfests. At present all the family has "done gone on" to heaven, but the Pilgrim, alone in this world, has faith that "We'll be together again up yonder in a little while." The conventional heavenly reunion takes the same form as the original gatherings:

One of these days and it won't be long,
I'll rejoin them in a song;
I'm gonna join the fam'ly circle at the throne.
No the circle won't be broken,
Eye and bye, Lord, bye and bye.
Daddy'll sing bass, mama'll sing tenor,
Me and little brother will join right in there
In the sky, Lord in the sky.
(Kitty Wells [c. 1972], pp. 22-24.)

The phrases borrowed from "Can the Circle Be Unbroken" not only declare the song's allegiance to past formulas, they also make the song an answer to the Carters' pessimistic emphasis on the circle's breaking. Unlike the earlier song, which describes the Mother's funeral and
nothing besides, Perkins's song does not even mention how the family separated. The memory of the original singings and of the future reunion are merged in a single picture of apparently unbroken family harmony. While this song does not place special stress on the mother, but presents the family as a single ideal unit, it still preserves intact the elegiac model.

During the post-war years, however, there were forces at work that disputed this ideal harmony. As noted in the previous chapter, the twentieth century brought drastic changes in parental roles. The father, once a distant disciplinarian, was restored to the family circle, and the mother, once the closest protector of the child, now more often was the punisher, and beginning with World War II she too began to leave home in search of employment. Sentimental fathers were rehabilitated, but mothers never were demoted from quasi-divine status. Even today there have been no numbers that I have encountered that directly attack Motherhood. Where did the resentment go? A fuller study of female roles in country music may give a detailed answer, but my own quick survey of post-war songs suggests this solution: just as antagonistic feelings toward the nineteenth-century father were displaced onto other males later in the child's adult life, so twentieth-century country songs tend to chide the adult son's sweet-heart because of the mother's neglect. The period during which daddy songs became popular was also the time when sentimental appeals to distant, all-powerful women became an important love song formula. We may see the conventional pattern developing in one pre-war example of this formula, Ernest Tubb's "Walking the Floor over You" (1941).
No motive is given for the cruel beauty's departure: "You've broken your promise, and you left me here alone/I don't know why you did, dear, but I do know that you're gone." Their relationship, like the idyllic years of infancy before the Parting, is left undescribed; the narrator simply says, "I thought that you wanted me and always would be mine." One day she is there and he is happy; the next she is gone and he is crushed. The song's conclusion hints that the sweetheart may get her come-uppance eventually--"Now someday you may be lonesome too . . ."--but the narrator, faithful to the end, takes his leave protesting "I love you and I will the day I die" (Horstman, pp. 177-178). The home, even in marriage, is supposed to be a place of passive bliss for the male. The woman, ideally, provides continual company and security, protecting his ego—in effect mothering her mate. Any threat of leaving him to be alone is strongly denounced in these songs, for not only will such an act cause the husband or lover intense grief (presumably his conspicuous floor-walking is equivalent to a mother's chair-rocking), but it will carry inevitable punishment with it. As she has done, so some less faithful mate will do to her.

As described, this pattern is only implicitly related to the mother stereotype, and, after all, similar songs like "I'll Remember You, Love, in My Prayers" (Hays, 1869) entered hillbilly tradition even during the peak of mother-worship. What is significant is that this formula of love songs became so dominant a part of the post-war repertory, overshadowing religion and other social commentary. And when such songs began to use motifs from mother songs, the implicit comment on female roles rose closer to the surface. One of Hank
Williams's first hits was "Mansion on the Hill" (1948), a song that derives much of its effect from an imaginative reversal of the "mother waiting at home" motifs. The cruel beauty, after telling the narrator she "could live without love," retires to her "loveless mansion" on top of a hill, where for years she lives "alone with [her] pride." Ironically, "The light shines bright from [her] window," although it is she who has fallen from grace, and it is the male lover who, mother-like, has "waited all through the years . . . /To give [her] a heart true and real . . . (Horstman, p. 165). The conventional roles of patient mother and neglectful son are here projected onto a patient male suitor and a neglectful sweetheart. The ideal home in this song, similarly, is not the mansion to which the female ascends, but the male's lowly "cabin" in the valley, where he waits for her to see the light and return to her rightful position. This reversal of motifs does not criticize the mother directly, but it does bring into question the traditional roles of male and female figures in country songs, suggesting that now the male can set himself up as a moral authority, even when the female is associated with previously "sacred" imagery. The mansion with the light in the window need not be a heavenly one; it can also be a loveless hell of pride.

In recent years country singers have been more willing to record songs satirizing previously untouchable subjects. In 1976, for example, Bobby Bare recorded an album of such parodies, The Winner and Other Losers (RCA APLC-1786), which took on, in addition to conventional macho stereotypes, such topics as the conventional religious allegory ("Dropkick Me, Jesus") and the sacred, but not terribly coherent
"Great Speckled Bird," which becomes in Bare's treatment a speed-freak's anthem ("Vince"). More significant for our purposes, though, is Shel Silverstein's "Brian Hennessey," the song that comes perhaps closest to expressing an explicit masculine rejection of maternal control. The mother figure in this song is a toothless hag of a gypsy, who reads Brian's palm, then frantically warns him that "the devil's mark" in his hand predicts imminent death. Brian manfully laughs off this prophecy, but finds it dogging his every sinful step. When he enters a saloon, he finds "a one-eyed scar-faced stranger dealing blackjack in the gloom," who at once invites him over.

Brian watched in fascination, as the stranger's fingers flew
Why he'd never seen such cheating done before
And his hand closed round the handle of his snub-nosed thirty-two
When the gypsy's warning come to him once more.

Unlike Billy Joe of "Don't Take Your Guns to Town," Brian controls his rage, folds up his cards, and walks away alive. After an equally unsuccessful attempt on a local waitress's virtue (at the critical moment he finds the warning printed magically on her pillow), he decides to reform. And "from that day on he changed his wicked life/
And he never drunk or gambled, and he never dealt no dope/And he never touched another fellow's wife ...." Up to this point this song could be interpreted as a conventional Violation plot, complete with supernatural Intervention, in which the male is pointed to the path of righteousness before death claims him. To be sure, the gypsy's warning is more curse than admonition, but its function is the same as a mother's last words: successful conversion of the male.
But the song's ironic coda gives the lie to this facile moral. When Brian encounters the gypsy twenty years later, he laughs in her face, boasting, "I beat your curse . . . ." The gypsy, like Mother, nevertheless gets the last word: "when she saw the frightened trembling withered wretch that he'd become/She said, Brian you died twenty years ago." By obeying the maternal code, in short, Brian has emasculated himself, and the gypsy, far from rejoicing at the black sheep's reform, jeers at his cowardice. The Violation formula is here in externals, but the spirit has been perverted to make Reckless Brian a sympathetic "alive" character whose personality is extinguished by the sinister Admonishing Gypsy. While this song nervously skirts the topic of Motherhood per se, at the same time it shows the distance we have come from the earlier male/female division of labor: as well as being pure, patient, and morally infallible, the woman now may be a castrating manipulator. Post-war songs such as these show that male anxiety and anger over this dual nature was beginning to surface in popular formulas.

Another symptom of shifting perspectives toward Motherhood was a series of country songs that treated sentimental subjects in an unsentimental fashion. The old attitudes are not discredited, but the symbols that used to express them are criticized and discarded. In particular such songs show that the idealized portraits of home and mother often fit their real-life counterparts poorly, and they try to present a more realistic portrait. But since the songs refuse to go beyond the old ideals, their effect depends on attacking old rhetorical conventions, not old attitudes. Chief among such songs are
those that try to explain what "home" was really like in the not-so-romantic past. Beginning with the title, Dolly Parton's "In the Good Old Days (When Times Were Bad)" (1968) embodies the tension between the fantasy and the grim facts of life during the Depression:

I've seen daddy's hands break open and bleed
And I've seen him work till he's stiff as a board
And I've seen mama lay and suffer in sickness
In need of a doctor we couldn't afford
Anything at all was more than we had
In the good old days when times were bad.

(Horstman, p. 15.)

Although the narrator admits that she would never give up her childhood memories, she also declares, "No amount of money could pay me/
To go back and live through it again." The same attitude, with less melodrama, is expressed in Bill Rice's "Wonder Could I Live There Anymore" (1970). His view of home is not grim, only disillusioning, with hard work and religious intolerance highlighted. The "loving" parents are still sympathetic, but too busy to be bothered with adoring their children:

Something 'bout the smell of cornbread cooking on a wood stove
Seems to bring a picture to my mind
Of a little three room house with mama in the kitchen
But she can't stop to talk, ain't got the time
She's fixing dad his supper, he's a-working overtime
Trying to pay our bill at the grovery store . . . .

(Horstman, pp. 29-30.)

As in the previous song, the narrator admits that such memories are "nice to think about," but he ends wondering if he would really feel at home back there. The question is not the same as the elegiac tradition of the pre-war period: today's children can indeed pack a bag and return to the old home without much fear of finding it gone. The shock is to find that one might not want to stay home for long.
In both songs, though, the parents are close to the original stereotypes: hard-working, devoted to the home, long-suffering. But they are no symbols of a haven beyond earthly sorrow, for they too are afflicted with all the troubles of the Dark and Dreary World. The picture is somewhat different in John D. Loudermilk's "Tobacco Road" (1960), in which the narrator terms his birthplace "a dump" and exclaims, "Only Lord known how I loathe/The place called Tobacco Road." Even the parents are presented in a blunt, unsentimental way: "Mama died and daddy got drunk/Left me here to die or grow . . . ." Later Loudermilk had to apologize for this curt characterization:

I felt that was a good rhyming word—that was a catchy phrase. Now I wish I had not said that, because I seem to be giving an illusion of a father who was fairly rough and a mother who was fairly rough, and my people were very big church-going people (Horstman, p. 25). Still, "realistic" to Loudermilk's experience or not, this portrait is in keeping with the song's grim view of this "old home," which is not only troubled by the world, but genuinely "filthy" as well. Yet the same ambivalent attitudes emerge: even as the narrator claims to loathe the town's grimy reality, he admits, "I loves you 'cause you're home." As his act of loyalty to the concept of "home," he vows to leave, make a fortune, then return with "dynamite and a crane/Blow it up and start over again . . . ." (Horstman, pp. 25-26). For once, then, a country song opts for the "City" solution to rural problems: bulldozers and "progress" win out over nostalgic conservatism. Yet this solution is no more than an updated way of clinging to one's roots, since the narrator plans to rebuild his old town only so it lives up to his ideal of what "home" should be like. Once the dynamite and the crane are done, he will love the reality as well as the stereotype. Admittedly the song
reduces sentimental attachment to an ideal home to its bare minimum—yet it is still there.

In the same way some portraits of mothers appear that use the old formulas, but in realistic ways unthinkable within earlier conventions. "Mr. Jackson," a song recently recorded by Rose Maddox, takes on the task of adapting sentimental patterns to the life-story of a prostitute. The story begins abruptly "like an old and frightening dream," for it is a nightmarish picture from life's other side. The narrator tells how she "turned [her] back on [her] drunken pa and . . . never looked back again . . . ." Finding herself in "The streets of the city," she soon discovered "that [she] was a woman and [she] looked pretty good to men . . . ." A life of hustling, she admits, was "a rough way to go," but she does not follow the path to remorse or suicide that other "lost daughters" followed: indeed, she boasts, "I ate real good and I slept real late, and always had a pretty good time." Eventually she bore a daughter, and she tried to change her style to raise her in the approved motherly way. But, she concedes, "I just wasn't what a mother should be and my best was none too good . . . ." Her daughter walks out on her, just as she had done in her own youth, and although she prays that her child will find "a better life," she is not surprised to find her hustling the streets in her mother's footsteps. Her daughter too, she admits, will "eat real good, and sleep real late and probably have a pretty good time" (Takoma D-1055: Reckless Love & Bold Adventure).

This song is effective because it borrows many of the Violation conventions associated with "fallen women," but takes care not to intrude
the usual moral. The prostitute-narrator does not condemn her child or
predict her doom, and she hardly blames herself for her own sins. The
focus of the song, instead, is on the mother's failure to find a better
life for the next generation, not how either or both fall into moral
decline. The narrator, like the "villainous" father in "Have You Seen
My Daddy Here" (1944, F126), comes off as a sympathetic figure caught
in an impossible dilemma, not as a conventional "unworthy mother." The
nightmarish perspective of the song precludes our seeing her as heroic,
but neither are we asked to condemn her. She remains an unsentimental
mother who tries to act out the conventional role but finds that her
surroundings make sentimentality impossible. That such a song has been
recorded, however recently, suggests that the standard roles of
Motherhood are becoming increasingly more difficult to assume in a
modern world based on a more universal form of hustling.

The present is indeed a time when women are challenging the tradi-
tional roles invested in the sentimental mother, especially from the
perspective of feminism. But many conservative women also have
recognized that everyday realities have to take precedence over yester-
day's formulas. In particular women have grown to view Mother's con-
ventional duties as impractical and restrictive: by limiting a
woman's roles to raising and teaching her children, remaining aloof from
the outside world, Motherhood denies the individual any choice in her
life-style and keeps her from rising above the surrounding she has
inherited. Like the prostitute-narrator of "Mr. Jackson," a sentimental
mother can teach her children only to be what she now is, and for
today's women this is no longer enough. Worse, the divine mask of
maternal self-denial and unaltering love for her children forces the individual to deny her own mutable emotions and hence any thought of having a personality of her own. As we have seen, those women capable of assuming this mask have also gained enormous persuasive power over their families' social thinking. But, as feminists now point out, for those unable to pour their personalities wholly into this role, the mask leads to madness.

Adrienne Rich, in Of Women Born, is especially critical of the specialized duties a woman must adopt to become a "good mother." She points out that the morality that the woman was "made" to embody is one that serves, above all, the adult males in society. Mother must socialize her sons, keep them from preying too much on each other, and liberate them from fear of death, but the sentimental code does not provide any equivalent rewards specially for the females, except the hope of becoming revered social leaders in their own tenure as mothers. Rich observes that

... much as she may act as the coequal provider or so-called matriarch within her own family, every mother must deliver her children over within a few years of their birth to the patriarchal system of education, of law, of religion, of sexual codes; she is, in fact, expected to prepare them to enter that system without rebelliousness or "maladjustment" and to perpetuate it in their own adult lives. Patriarchy depends on the mother to act as a conservative influence, imprinting future adults with patriarchal values even in those early years when the mother-child relationship might seem most individual and private ... (p. 45).

Such a burden, she observes, a a crushing social burden, for it requires the individual mother to repress her own desires or frustrations against the "sacred" institutions that use her, venting them as anger directed at her children, or, worse, at herself. And if she "fails" her
children by rejecting this "powerless responsibility," her "very character, her status as a woman, are in question . . . ." (p. 36). Once she steps beyond conventional moral bounds, she is open to far more severe moral sanctions than the male, who is almost expected to sow his wild oats so Mother can save him. But who will save Mother?

Sarah Penfield, a rural grandmother of southern Ohio who has been extensively studied by Rosemary Joyce, also agrees that this double standard was the rule:

They had the silly idea that the boy could do the same thing, be guilty of the same thing as the girl, but it didn't hurt him like it did the girl. And people would forget that! But they wouldn't forget it if the girl did it.

Although Ms. Penfield is staunchly conservative in her concept of a woman's place in society, agreeing that mothers ought not to trifle with sin and try to behave like men, it is significant that she calls this and other patriarchal attitudes "silly." Joyce has collected a few of her more definite statements about the nature of woman:

There isn't anything younger than a man! [agreeing with daughter] why are men running the world when women are much more capable, thoughtful, and stable?

We find that some of our great minds come from females. And why would the males be so smart if they didn't have a smart mother? Sure they're as important!

I do think that some people say women are inferior. I mean it is very, very wrong (p. 34).

Yet Sarah Penfield, in company with other rural mothers, is no feminist. This vital, self-confident image depends in turn on the mother's willingness to confine her power to a self-enclosed family circle. There she is indeed a match for the men, but any activity outside the home is viewed with extreme ambivalence. Speaking of her own
decision to earn extra house money with a part-time job, Ms. Penfield cautiously said,

I never gave it much thought, we just, you know, when we—'cause if the children needed clothes. If they needed food, they needed food. That come first. That's what you worked for. That's what we live for, isn't it? (p. 18).

The role of today's rural mother is still a restricted one, but, as Joyce points out, the first tentative steps toward a career and a life of one's own have been taken, however conservatives may rationalize them. Ms. Penfield now grudgingly approves her daughters' lifestyles, even though most of them have chosen careers outside the home. Even within traditional circles, then, the roles of the sentimental mother are giving way to more varied careers, first with ambivalence, then without hesitation. And once this step is taken, the confident self-image of the domestic mother as more-than-equal becomes something else again.

It is no great step from this image to that of the community or national reformer/critic who attacks outdated mores in favor of a more universal code of ethics. Such a figure, in fact, has already appeared in one of the 1960s' most popular country songs, "Harper Valley PTA." Written by a male (Tom T. Hall), it was, appropriately, made a hit by a tough-voiced female vocalist (Jeannie C. Riley). Its text is as follows:

I want to tell you all a story 'bout a Harper Valley widowed wife Who had a teenage daughter who attended Harper Valley Junior High Well, her daughter came home one afternoon and didn't even stop to play She said, "Mom, I got a note here from the Harper Valley PTA."
The note said "Mrs. Johnson, you are wearing your dresses 'way too high
It's reported you've been drinking and running 'round with men and going wild
And we don't believe you ought to be a-bringing up your little girl this way"
It was signed by the secretary, Harper Valley PTA.

Well, it happened that the PTA was gonna meet that very afternoon
They were sure surprised when Mrs. Johnson wore her miniskirt into the room
As she walked up to the blackboard, I still recall the words she had to say
She said, "I'd like to address this meeting of the Harper Valley PTA.

Well, there's Bobby Taylor sittin' there, and seven times he's asked me for a date
And Mrs. Taylor sure seems to use a lot of ice when he's away
And, Mr. Baker, can you tell us why your secretary had to leave this town?
And shouldn't widow Jones be told to keep her window shades all pulled completely down?

Well, Mr. Harper couldn't be here 'cause he stayed too long at Kelly's Bar again
And if you smell Shirley Thompson's breath, you'll find she's had a little nip of gin
Then you have the nerve to tell me you think that as a mother I'm not fit
Well, this is just a little Peyton Place, and you're all Harper Valley hypocrites."

No, I wouldn't put you on, because it really did, it happened just this way
The day my Mama socked it to the Harper Valley PTA.
(Horstman, p. 218)*

The pattern of this song, significantly, is one of the oldest, most versatile formulas in the sentimental repertory, the mother's plea before the courtroom. Only this time she does not plead for her accused son, she herself is on trial for her recklessness. The sins for which she is criticized are the traditional ones for a Reckless Daughter: drinking and promiscuity, or "going wild." And if a mother is guilty of such

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recklessness, what must the next generation do? Unlike the conventional violation plot, though, the mother does not criticize or regret these trivial sins—indeed she flaunts her miniskirted wild life in front of the community's moral custodians. Her plea, as usual, does not deny that the charges are true, but instead psychologically attacks her judges, trimming them down to human size. The impersonal "secretary, Harper Valley PTA" gives way to a sequence of fallible vignettes, in effect equating the judges with the prejudged. Where in earlier trial ballads the effect of this equating was to raise the status of the judge from bureaucrat to father, this song instead reduces the board of moralists to petty wayward children. At the same time Mrs. Johnson reestablishes her own moral dominance over the group and is able to give them a maternal tongue-lashing for having the nerve to call her "unfit." If she is not fit, neither are the others in the room, and Mrs. Johnson at least has the insight to look beyond the trivial sins of liquor and sexy dress to the more insidious sins of hypocrisy and intolerance. By appealing to this higher morality, the mother of this song emerges as a new kind of heroine, not because of her unearthly perfection, but because of her courageous denunciation of moralistic blindness. Although she is a hundred years and a social milieu away from the blind girl of our first chapter, she fits into the same tradition of sentimental rhetoric and thus is a worthy successor to the earlier heroine.

It is too early yet to see if this more liberated stereotype will become the popular norm in country music, although it is noteworthy that the song has recently been expanded into a full-length movie.
There is, however, ample precedent for seeing Mother as a community critic and crusader. The rise of sentimentality coincided with a variety of movements aimed at giving women more control over American society. Some of these, like the Temperance crusade, were as puritanical as the songs we have surveyed, but others were progressive, like the Suffragette movement, or even radical, like early left-wing labor agitation, in which female organizers took major part. If Carrie Nation is the popular stereotype of yesterday's crusading mother, we need to keep in mind that "Mother" Jones, "Aunt" Molly Jackson, and Ella Mae Wiggins drew their appeal from the same set of role models. Even in so radical a labor song as "I Hate the Capitalist System," composed by Sarah Ogan Gunning, we can still see the link between social agitation and sentimental rhetoric:

I had a darling mother
For her I often cry
But with those rotten conditions
My mother had to die.

Well what killed your mother
I heard those capitalists say
The debt of hard work and starvation
My mother had to pay.  

For such crusaders, capitalism was guilty of many crimes, but not the least of them was failure to live up to sentimental ideals of conduct.

This heritage, whether in song or social reality, is still active today, and it is difficult for public-minded females, however they try to break with past models, to avoid the maternal image. And it is worth remembering that this role, like "Harper Valley PTA," is a male creation. Adrienne Rich again has pointed out the subtle danger for contemporary women:
The woman's movement is still seen in terms of the mother-child relationship: either as a punishment and abandonment of men for past bad behavior, or as a potential healing of men's pain by women, a new form of maternalism, in which little by little, through gentle suasion, women with a new vision will ease men into a more humane and sensitive life. In short, that women will go on doing for men what men cannot or will not do for each other or themselves (p. 214).

The present is a time of female crusaders as various as Gloria Steinem and Anita Bryant, aggressive moralists who see their duties as directing America back to a lost golden age, whether it be to the secure home of the just-vanished nineteenth century, or to an even more remote era of matriarchy. It is apt to say that if it were not for the dramatic rise of the sentimental mother as a powerful role model within the family and small town, the present feminist movement would encounter even more frustrations in defying patriarchal prejudices. Yet feminists—and liberated males as well—must come to terms with the heritage of the sentimental mother, for in its peculiar demands are bound up both the strength and the constraints of contemporary women.
Notes to Chapter Eight

1 This song, written by Johnny Wilson, Gene Dobbins, and Wayne Sharp, is published by Chappell Music and may be heard on Polydor PD-1-6125: Roses for Mama.

2 I surveyed the review columns from July 1977 to June 1978. As I did not count titles that seemed ambiguous (like "Sweet Daddy"), my list doubtless omits some songs that do concern sentimental parents. It is hard to tell from the title alone what the song is actually about, so I took a conservative approach here.

3 Since I originally wrote this chapter, I have purchased four LP's of bluegrass gospel, which provide a useful check on this assertion. One of these, done by the progressive group The Seldom Scene (Rebel SLP 1573: Baptizing), included only one mother song, "Dreaming of a Little Cabin" (Brumley, bef. 1951), although another song, "Brother John" (Rosenthal, 1978) shows the same kind of role taken over by a sentimental wife. The more traditional Country Gentlemen (Rebel SLP 1574: Calling My Children Home) not only include the usual two mother songs ("Calling My Children Home" [untraced], and "Where No Cabins Fall" [1938, P139]), they also dedicate the album to their parents. Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper's album, Power Pak PO-242: Walking My Lord Up Calvary's Hill, also includes the usual number ("The Drunken Driver" [bef. 1937, V020] and "I Dreamed about Mama Last Night" [Rose, 1949]), while a Stanley Brothers reissue from the early 1960s, King 750: Old Time Camp Meeting, includes three: "I Heard My Mother Call My Name in Prayer" (1919, A068), "Village Churchyard" (bef. 1911, P331), and "Mother's Only Sleeping" (2) (1946, P359). Howard Wight Marshall gives a list of thirty-four parent-child (mostly mother-son) gospel songs current in bluegrass tradition in "Keep on the Sunny Side of Life," New York Folklore Quarterly, 30 (1974), 37-41.

4 At a workshop on women in country music held at the fourth annual UCLA Folk Festival, April 17, 1976, Lily May Ledford and Rose Maddox discussed male interference in their careers. The most revealing of their comments are transcribed in Frances M. Farrell's article, "The John Edwards Memorial Foundation as a Raw Data Source for the Study of Women in Country Music," JEMFQ, 13 (1977), 162-164. Similar comments in Loretta Lynn's autobiography are excerpted and discussed from a feminist point of view by Sally F. O'Connor in her review of Coal Miner's Daughter, JEMFQ, 13 (1977), 149-151.

5 This interpretation of the song is made more likely by Williams's psychological background. Even his biographer admits that his mother was "large, mannish, and overbearing," and that it was she who raised
Williams, supported his early career, and held considerable power over him even during his later life. (See Roger M. Williams, "Hank Williams," in _The Stars of Country Music_, ed. Bill C. Malone and Judith McCulloh [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975], p. 238.) To top things off, Williams's mother (by then Mrs. W. W. Stone) followed her son's sensational death and funeral by dictating an account of the singer's life in which she claimed, "Hank's Mother was always his first girl, and he never forgot it. He was always as sweet and kind to me as anybody could be. He wrote many 'mother songs' to me . . ." (quoted, with comments, by Eli Waldron, "The Death of Hank Williams," in _The American Folk Music Occasional_, ed. Chris Strachwitz and Pete Welding [New York: Oak Publications, 1970], p. 45).

6 1976; rpt. New York: Bantam Books, 1977. Page citations from this work are given in the body of the text.

7 Rosemary Joyce, "The Life of Sarah Penfield, Rural Ohio Grandmother: Tradition Maintained, Tradition Threatened," unpublished paper (projected for publication in a collection of essays), p. 10. Page citations for further quotes from this paper are given in the body of the text. I thank Ms. Joyce for lending me a copy of this valuable essay.

8 This song may be found in its original version on Rounder 0051: _The Silver Dagger_. It is also known in a modified version as "I Hate the Company Bosses." The tune, interestingly, derives from a Carter Family song, "I Have No One to Love Me (But the Sailor on the Deep Blue Sea)." The Rounder LP also provides a valuable cross-section of Gunning's religious and sentimental repertory from which she derived the rhetoric on which this song is based.
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APPENDIX A

An Alphabetical Listing

of Parent-Child Country Songs 1923-45

The following is a list of all the early country songs on
which this dissertation is based. In the first column is the catalog
number I assigned to the song, and in the second is the song's
title, with author and date of composition if known. The main
entries are under the original published title of the song, or,
if it is a folksong, the most common title. I also give cross-
referenced entries for alternative titles of some songs, except
when the alternative title is an abbreviation or obvious variant
of the original so that it would be placed beside the main entry
in the listing (e.g., "The Blind Child's Prayer" = "The Blind
Girl.") But wherever there was a chance that the alternative
title might confuse a researcher, I have listed it (e.g., "The Old
Cottage Home" = "My Old Cottage Home.").

After the Roundup - see "When the Work's All Done This
Fall."

P515  After the Round-Up Is Done (Keene, 1934).
P037.1  Alan Bane (untraced, bef. 1909).
C352  Always Be Kind to Daddy (Frank, King & Scaggs, 1937).
V029  Always in the Way (Harris, 1903).
P432  Angel with Bright Silver Wings (Moore, 1940).
P008  Angels Always Listen When a Mother Prays (McEnery, Martin,
 & Gregory, 1944).
P405  Angels Tell My Mother I'll Be There (untraced, bef. 1927).
P158.1  Answer to That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine, The (Snow, 1942).
Are You Going to Leave the Old Home - see "There's a
Mother Always Waiting at Home Sweet Home."
As Welcome as the Flowers in May - see "You're as Welcome
as the Flowers in May."
At the End of the Lane - see "By a Window at the End of
the Lane"; also "I Know There Is Somebody Waiting."
At the Old Church Door - see "The Two Orphans."
P149.1  Awaiting the Return of My Boy (Mainer, ca. 1946).
A192  Baby Boy (McEnery, 1945).
C198  Baby Song to Mother, A (Gilbert & Cheshire, 1940).
P417  Baby's Prayer at Twilight (To the Angels Up Above), A
 (Sizemore, 1936).
P231  Back on the Old Santa Fe (Brown, 1939).
V085.1  Bad Companions (untraced, bef. 1925).
V256  Bars, Bars (McEnery, 1939).
Battle of Fredericksburg, The - see "The Last Fierce Charge."
Battle of Gettysburg - see "The Last Fierce Charge."
Be Home Early To-night, My Dear Boy - see "I Have Traveled through Life, I Have Seen Many Things."
C359 Be Kind to the Loved Ones at Home (Woodbury, 1847).
Bessie, or the Drunkard's Daughter - see "The Drunkard's Lone Child" (1).
C339 Best Girl of All, The (Bogan & Pridgen, 1940).
C278 Bible That My Mother Read to Me, The (Sizemore & White, 1941).
A182 Bible That Saved My Life, The (Gregory, 1945).
V185 Black Sheep (Loves You Best of All), The (Gould, 1897).
V002 Blind Girl, The (untraced, bef. 1860s).
P152 Blind Mother's Prayer, A (Davis & Williams, 1928).
P220 Blue-Ridge Mountain Blues (untraced, bef. 1924).
Boy Leaving Home - see "There's a Dear Spot in Ireland."
Boyhood Days Down on the Farm - see "Down on the Farm."
V244 Boy's Best Friend, A (Jenkins, n.d.).
C322 Boy's Best Friend Is His Mother, A (1) (Miller & Skelly, 1883).
C323 Boy's Best Friend Is His Mother, A (2) (Williams, bef. 1886).
P530 Boys in Blue, The (untraced, bef. 1900).
Brave Engineer, The - see "Wreck on the C & O."
Brave Fireman, The - see "Break the News to Mother Gently."
P507 Break the News to Mother (Harris, 1897).
P509 Break the News to Mother Softly (Fox & Marks, bef. 1898).
P001 Bride's Farewell, The (untraced, bef. 1872).
Bring Back to Me My Wandering Boy - see "The Wandering Boy."
P503 Bring to Me My Harp Again (untraced, bef. 1934).
C334 Bring Your Roses to Her Now (Ennis, Giles & Large, 1939).
P174 By a Window at the End of the Lane (Howard & Vincent, 1930).
C229 By the Side of an Old Green Hill (Frank, King & Scaggs, 1937).
P113 By the Silvery Tennessee (Furrow, Wade & Hooker, 1942).
C & O Wreck - see "The Wreck on the C & O."
P171 Cabin Home (Golden Melody Boys, 1928).
C199 Cabin in the Valley of the Pines (Brumley, 1940).
P229 Cabin of Memories (Brumley, 1939).
C203 Cabin That Stood on the Hillside (Mel & Aspinall, 1941).
P416 Can the Circle Be Unbroken (Carter, 1935).
P103 Candle Light in the Window, The (Robison, 1936).
Can't Feel at Home Any More - see "This World is Not My Home."
Charge of Confederatesburg, The - see "The Last Fierce Charge."
Charley Ross - see "Nobody's Darling."
C176 Childhood Dreams (Carlisle, 1932).
P336 Choir Boy Sings All Alone Tonight, A (Herbert, Maltin, & Raskin, 1928).
C345 Christmas Day with Mother (Van Ness, 1944).
V104 Come Back to the Old Home (McCoy, 1941).
V003 Come Home, Father (Work, 1864).
P102 Come on Home (Spencer, 1936).
Come Raise Me in Your Arms, Dear Brother – see "Write a Letter to My Mother."

P025 Come Stand by My Side Dear Children (Buskirk, 1939).
P333 Country Churchyard, The (Jenkins, 1925).
A086 Cowboy at Church, The (untraced, bef. 1910).
P519 Cowboy, Don't Forget Your Mother (Carter, 1937).
C027 Cowboy's Best Pal Is His Mother, A (Cain, Carnegie, & Colby, 1939).
P149 Cowboy's Dream, The (untraced, bef. 1900).
P516 Cowboy's Last Ride, The (Sizemore, 1935).
V249 Cowboy's Last Wish, The (Keene, 1935).
P096 Cowboy's Letter to His Mother, A (Hunter, 1934).
P545 Cowboy's Mother (l) (McLeod & Carter, 1933).
C069 Cowboy's Mother, The (2) (Fletcher, 1940).
C184 Cradle Days (Tev, 1936).
V089 Crepe on the Little Cabin Door, The (Guernsey & Thompson, 1926).
V213 Crime Does Not Pay (Jenkins, n.d.).
A093 Cross on the Prison Floor, The (untraced, bef. 1929).
Crowd of Young Fellows, A - see "Two Sweethearts of Mine."
V191 Custer's Last Fierce Charge - see "The Last Fierce Charge."
C051 Dad and Mother (Baker & Cheshire, 1940).
C054 Dad in the Hills (Autry, 1931).
C354 Dad Too Is Lonely (Skinner, 1944).
C050 Daddy and Home (McWilliams & Rodgers, 1928).
V022 Daddy Hold the Lamp While Mother Chops the Wood (Gregory, 1943).
C058 Daddy, My Dearest Pal (Bowen, Housefield, & Huxley, 1940).
P010 Daddy's Girl (Draper, 1943).
P2546 Dad's Little Pals (Foley, 1941).
A020 Dad's Little Texas Lad (Carter, 1939).
V102 Day I Left Daddy Alone, The (Morton, 1940).
P442 Dear Daddy I'm Coming (Arnold, Fowler, & Hall, 1944).
P216 Dear Daddy I'm Longing for You (Fowler & McDuffee, 1944).
Dear Daddy You're Gone - see "Dear Old Daddy."
P351 Dear Little Prairie Mother (Davis, Carroll, & Harwood, 1940).
C060 Dear Old Dad (Wesley, 1941).
C053 Dear Old Daddy of Mine (Carter, 1933).
P232 Dear Old Homestead (Hickman, 1940).
P101 Dear Old Mother (untraced, bef. 1936).
P221 Dear Old Sunny South by the Sea (Cozzens & Rodgers, 1928).
Dear Spot in Ireland - see "There's a Dear Spot in Ireland."
P550 Dear Old Daddy (Carlisle, 1932).
P538 Dear Old Daddy of Mine (Carter, 1933).
P201 Dear Old Homestead (Hickman, 1940).
P101 Dear Old Mother (untraced, bef. 1936).
P221 Dear Old Sunny South by the Sea (Cozzens & Rodgers, 1928).
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P007 Dearest Sweetest Mother (untraced, bef. 1929).
V272 Death of Floyd Collins, The (Jenkins & Spain, 1925).
C188 Did You Ever Go Sailin' (Down the River of Memories)(Brumley, 1938).
P251 Did You See My Daddy Over There? (Showmet, 1944).
Distant Land to Roam, A - see "The Wanderer."
Dixie Cowboy - see "When the Work's All Done This Fall."
Dixie Home - see "I'm Thinking Tonight of the Old Folks."

Don't Be Ashamed of Mother (Carlisle, 1940).
Don't Be Ashamed to Pray with Mother (McEnery, Martin, & Gregory, 1944).
Don't Break Your Poor Old Mother's [sic] Heart (Gregory, 1945).
Don't Cause Your Mother's Hair to Turn Gray (untraced, bef. 1936).
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Don't Forget This Song - see "Bad Companions."
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Don't Grieve Your Mother (untraced, bef. 1928).
Don't Leave Mother Alone (untraced, bef. 1930).
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Don't Let My Mother Know (The Way That I'm to Go) (Butcher & Canova, 1934).
Don't Sell My Father Rum (Bradley & Dressler, 1871).
Don't Sell the Old Clock (Jenkins, 1929).
Don't Send My Boy to Prison - see "A Mother's Appeal for Her boy."
Don't Wait 'til Mother's Hair Has Turned to Silver (Sizemore & Davis, 1937).
Don't Whip Little Ben (Munyon, 1883).
Don't You Go, Tommy (Lockwood, 1863).
Don't You Love Your Daddy Too? (untraced, bef. 1926).
Don't You Want to Meet Your Mother Over There (untraced, bef. 1931).
Doorman of Heaven (Keller, Pelkonen, & Barnhart, 1942).
Down in Memory Valley (Brumley, 1942).
Down in the Licenced Saloon (Williams, 1892).
Down on the Family - see "I Wonder How the Old Folks Are at Home."

Down on the Farm (Du Bois, 1889).
Down on the Old Plantation (Robison, 1929).
Down the Old Ohio River Valley (Salt & Peanuts, 1934).
Dream Mother (Burke, Lewis, & Sherman, 1929).
Dream of Mother and Dad, A (Jenkins, n.d.).
Dream of the Miner's Child - see "Don't Go Down in the Mine, Dad."
Dream of the Old Fireplace, A (White, 1939).
Dreamin' of My Mother (Williams, 1940).
Dreaming of Home and Mother (Lamb & Hay, 1898).
Drifter, The (1) (Reeves, 1929).
Drifter, The (2) (Cox, 1941).
Drunkard Is No More, The - see "The Drunkard's Doom."
Drunkard's Child, A (Jenkins & Rodgers, 1930).
Drunkard's Child, The - see "The Drunkard's Child's Plea"; also "The Drunkard's Lone Child" (2).

Drunkard's Doom, The (untraced, bef. 1905).

Drunkard's Child's Plea, The (Parkhurst, bef. 1870).

Drunkard's Lone Child, The (1) (Work, bef. 1870).

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Drunkard's Lone Child, The - see also "Mister Bartender."

Drunkard's Wife, The (Knapp & Pickett, 1899).

Drunken Driver, The (untraced, bef. 1937).

Dust on Mother's Old Bible, The (Travis, 1939).

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Dying Mother and Her Child, The (untraced, bef. 1926).

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<td>She'll Be There (Hendley, Boswell, &amp; Converse, 1935).</td>
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<td>Sheriff's Sale, The (un traced, bef. 1914).</td>
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<td>She's a Rose from the Garden of Prayer (Snow, 1942).</td>
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<td>C036</td>
<td>She's More Than a Pal (She's My Mother) (Sheehan &amp; Hal gerson, 1941).</td>
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<td>Signed, Your Loving Son (Taylor, 1938).</td>
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<td>V327</td>
<td>Silver and Gold (Miller &amp; Mahoney, 1935).</td>
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Silver Haired Daddy of Mine — see "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine."

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<td>Since My Mother's Dead and Gone — see &quot;Village Churchyard.&quot;</td>
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<td>P348</td>
<td>Since the Angels Took My Mother Far Away (Filenius, Rhodes, &amp; Kent, 1940).</td>
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<td>Sing Me an Old Fashioned Lullaby (Long, 1935).</td>
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<td>Sitting Round the Old Fireside at Home (Lair &amp; Cross, 1935).</td>
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<td>A120</td>
<td>Skeptic's Daughter, The (un traced, bef. 1894).</td>
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<td>Some One Who Loves Me Is Waiting (Iverson &amp; Iverson, ca. 1939).</td>
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<td>Sort of Longin' for That Old Home Town (Denniker &amp; Davis, 1937).</td>
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<td>P424</td>
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<td>Stay, Father, Stay! (un traced, bef. 1919).</td>
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Stick to Your Mother, Tom — see "Don't Leave Your Mother When Her Hair Turns Grey."

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| Sunny South by the Sea — see "Dear Old Sunny South by the Sea."


Sunshine Valley (Hamblen, 1942).
Sweet Little Mother (Wesley, 1941).
Sweet Mountain Mother of Mine (Stout, 1938).
Sweet Old Lady (Miller, 1934).
Sweet Old Mother of Mine (Warmezky & Gillette, 1940).
Sweet the Memory of My Mother (Jenkins, 1928).
Sweetest Mother (Dennstedt & Ramsey, 1917).
Take Care of Mother (Belcher & Grove, 1944).
Take Me Back to Home and Mother (French & Huntley, 1875).
Take Me Back to Renfro Valley (Lair, 1933).
Take Me By the Hand (Boyd, 1943).
Take the News to Mother (untraced, bef. 1935).
Take This Letter to My Mother (Hays, 1873).
Telephone to Heaven (Gregory, 1941).
Tell Me Why My Daddy Don't Come Home (Boyd, Burns, & Nunn, 1941).
Tell Mother I Will Meet Her (Tinsman, bef. 1927).
Tell Mother I'll Be There (Fillmore, 1898).
Tell Mother I'll Meet Her - see "Tell Mother I Will Meet Her."
Tell My Mother I'm in Heaven (Arnold, 1933).
Temperance Song - see "The Drunkard's Doom."
Ten Thousand Miles Away - see "On the Banks of a Lonely River."
Texas Lullaby (Ritter & Choate, 1941).
That Dapple Grey Broncho of Mine (Williams, 1940).
That Last Fierce Fight - see "The Last Fierce Charge."
That Little Old German Home across the Sea - see "Little Old German Home across the Sea."
That Little Old Red Shawl - see "Little Old Red Shawl."
That Montana Mother of Mine (Owen & Raney, 1939).
That Mother and Daddy of Mine (1) (Autry, 1934).
That Mother and Daddy of Mine (2) (Sizemore, 1936).
That Old Fashioned Mother of Mine (1) (Frank, King, & Estes, 1937).
That Old Fashioned Mother of Mine (2) (Smith & Long, 1942).
That Old Irish Mother of Mine (Jerome & Von Tilzer, 1920).
That Old Parlor Organ (Lafrenz & Berg, 1941).
That Pioneer Mother of Mine (Spencer, 1937).
That Place Called Home, Sweet Home (Aube & Doline, 1939).
That Ramshackle Shack - see "Ramshackle Shack."
That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine (Long & Autry, 1931).
That Silver Haired Mother (Sizemore & Fox, 1934).
That Silver Haired Mother Back Home (Gregory, 1941).
That Silver Haired Mother of Mine (Long, 1935).
That Silver Haired Sweetheart of Mine (Griswold, 1941).
That Sweet Little Mother (Sizemore, 1935).
That Sweet Old Lullaby (Sizemore & Gaddie, 1941).
That Tumbled Down Cabin (DeWitt & Sizemore, 1934).
That Tumbled Down Shack (Autry & Davis, 1934).
That's What God Made Mothers For (Wood, 1919).
There Are Tear Stains on Your Letter Mother Dear (Morton, 1937).

There Is Always a Mother Who Cares (Sizemore, 1936).

There'll Come a Time (Harris, 1895).

There's a Blue Star in the Window (Gregory, 1943).

There's a Dad in the Hills (Sizemore, 1936).

There's a Dear Spot in Ireland (Farron, 1878).

There's a Gold Star Hanging in the Window (Where a Blue Star Used to Be) (Wilkins, Marcell, & Hull, 1943).

There's a Gold Star in the Window (Ritter & Harford, 1944).

There's a Grave in the Wilderness (Bassett, 1943).

There's a Hill-Billy Heaven in the Mountains (McEnery, 1939).

There's a Home Up in the Mountains (Sizemore, 1937).

There's a Letter in the Mail-Box from Mother (Autry & Burnette, 1934).

There's a Light in a Window in the West (Gregory, 1942).

There's a Light Shining Bright (In God's Heaven Tonight) (Nixon, Bauer, & Boyd, 1939).

There's a Little Blue Star in the Window (Of the Little White House Down the Lane) (Wilkins, Hull, & Kalar, 1943).

There's a Little Box of Pine on the 7:29 (Ettlinger, Brown, & Lee, 1931).

There's a Little Gray Haired Couple Way Back Home (Gregory, 1941).

There's a Little Pine Log Cabin (Brumley, 1937).

There's a Little White House (On the Side of the Hill) (Kirby, 1945).

There's a Little White-Haired Lady (Dickson, 1943).

There's a Mother Always Waiting at Home Sweet Home (Thornton, 1903).

There's a Mother Old and Gray Who Needs Me Now (Diamond, 1909).

There's an Old Log Cabin (In the Hollow) (Rice, Junkins, & Boyd, 1939).

There's a Palace Down in Dallas (Rose, 1944).

There's a Picture on Pinto's Bridle (Snow, 1942).

There's a Place in Home for Mother - see "What Shall We Do with Mother."

There's a Tumbled Down Shack in Ireland (Gregory, 1943).

There's a Vacant Chair at Home Sweet Home (Goodwin & Hanley, 1920).

There's a Vacant Place in Our Home (untraced, bef. 1939).

There's a Wreath on the Door (Of My Old Home Tonight) (Foley & Carson, 1941).

There's No One Like Mother to Me (Davies, 1887).

There's No One Like the Old Folks (Hirsekorn & Selig, 1905).

There's Somebody Waiting for Me - see "Somebody's Waiting for Me."

They'll Welcome Me Back Home (Brumley, 1939).

They're All Going Home But One (Davis, Taylor, & Johnson, 1936).
They're Gone (Nolan, 1936).
C211 Things My Mother Taught Me (Are the Things I Do Today), The (McConnell & Cooper, 1941).
C347 Think of How Your Mother Thinks of You (Foley & Penny, 1944).
P427 This World Can't Be My Home (Buskirk, 1939).
P404 This World Is Not My Home (untraced, bef. 1927).
C087 Thoughts of Mother (Coats, 1936).
P541 Three Leaves of Shamrock (McGuire, 1889).
Three Pictures of Life's Other Side - see "Pictures from Life's Other Side."
V098 Three Thousand Miles from Home (Schaffer, 1936).
'Tis a Picture from Life's Other Side - see "Pictures from Life's Other Side."
C163 'Tis Home Because Mother Is There (untraced, bef. 1927).
Tramp's Mother, The - see "There's a Mother Always Waiting at Home Sweet Home."
Trundle Bed, The - see "My Mother's Prayer" (1).
P168 Tuck Me to Sleep in My Old Tucky Home (Lewis, Young, & Meyer, 1921).
Two Boys of Switzerland - see "Wandering Boys."
Two Little Children - see "The Two Orphans."
P324 Two Little Orphans (Kuykendall, 1941?).
Two Little Orphans - see also "The Two Orphans."
V017 Two Log Cabin Orphans (Jenkins, n.d.).
P323 Two Orphans, The (untraced, bef. 1925).
Two Soldiers, The - see "The Last Fierce Charge."
A171 Two Sweethearts of Mine (Moran & Helf, 1897).
P331 Village Churchyard (untraced, bef. 1911).
P325 Village School, The (untraced, bef. 1929).
P003 Wanderer, The (untraced, bef. 1928).
V091 Wanderer's Warning, The (Luther & Robison, 1929).
P150 Wandering Boy, The (1) (untraced, bef. 1911).
V095 Wandering Boy, The (2) (Reeves, 1934).
A041 Wandering Boys (untraced, bef. 1860).
Wayward Boy, The - see "A Mother's Welcome"; also "The Wandering Boy" (2).
A025 Wayward Daughter, The (untraced, bef. 1934).
C094 We Shall Meet (Yearger, 1941).
A201 We Still Love Our Boy Down in Prison (Love Him the Same Old Way) (Frank, King, & Estes, 1937).
We're Just Plain Folks - see "Just Plain Folks."
What a Friend We Have in Mother - see "She'll Be There."
C042 What a Pal Is Mother, Ch (Carson, 1943).
C034 What a Wonderful Mother of Mine (Carter, 1940).
C081 What Is Home Without a Mother? (Winner, 1854).
A050 What Shall We Do with Mother (Hieronymus & Moore, bef. 1927).
P438 What Will Cheer My Wary Soul (White, 1945).
P135 When I Dream of My Red River Home ('Miller & Sanford, 1935).
P440 When I Find My Dear Daddy Is Waiting (De Lay & Boyd, 1939).
C290 When I Look Thru the Old Family Album (Keene, 1934).
C212 When I Meet My Mother Up There (Sizemore, 1941).
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You Are as Welcome as Flowers in May — see "You're as Welcome as the Flowers in May."

You Can Have Only One Mother (Hall, Bartlett, & Allen, 1942).

You Can't Buy Another Mother (Gregory, 1941).

You Helped to Put the Silver in Your Dear Old Mothers [sic] Hair (Montana, 1941).

You Never Miss Your Mother Till She's Gone (untraced, bef. 1923).

You Reap Just What You Sow (Iverson, 1939). You Will Never Miss Your Mother Until She's Gone — see "You Never Miss Your Mother Till She's Gone."

You'll Find Her with the Angels — see "Hello Central, Give Me Heaven."

You'll Never Miss Your Mother Till She's Gone — see "You Never Miss Your Mother Till She's Gone."

You'll Only Have One Mother (Morton, 1937).

Young Boy Left His Home One Day, A — see "A Mother's Welcome."

Young Companions — see "Bad Companions."

Your Best Friend Is Your Mother — see "A Boy's Best Friend Is His Mother" (2).

Your Mother Always Cares for You (Powell & Hazelwood, bef. 1917).

You're a Swell Mom, Mom (Carson, 1943).

You're Going to Leave the Old Home, Jim — see "There's a Mother Always Waiting at Home, Sweet Home."
APPENDIX B

A Classification of Parent-Child Country Songs by Formula

Following is a brief explanation of the categories in which I placed the songs surveyed, followed by a complete title and date listing in order of their catalog numbers. When a song is known more commonly by an alternative title (e.g., "Going for a Pardon" = "The East-Bound Train") I have listed that after the main title.

A. CELEBRATION - This general heading includes songs that describe the typical or ideal qualities of a stereotypical subject, whether it be person, place, thing, way of life, or concept. In the present catalog it describes those songs that praise the ideal mother, father, or parent stereotypes. This general song type differs from narrative types in that the unifying structures are descriptive, not dramatic, in form. For the sake of convenience, I have used the frames in which the celebrations occur as the basis for the primary classification, and have subdivided each subheading according to the specific stereotype they celebrate: mother, father, or both without distinction.

1) Encomium: A narrator recites the ideal qualities and actions of a stereotypical character and affirms that s/he is worthy of respect. This formula includes hymns and catalogs of all sorts in which the main action is the description of the stereotype itself.

   a) Mother.

   C001 You Never Miss Your Mother Till She's Gone (bef. 1923).
   C002 Prettiest Little Song of All, The (bef. 1890s).
   C004 That's What God Made Mothers For (1919).
   C005 That Old Irish Mother of Mine (1920).
   C006 Sweetest Mother (1917).
   C007 Dearest Sweetest Mother (bef. 1929).
   C008 My Mother (1) (bef. 1927).
   C009 I Wouldn't Trade the Silver in My Mother's Hair (For All the Gold in the World) (1932).
   C010 My Mom (1932).
   C011 Silver Haired Mother (1932).
   C012 Mother, Pal and Sweetheart (1934).
   C013 My Mother (2) (1934).
   C014 Sweet Old Lady (1934).
   C015 My Best Friend (1935).
   C016 She'll Be There ("What a Friend We Have in Mother") (1935).
C017 That Sweet Little Mother (1935).
C018 Log Cabin Home (1936).
C019 Mother, A (1936).
C020 My Mother (3) (bef. 1936).
C021 Song for Mother, A (1936).
C022 That Old Fashioned Mother of Mine (1) (1937).
C023 That Pioneer Mother of Mine (1937).
C024 Old Fashioned Lady (1938).
C025 Queen of My Heart, The (1938).
C026 Sweet Mountain Mother of Mine (1938).
C027 Cowboy's Best Pal Is His Mother, A (1939).
C028 Her Mansion Is Higher Than Mine (1939).
C029 Mother's Smile Comes from Heaven (1939).
C030 That Montana Mother of Mine (1939).
C031 Little Mother in Gray (You Are My Sweetheart) (1940).
C032 Mother Darling (1940).
C033 Sweet Old Mother of Mine (1940).
C034 What a Wonderful Mother of Mine (1940).
C035 My Mother's Hands (2) (1941).
C036 She's More Than a Pal (She's My Mother) (1941).
C037 Sweet Little Mother (1941).
C038 I Will Meet You Mother (1942).
C039 Little Grey Mother of Mine (1942).
C040 Mother (Sweet Pal of All My Dreams) (1942).
C041 Snowy Haired Mother of Mine (1942).
C042 What a Pal Is Mother, Oh (1943).
C043 You're a Swell Mom, Mom (1943).
C044 Wrinkled and Old (1944).

b) Father

C050 Daddy and Home (1928).
C051 Dad in the Hills (1931).
C052 That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine (1931).
C053 Dear Old Daddy of Mine (1933).
C054 I'll Never Forget You! My Daddy (1934).
C055 There's a Dad in the Hills (1936).
C056 My Old Crippled Daddy (1937).
C057 Pappy (1937).
C058 Daddy, My Dearest Pal (1940).
C059 I Want to Live Like Daddy (1940).
C060 Dear Old Dad (1941).
C061 He's Just a Grey Haired Kid (That Dear Old Dad of Mine) (1941).
2) **Elegy:** At the death of a stereotypical character, a narrator consoles himself by recalling his virtues. This formula is similar to the narrative formula Parting: Death (Bereavement), the main difference being that here the narrator's mourning and the stereotype's death are not dramatized. The main emphasis lies on describing the ideal lost figure.

a) **Mother**

C081 What Is Home without a Mother? (1854).
C082 I Have No Mother Now (bef. 1911).
C083 Old Fashioned Mother (n.d.).
C084 Mother's Grave (2) (1927).
C085 Picture on the Wall, The (1927).
C086 Since Mother's Gone (1928).
C087 Thoughts of Mother (1936).
C088 Sleep, Mother Sleep (bef. 1937).
C089 Cowboy's Mother (2) (1940).
C090 Mother's Grave (3) (1940).
C091 Our Home Will Be Lonesome Tonight (1940).
C092 Mother, How We Miss You, O (ca. 1941).
C093 My Mother's Day (1941).
C094 We Shall Meet (1941).
C095 How I Miss You, Mother of Mine, Oh (1942).
C096 That Old Fashioned Mother of Mine (2) (1942).
C097 Old Deserted Church by the Graveyard, The (1945).
C098 White Rose of Georgia, The (1945).

b) **Father**

C100 Pappy's Buried on the Hill (1929).
C101 Memories of That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine (1934).
C102 Father, Dear Father, Oh (1939).
C104 That Pioneer Pappy of Mine (1939).
C105 My Daddy Was a Cowboy (1941).

c. **Parents**

C110 I Miss My Mother and Dad (1929).
C111 Memory Picture of Home, A (ca. 1939).

3) **Reminiscence:** From a distance of time or space, a narrator recalls the ideal qualities of a lost stereotypical character. This formula is similar to Parting: Separation (Bereavement), the main difference being that, as with Elegy, the narrator's acts are not dramatized and the main emphasis is on description.
a) Mother

C161  Rock Me to Sleep, Mother (1860).
C162  Old Red Cradle, The (bef. 1889).
C163  'Tis Home Because Mother Is There (bef. 1927).
C164  Dreaming of Home and Mother (1898).
C165  My Happy Childhood Home (1904).
C166  Let Me Hear the Songs My Mother Used to Sing (1906).
C167  She Was a Grand Old Lady (1907).
C168  My Mother's Rosary (1915).
C169  My Mother's Hands (1) (bef. 1924).
C170  My Little Home in Tennessee (1925).
C171  Rock Me to Sleep in an Old Rocking Chair (1926).
C172  My Mother's Eyes (1928).
C173  My Mammy's Yodel Song (1929).
C174  Rock Me to Sleep (In My Rocky Mountain Home) (1930).
C175  Rocky Mountain Lullaby (1931).
C176  Childhood Dreams (1932).
C177  My Ozark Mountain Home (1932).
C178  Old Fashioned Cabin, The (1) (1934).
C179  When My Mother Knelt in Prayer (1934).
C180  Sing Me an Old Fashioned Lullaby (1935).
C181  That Silver Haired Mother of Mine (1935).
C182  When I Prayed at Mother's Knee (1935).
C183  When Mother Prayed for Me (1935).
C184  Cradle Days (1936).
C185  Empty Arms Are Calling Me (1937).
C186  Memories of My Old Kentucky Home (1937).
C187  Old Fashioned Home (Down an Old Country Lane), An (1937).
C188  Did You Ever Go Sailin' (Down the River of Memories) (1938).
C189  Memories of Home Sweet Home (1938).
C190  Old Home Place, The (1) (1938).
C191  Old Home Place, The (3) (1938).
C192  Dream of the Old Fireplace, A (1939).
C193  Hill Billy Boy (1939).
C194  In That Rose Covered Arbor Back Home (1939).
C195  In the Sleepy Hills of Sleepy Valley (1939).
C196  Mother's Lullaby (1939).
C197  There's an Old Log Cabin (In the Hollow) (1939).
C198  Baby Song to Mother, A (1940).
C199  Cabin in the Valley of the Pines (1940).
C200  Dreamin' of My Mother (1940).
C201  My Memory of Mother (1940).
C202  My Mother's Bible (2) (1940).
C203  Cabin That Stood on the Hillside, The (1941).
C204  Every Day Is Mother's Day to Me (1941).
C205  Just Mother and Me (1941).
C206  My Mother and Her Mountain Home (1941).
C207  My Mother Prayed (1941).
C208  Rock Me to Sleep (Beneath a Golden Southern Moon) (1941).
C209  Texas Lullaby (1941).
4) Memento: A Narrator cherishes a keepsake or a lesson that reminds him of a lost stereotypical character. I have distinguished, for convenience's sake, between tangible "keepsakes" (such as a shawl or a chair) and intangible "lessons" (such as a prayer or a song) in the case of mother songs. This proved to be unnecessary with fathers and parents.

a) Mother (Keepsake)

C241 Old Arm Chair, The (1840).
C242 Ring 'My Mother Wore, The (bef. 1869).
C243 Flower from 'My Angel Mother's Grave, A (1878).
C244 Rose from Mother's Grave, A (ca. 1870s).
C245 'My Mother's Prayer (1) (bef. 1895).
C246 Handful of Earth from 'My Dear Mother's Grave, A (1883).
C247 Just a Handful of Earth from Mother's Grave (bef. 1935).
C248 Little Old Red Shawl (1886).
C249 Old-Fashioned Photograph, An (bef. 1889).
C250 Don't Sell the Old Clock (1929).
C251 Faded Picture (1930).
C252 Pictures of 'My Mother (1931).
C253 'My Mother's Old Sun Bonnet (1935).
C254 Little Old Faded Blue Bonnet (1938).
C255 Only a Rose (From 'My Mother's Grave) (ca. 1939).
C256 Picture of Home (1939).
b) Mother (Lesson)

C265  I Believe It, For My Mother Told Me So (ca. 1887).
C266  My Mother's Bible (1) (1893).
C267  Hymns My Mother Sang (bef. 1937).
C268  Songs My Mother Used to Sing (bef. 1930).
C269  Songs My Mother Sang (1925).
C270  Little Log Cabin by the Sea (1927).
C271  My Mother's Old Bible Is True (1928).
C272  Old Fashioned Dipper (That Hangs on a Nail) (1933).
C273  My Mother's Song (1934).
C274  Little Prayer I Learned on Mother's Knee, The (1938).
C275  Memories of My Mother's Prayers (1938).
C276  Dust on Mother's Old Bible, The (1939).
C277  Mother's Torn and Faded Bible (1940).
C278  Bible That My Mother Read to Me, The (1941).
C279  I Found It in Mother's Bible (1941).
C280  Songs My Mother Used to Sing to Me, The (1941).
C281  Prayer My Mother Taught Me, The (1943).

c) Father

C285  Old Hickory Cane, The (1891).
C286  Father's Chair (1939).
C287  My Daddy's Violin (1939).
C288  Old Violin, The (1940).
C289  Sweetest Prayer I've Ever Heard, The (1943).

d) Parents

C290  When I Look thru the Old Family Album (1934).
C291  That Old Parlor Organ (1941).
C292  Just a Faded Photograph (1942).

5) Admonition: A narrator, or "preacher-figure," reminds his listeners of a stereotypical character's ideal qualities and warns them to give her more respect. This formula is similar to the narrative one of Violation: Neglect/Abuse (Parent by Child), the difference being that the violation and suffering are not dramatized here.
a) Mother

C322 Boy’s Best Friend Is His Mother, A (1) (1883).
C323 Boy’s Best Friend Is His Mother, A (2) (bef. 1886).
C324 Don’t Forget to Drop a Line to Mother (1908).
C325 Your Mother Always Cares for You (bef. 1917).
C326 Prepare to Meet Your Mother (bef. 1929).
C328 Have You Written Mother Lately? (1934).
C329 Write Home to Mother (1934).
C330 Write a Letter to Mother (bef. 1935).
C331 Don’t Cause Your Mother’s Hair to Turn Gray (bef. 1936).
C332 There Is Always a Mother Who Cares (1936).
C333 Everybody’s Seen Some Mother’s Darling (1938).
C334 Bring Your Roses to Her Now (1939).
C335 Don’t Forget Mother (1939).
C336 Don’t Forget to Write to the Folks Back Home (1939).
C337 Every Day Is Mother’s Day for Me (1939).
C338 Send a Letter Back Home to Mother (1939).
C339 Best Girl of All, The (1940).
C340 That Silver Haired Mother Back Home (1941).
C341 You Can’t Buy Another Mother (1941).
C342 You Helped to Put the Silver in Your Dear Old Mother’s [sic] Hair (1941).
C343 Your Mother Will Always Love You (1941).
C344 You Can Have Only One Mother (1942).
C345 Christmas Day with Mother (1944).
C346 Don’t Be Ashamed to Pray with Mother (1944).
C347 Think of How Your Mother Thinks of You (1944).

b) Father

C350 Don’t You Love Your Daddy Too? (bef. 1926).
C351 Little Love for Dad, A (1936).
C352 Always Be Kind to Daddy (1937).
C353 Yes, We Have a Friend in Daddy (bef. 1942).
C354 Dad Too Is Lonely (1944).

c) Parents

C359 Be Kind to the Loved Ones at Home (1947).
C360 Mother and Dad (1926).
C361 Give Them the Roses Now (1940).
B. NARRATIVE - This general song type describes movement of a character or characters from one state of equilibrium to another. While a celebration is unified by a structure that explores and describes a given subject, a narrative is dynamic: it presents a plot with a definite set of motivations and leads to a more or less predictable set of conclusions. This is not to say that all narratives do in fact move from one equilibrium to another—in fact some songs only suggest closure, with a character resolving to act but not yet acting, while others plainly deny closure by breaking off at the end of a dramatic plea. Such condensation of narrative motion is necessary in the highly condensed and stylized world of song texts. What is constant in all narratives is that they dramatize the crucial moment of transition from one stage of life to another. The drama may stop short of conclusion, but it must carry us beyond the beginning, and represent an irreversible change in the main characters' way of life. (My argument here is indebted to Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic, trans. Richard Howard [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975], esp. p. 163.)

1) Assistance: Of the three narrative formulas in this catalog, this is the smallest and least clearly defined, with barely enough texts per heading to justify its existence. Yet these headings include some of the most widespread songs in the sentimental tradition. Perhaps the popularity of these songs inhibited imitation, although one would expect just the opposite effect. The core of the formula, however, is clear: a character moves from a position of danger or suffering to a more secure, stable position through the help of a second, more idealized character. As with narrative formulas in general, though, this transition need not prove successful: many songs end with failure, or present an appeal with no answer. The attempt to better a character's situation is the central element in this formula.

a) Rescue: One character, in danger of death or lengthy imprisonment, is liberated by the efforts of a more idealized character. This formula, at least in this catalog, is a small one, but I feel secure in defining it as a valid heading because of numerous analogs among ballads dealing with non-family relationships (e.g., "Geordie," "The Prisoner at the Bar," and "Jock o' the Side").

i) Child rescued by Mother

A001 Mother's Appeal for Her Boy, A (bef. 1897).
A002 Governor's Pardon, The (1926).
A003 From Cradle Bars to Prison Bars (1933).
A005 I'm Here to Get My Baby Out of Jail (1936).
A006 Little Mountain Shack (1942).
Father Rescued by Child

Going for a Pardon ("The East-Bound Train") (1896).
Don't Go Down in the Mine, Dad ("The Dream of the Miner's Child") (1910).
I Want a Pardon for Daddy (1926).
Mister Bartender (bef. 1929).
Picture of Life's Other Side, A (1930).
Please Pardon My Daddy Mister Warden, Oh! (1941).

Child Rescued by Father

Dad's Little Texas Lad (1939).
Wayward Daughter, The (bef. 1934).

Child Aided by Mother

Wandering Boys (bef. 1860).
Don't Leave Your Mother When Her Hair Turns Gray (1882).
Somebody's Waiting for Me (1902).
There's a Mother Old and Gray Who Needs Me Now (1909).
Newsboy, The (bef. 1931).
Ragged Pat (bef. 1935).
Little Newsboy, The (1925).
Little Flower Girl, The (1928).
Sheriff's Sale, The (bef. 1914).
What Shall We Do With Mother (bef. 1927).
Jimmie Brown the Newsboy (1929).
Paint a Rose on the Garden Wall! (1935).
New England Home (bef. 1939).
I'll Take Good Care of Mommy (While You're Gone) (1944).

Child Aided by Father

Put Me in My Little Bed (1870).
Hold Fast to the Right (n.d.).
My Mother's Prayer (2) (1895).
There's a Mother Always Waiting at Home Sweet Home (1903).
Cowboy at Church, The (bef. 1910).
Mother's Prayers Have Followed Me (1912).
I Heard My Mother Call My Name in Prayer (1919).
If I Could Hear My Mother Pray Again (1922).
Prisoner's Dream, The (1927).
iii) Child aided by father

A100  Have Courage, My Boy, to Say No (bef. 1871).
A101  On the Road to Happiness (bef. 1929).

iv) Child aided by parents

A110  Little Shoes (1933).

v) Parents aided by child

A120  Skeptic's Daughter, The (bef. 1894).
A121  Dying Girl's Farewell, The (bef. 1936).

c) Support: One character, in danger of becoming discouraged by the trials he faces in life or love, is given encouragement or moral support by a more idealized character. This heading is at present loosely defined, since it groups only the least tangible forms of assistance—a well-timed letter, an expression of solidarity, a pat on the back. Perhaps a broader survey of material would allow us to define this category more definitely or abolish it.

i) Child supported by mother

A162  There's a Letter in the Mail-Box from Mother (1934).
A163  Mother's Letter (bef. 1935).
A164  Letter from My Mother to Me, A (ca. 1939).
A170  She Was Happy Till She Met You (1899).
A171  Two Sweethearts of Mine (1897).
A172  My Mom Heard Me Cry Over You (1945).
A180  Mother, Pray for Me (bef. 1943).
A181  Mother, I Thank You (For the Bible You Gave) (1943).
A183  Mother's Prayer (1) (1944).

ii) Child supported by father

A190  Left All Alone (1932).
A191  My Daddy Is a Cowboy (1937).
A192  Baby Boy (1945).
iii) Father supported by child

A195 Lord Watch O'er My Daddy Over There (1945).

iv) Child supported by parents

A199 There's a Vacant Chair at Home Sweet Home (1920).
A200 Ma and Pa (Send Their Sweetest Love) (1932).
A201 We Still Love Our Boy Down in Prison (Love Him the Same Old Way) (1937).
A202 Message from Home, A (bef. 1940).

2. Violation: While this formula is not the largest in
the catalog, it includes many of the oldest and most widespread
songs in the sentimental tradition. The term "Violation" was
suggested by V. Propp, although I do not intend it to signify any
universal sequence of functions that underlie all such songs. The
term does, however, make it clear that the presence of a violation
is signaled not by a direct statement, "This is forbidden," but
rather by the narrative consequences that follow. The proof of
the taboo is that it is enforced. In terms of our view of narrative
as "crucial moments of transition," I would define "Violation" as
the actions of a character that destroy the normal order of the
community, and the consequences that restore this order. The
formula, in other words, includes both the villain's defiance and
his punishment or conversion. I have divided this category into
two major headings, according to which part of the defiance/
punishment sequence the song focuses on.

a) Crime: A character's actions lead to his own mis­
fortune or cause a second, more idealized character to suffer.
This type of plot describes the committing of the violation—the
specific things the villain does and why they are wrong. Such
plots may conclude in a number of ways, including the villain's
punishment, but the unifying principle is not the way the crime
is dealt with, it is the crime itself. For convenience's sake I
have subdivided this heading into three subheadings, according to
what kind of crime is committed ang against whom.

i) Neglect/Abuse: A parent who is expected to care for hir
children either ignores them or actually injures or kills them.
The two crimes are placed together here because the songs so often
suggest that they are forms of the same sin: the trivial crime is
as heavily criticized as the "fatal" one.
A) Child neglected/abused by father

VO01 Stepmother, The (1855).
VO02 Blind Girl, The (bef. 1860s).
VO03 Come Home, Father (1864).
VO04 Drunkard's Lone Child, The (bef. 1870).
VO05 Drunkard's Child's Flea, The (bef. 1870).
VO06 Don't Sell My Father Rum (1871).
VO07 Don't Go Out Tonight, Dear Father (1877).
VO08 Stay, Father, Stay! (bef. 1919).
VO09 Father Is Drinking Again! (1879).
VO10 Old Man's Drunk Again, The (bef. 1877).
VO11.1 Don't Whip Little Ben (1883).
VO12 Licenced to Sell, or Little Blossom (1870s).
VO13 Drunkard's Wife, The (1894).
VO16 Drunkard's Child, A (1930).
VO17 Two Log Cabin Orphans (n.d.).
VO18 Runaway Boy, The (1931).
VO19 Little Ragamuffin, The (1935).
VO20 Drunken Driver, The (bef. 1937).
VO21 Story of Parson Joe, The (1943).
VO22 Daddy Hold the Lamp While Mother Chops the Wood (1943).
VO23 Who Put the Pop in Papa? (1945).

B) Child neglected/abused by mother [or stepmother]

VO29 Always in the Way (1903).
VO30 Would You Leave Me Here to Die (1939).
VO31 Orphan Blues, The (1941).
VO32 Mommy Please Stay Home with Me (1943).

C) Child neglected/abused by parents or family

VO40 Motherless Children (bef. 1927).
VO41 Mama and Daddy Broke My Heart (bef. 1933).

ii) Rebellion: Despite the ties of affection that should link one character to a more idealized one, he chooses to break them and strike out on his own, leaving the other to suffer. In the case of children, this crime is leaving home against the parent's wishes, but mothers also leave home to seek a new lover.

A) Child rebels against mother or parents

VO81 Don't You Go, Tommy (1868).
VO82 I Have Traveled through Life, I Have Seen Many Things ("Be Home Early To-night, My Dear Boy") (bef. 1883).
Down in the Licensed Saloon (1892)
Mother's Welcome, A (1892).
Tell Mother I'll Be There (1898).
Bad Companions ("Young Companions") (bef. 1925).
Old Black Sheep (bef. 1930).
Mother Still Prays for You Jack (bef. 1930).
Girl on the Greenbriar Shore, The (bef. 1941).
Crepe on the Little Cabin Door, The (1926).
Where Is Your Boy To-night? (bef. 1929).
Wanderer's Warning, The (1929).
Drifter, The (1) (1929).
Don't Leave Mother Alone (bef. 1930).
Mother, Queen of My Heart (1932).
Wandering Boy, The (2) (1934).
John Dillinger (1935).
I'm Just Here to Get My Baby out of Jail, No. 2 (1936).
Three Thousand Miles from Home (1936).
Don't Wait 'til Mother's Hair Has Turned to Silver (1937).
My Cabin in the Hills (bef. 1938).
I Long for Old Wyoming (1939).
Day I Left Daddy Alone, The (1940).
Memphis Kid (1940).
Come Back to the Old Home (1941).
I've Learned My Lesson to Never Roam (1944).
Don't Break Your Poor Old Mothers Heart (1945)

B) Mother rebels against children or family

There'll Come a Time (1895).
Mother Oh! Mother Where Are You Tonight (1941).

iii) Rejection: One character refuses to return home or even throws another out of the home, even though s/he is bound by family ties to cherish and protect him. In this catalog this crime most often involves fathers and sons: the son turning an aged father out of door, or the father angrily disowning the son.

A) Child rejects mother

Mother's Plea, A (1928).
Old Ladies' Home (1932).
Rockin' Alone (In an Old Rocking Chair) (1932).
Mail Carrier's Warning, The (1936).
Holiness Mother, The (1936).
Has Someone Forgotten? (1938).
Don't Be Ashamed of Mother (1940).
There's a Wreath on the Door (Of My Old Home Tonight) (1941).
B) Child rejects father

V180 Write a Letter to My Mother (1864).
V181 Over the Hill to the Poor-House (1874).
V182 Poor Old Dad (1886).
V183 Old, and Only in the Way (1) (bef. 1889).
V184 Old and Only in the Way (2) (n.d.).
V185 Black Sheep (Loves You Best of All), The (1897).
V186 Hut on the Back of the Lot, The (1930).
V187 Give a Little Credit to Your Dad (1940).
V188 Looking for My Children (1945).

C) Child rejects parents

V190 Just Plain Folks (1901).
V191 Dad and Mother (1940).

D) Father rejects child

V200 I'm a Man That Done Wrong to His Parents (bef. 1880).
V201 My Father Don't Love Me (bef. 1930).

E) Mother [or stepmother] rejects child


b) Punishment: A character who has committed a crime is punished with a retribution appropriate to his offense. In such songs the crime is usually mentioned, but the unifying structure is what happens to the villain after his crime. In general, these songs begin the story after the crime, indeed, often after the punishment, so all the villain does is review his actions and admit that his punishment is just. This heading I have divided into four subheadings, according to the type of punishment received.

i) Imprisonment/execution: the villain is captured by community law-enforcement agents (official or unofficial) and either executed or sentenced to a long term in prison.

V242 Gambling on the Sabbath Day (bef. 1889).
V243 Crime Does Not Pay (n.d.).
V244 Boy's Best Friend, A (n.d.).
V245 My Time Ain't Long (1932).
V246 Lie He Wrote Home, The (1933).
V247 Don't Let My Mother Know (The Way That I'm to Go) (1934).
V248 Fifteen Years Ago Today (1934).
V249 Cowboy's Last Wish, The (1935).
V250 If You Change My Name to a Number (You'll Break My Mother's Heart) (1936).
1) Accident: An idealized character warns another that if he commits a certain act, he will have an accident; the villain disregards the warning and is killed.

V270 Wreck on the C & O, The (ca. 1890).
V271 Fatal Run, The (bef. 1934).
V272 Death of Floyd Collins, The (1925).

iii) Divine Retribution: When the villain least expects it, God strikes him down, and s/he is damned for eternity.

V290 Pictures from Life's Other Side (1896).
V293 Take Me by the Hand (1943).
V294 There's a Grave in the Wilderness (1943).

iv) Remorse: The villain repents of hir sins, but too late to make amends, so s/he is doomed to a life of grief in a "fallen" state.

V321 Fallen by the Wayside (1892).
V321.2 If I Could Only Blot out the Past (1896).
V322 In the Heart of the City That Has No Heart (1913).
V323 Orphan Boy, The (bef. 1929).
V324 If I Had Listened to Mother (bef. 1939).
V325 My Mother's Tears (1933).
V326 Returning to My Cabin Home (ca. 1934).
V327 Silver and Gold (1935).
V328 Pray for Me, Mother (bef. 1937).
V329 You'll Only Have One Mother (1937).
V330 How I Miss You Tonight, Oh (bef. 1939).
V331 You Reap Just What You Sow (ca. 1939).
V332 Gamblin' Cowboy Jim (1939).
V333 Letter from a Run-a-way Boy (1940).
V334 If I'd Only Taken Mothers Advise [sic] (1941).
V335 My Mother (4) (1941).
V336 Mother Dear (1941).
3) Parting: The title of this category, the largest in the catalog, is deliberately ambivalent, since it covers all instances in which two characters linked by bonds of affection are divided by circumstances. At one time I considered two categories, one dealing with a character's physical departure, and another with hir death, but two considerations led me to group them together. First, a number of songs deliberately confuse or equate the two types of parting: those in which a child fails to grasp the difference (3b.iii) and those in which they follow sequentially (3d). Second, the kind of reunion that normally is projected is much the same in both types of song, whether the child longs to go back to an idyllic cabin in the mountains, or to a perfect mansion on the side of Mount Zion. The Parting category is thus probably the most clearly defined formula in the catalog.

The crucial moment of transition here focuses on the situation that immediately follows parting, the disrupting force on the equilibrium of ideal family life. These songs deal with the ways in which the main character comes to terms with the negative equilibrium, the "Dark and Dreary World," into which parting thrusts hir. The scene dramatized is that of the orphan or wanderer who longs to rejoin his parents back in the original refuge of home, or that of the lonely parent, who wishes hir child would cease hir fruitless roaming. Reunion of the divided characters is the preferred conclusion of these narratives, but it is almost invariably projected, not dramatized; thus motion toward reunion is the core of this formula. Parting is divided into four categories, according to the form that the parting takes.

a) Leavetaking: The song dramatizes the moment in which the two characters part company, whether one is leaving the home or is on hir deathbed. Since the scene is clearly stereotyped in both cases, there was no need to file the two separately. Although the conclusion of the songs may indicate what happens to the characters afterwards, the scene of leavetaking is the structure that unifies the song.

i) Child parts from mother and/or father

P001  Bride's Farewell, The (bef. 1872).
P002  There's No One Like the Old Folks (1905).
P003  Wanderer, The (bef. 1920).
P004  My Little Gray-Haired Mother in the West (1935).
P005  I Was Born in Rainbow Valley (1942).
P006  My Dear Old Texas Home (1942).
Soldier's Farewell, The (ca. 1942).

Angels Always Listen When a Mother Prays (1944).

ii) Father parts from child

Daddy's Girl (1943).

Little Soldier (Your Daddy Is Going Away) (1943).

iii) Mother dies

Dying Mother and Her Child, The (bef. 1926).

Just a Few More Days (1938).

Whisper Softly, Mother's Dying (1874).

Mother's Dying Prayer (1934).

That Silver Haired Mother (1934).

Come Stand by My Side Dear Children (1939).

iv) Father dies

Convict's Dream, The (1934).

v) Child dies

Dying Soldier to His Mother, The (ca. 1863).

Little Jim (1) (bef. 1867).

Little Mamie (bef. 1900).

Alan Bane (bef. 1909).

When We Meet Again in Heaven (1937).

b) Separation: One character finds himself physically separated from another with whom s/he has bonds of affection. The unifying structure is the main character's reaction to his separated state, although the parting scene may be briefly described. For convenience's sake I have divided this heading into three subheadings, according to the kind of reaction described.

i) Bereavement: The main character laments his fate and longs to be back beside his loved one; the scene dramatized is one of lamentation, not action to initiate reunion.

A) Child laments lost mother

Just Before the Battle, Mother (1863).

On the Banks of a Lonely River (bef. 1890).

I Have an Aged Mother (1930).

'Mid the Green Fields of Virginia (1898).

Down on the Old Plantation (1929).

When It's Lamp Lightin' Time in the Valley (1930).

Ramshackle Shack (1932).
In the Cumberland Mountains (1931).
When the Mellow Moon Is Shining (1932).
Down the Old Ohio River Valley (1934).
Memories of Old Kentucky (1934).
My Old Gray Haired Mammy (1934).
In a Little Cottage by the Sea (1934).
Cowboy's Letter to His Mother, A (1934).
My Home in the West Virginia Hills (1935).
Little Farm Home, The (1935).
Mississippi Valley Blues, The (1931).
Lonely Little Prairie Mother (1935).
Dear Old Mother (bef. 1936).
Come On Home (1936).
Candle Light in the Window, The (1936).
There Are Tear Stains on Your Letter Mother Dear (1937).
Little Pinewood Home (Among the Hills) (1939).
There's a Hill-Billy Heaven in the Mountains (1939).
My Prairie Prayer for You (1940).
Prayer of the Prison Boy, The (1940).
My Home Among the Hills (1940).
Little Mountaineer Mother (1941).
She's a Rose from the Garden of Prayer (1942).
Sunshine Alley (1942).
By the Silvery Tennessee (1942).
There's a Little White-Haired Lady (1943).
There's a Tumbled Down Shack in Ireland (1943).
When It's Sundown in Old Wyomin' (1943).
There's a Palace Down in Dallas (1944).
Just a Little Shack (With a Garden Out in Back) (1945).

B) Child laments lost father

On the Mississippi Shore (1932).
My Winding River Home (1934).
Tell Me Why My Daddy Don't Come Home (1942).
Have You Seen My Daddy Here (1944).

C) Child laments lost parents

My Old Cottage Home (ca. 1880).
Little Old German Home Across the Sea (1877).
Down on the Farm (1889).
My Mississippi Home (1932).
That Mother and Daddy of Mine (1) (1934).
That Tumbled Down Cabin (1934).
When I Dream of My Red River Home (1935).
Mountain Home (1936).
That Mother and Daddy of Mine (2) (1936).
My Southern Mountain Home (1936).
P139 Where No Cabins Fall (1938).
P140 Signed, Your Loving Son (1938).
P141 My Hearts [sic] in the Heart of the Hills (ca. 1938).
P142 Old Home's Not the Same, The (1941).
P143 Old Fashioned Cabin, An (1941).
P144 I Wonder If It's Lamp Lighting Time (1941).
P145 Down in Memory Valley (1942).
P146 Not a Word from Home (1942).
P147 If I Had My Life To Live Over (1944).

D) Mother laments lost child

P149 Cowboy's Dream, The (bef. 1900).
P150 Awaiting the Return of My Boy (bef. 1945).
P150.1 Wandering Boy, The (1) (bef. 1911).
P151 Don't Grieve Your Mother (bef. 1928).
P152 Blind Mother's Prayer, A (1928).
P153 My Blue Eyed Baby Boy (1943).
P154 There's a Blue Star in the Window (1943).
P155 There's a Little Blue Star in the Window (Of the Little White House Down the Lane) (1943).
P156 My Darling Soldier Boy (1945).

E) Father laments lost child

P158 Picture of Daddy's Little Girl (1940).
P158.1 Answer to That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine, The (1942).

F) Parents lament lost child

P159 Picture That Is Turned Toward the Wall, The (1891).
P160 Picture No Artist Can Paint, A (1899).

ii) Return: The main character initiates action that will soon return hir to the side of hir loved one. That is, the scene dramatized is one of action, or of re-establishing the previous relationship, even if the actual reunion is only projected.

A) Child returning to mother

P161 Take This Letter to My Mother (1873).
P162 Take Me Back to Home and Mother (1875).
P163 There's No One like Mother to Me (1887).
P164 Whisper Your Mother's Name (1896).
P165 Please, Mr. Conductor, Don't Put Me Off the Train ("The Lightning Express") (1898).
P166 Mother's Last Farewell Kiss (bef. 1930).
P167 Only a Message from Home Sweet Home (bef. 1966).
P168 Tuck Me to Sleep in My Old Tucky Home (1921).
P169 My Boy's Voice (1927).
P170 I Know There Is Somebody Waiting (In the House at the End of the Lane) (1927).
P171 Cabin Home (1928).
P172 I'm Just a Black Sheep (1929).
P173 Oklahoma, Land of the Sunny West (1929).
P174 By a Window at the End of the Lane (1930).
P175 I'll Be with You Mother (bef. 1930).
P176 My Alabama Home (1931).
P177 I'd Like to Go Back (1931).
P178 Keep a Light in Your Window To-night (1933).
P179 My West Virginia Home (1934).
P180 That Tumbled Down Shack (1934).
P181 Home Again to Mother (1934).
P182 When the Lights Begin to Twinkle in the Little Mountain Cabin (1934).
P183 My Old Virginia Home (1935).
P184 Headin' Home (1935).
P185 I'm Thinking Tonight of the Old Folks (bef. 1936).
P186 There's a Little Pine Log Cabin (1937).
P187 Old Kentucky Hills (1937).
P188 In a Moss Covered Cottage Back Home (1937).
P189 Little Silver-Haired Sweetheart (1937).
P190 My Sweet Little Mother of the Range (1937).
P191 Sort o' Longin' for That Old Home Town (1937).
P192 I'm Dreaming To-night (Of the Old Folks) (1938).
P193 I've Got a Silver Haired Sweetheart in the Golden West (1938).
P194 I'll Soon Be Rollin' Home (1938).
P196 Red River Valley Mother (1939).
P197 Some One Who Loves Me Is Waiting (ca. 1939).
P199 My Mountain Home (1940).
P200 My Little Old Cabin (1940).
P201 Rose Covered Cottage, The (1940).
P202 Longing for Home (1941).
P203 Ireland Is Calling (1941).
P204 Light Up the Old Fireplace Tonight (1941).
P205 I Long to Be with Mother Tonight (1941).
P206 There's a Light in a Window in the West (1942).
P207 My Mother Is Lonely (1937).
P208 On a Little Isle of Green (1943).
P209 I Hear the Southland Callin' (1944).
P210 Old Fashioned Home upon the Hill (1944).
P211 Mother's Last Letter, A (1944).

B) Child returns to father

P212 Prodigal Son (bef. 1926).
P213 Prodigal's Return, The (bef. 1926).
P214 Home in Caroline (1932).
P215 I'm Goin' Back to My Little Mountain Shack (1937).
P216 Dear Daddy I'm Longing for You (1944).

C) Child returns to parents

P219 You're as Welcome as the Flowers in May (1942).
P220 Blue-Ridge Mountain Blues (bef. 1924).
P221 Dear Old Sunny South by the Sea (1928).
P222 In the Hills of Tennessee (1928).
P223 Old Folks Back Home, The (1933).
P224 Sitting Round the Old Fireside at Home (1935).
P225 Echoes from the Hills (1936).
P226 There's a Home up in the Mountains (1937).
P228 They'll Welcome Me Back Home (1939).
P229 Cabin of Memories (1939).
P230 That Place Called Home, Sweet Home (1939).
P231 Back on the Old Santa Fe (1939).
P232 Dear Old Homestead (1940).
P233 Cabin in the Hills, The (1940).
P234 My Old Ozarkian Home (1941).
P236 There's a Little Gray Haired Couple Way Back Home (1941).
P237 Old Faded Mansion (1942).
P238 I'm Going Back to My Mother and Dad (1944).

iii) Attempted Return: This is a hybrid category: a child "too young to understand" naively supposes that s/he can rejoin hir dead parent on earth and so initiates action. In a few cases, through supernatural means, the child actually does meet hir parent, or at least contacts hir, but as with 3b.ii the scene dramatized is one of motion toward reunion, not reunion itself.

A) Child seeks mother

P241 Hello Central, Give Me Heaven (1901).
P243 No Telephone in Heaven (bef. 1910).
P244 Please Let Me Broadcast to Heaven (1935).
P246 Dad's Little Pals (1941).
P247 How Many Miles to Heaven (1941).
P248 Telephone to Heaven (1941).
P249 No Telegraph Office in Heaven (1945).
B) Child seeks father

P250 Is My Daddy Up in Heaven (1940).
P251 Did You See My Daddy Over There? (1944).
P252 I Dreamed That My Daddy Come Home (1944).

C) Child seeks parents

P260 Row Us Over the Tide (bef. 1927).

c) Death: The main character finds himself divided by death from an idealized character whom s/he loves. In most cases it is the idealized character who dies, but in a few songs the main character dies and delivers his lament from the deathbed or supernaturally from the afterworld. This category is otherwise similar to Separation, and its two subheadings, Bereavement and Return, are identical in form to 3b.i and 3b.ii, except that the parting is through death and the return is a supernatural one.

i) Bereavement: The main character laments his fate and longs to be back beside his loved one; the scene dramatized is one of lamentation, not action to initiate reunion.

A) Child laments lost mother

P320 I'm Lonely Since My Mother Died (1863).
P320.1 I'm Lonesome Since My Mother Died (bef. 1929).
P321 Nobody's Darling (1870).
P322 Orphan Girl, The (bef. 1870).
P323 Two Orphans, The (bef. 1925).
P325 Village School, The (bef. 1929).
P326 Drunkard's Lone Child, The (2) (bef. 1930).
P327 Why Did They Dig Ma's Grave So Deep? (1880).
P328 Where the Whippoorwill Was Whispering Goodnight (bef. 1930).
P329 I Have No Loving Mother Now (bef. 1880).
P330 Little Jim (2) (1890?).
P331 Village Churchyard (bef. 1911).
P332 Mother's Grave (1) (1925).
P334 In a Little Village Churchyard (1936) [not about mother, but derived from P331].
P335 Poor Little Orphan Boy (bef. 1928).
P336 Choir Boy Sings All Alone Tonight, A (1928).
P337 He Was Once Some Mother's Boy (1930).
P338 Roamer's Memories, The (1933).
P339 Since Mammy's Gone Away (1934).
P342 My Daddy, My Mother and Me (1937).
P343 Mother, Here's a Bouquet for You (1938).
P344 Prayer-Wheel (bef. 1938).
P345 There's a Vacant Place in Our Home (bef. 1939).
P346 How I Need My Mother, Oh (n.d.).
P347 Mother, Look Down and Guide Me (n.d.).
P348 Since the Angels Took My Mother Far Away (1940).
P349 Orphan's Lament, The (1940).
P350 Precious Thoughts of Mother (1940).
P351 Dear Little Prairie Mother (1940).
P352 In a Little Rose-Covered Garden (ca. 1942).
P353 Mother, Sweet Mother, O (1942).
P354 Doorman of Heaven (1942) [includes alternative lines to make the song one for a father].
P355 There's a Picture on Pinto's Bridle (1942).
P356 Among a Bed of Flowers (1943).
P357 Why Do You Weep (Dear Willow) (bef. 1944).
P358 Mother's Only Sleeping (1) (ca. 1945).
P359 Mother's Only Sleeping (2) (1946).
P360 Wilted Flowers (1945).

B) Child laments lost father

P370 Save My Father's Picture from the Sale! (1890).
P371 Save My Mother's Picture from the Sale (bef. 1925) [about mother, but a close recomposition of the above].
P373 Old Home Place, The (2) (1938).
P374 When the Roses Were Blooming (bef. 1940).
P375 Just a Stranger (1941).

C) Child laments lost parents

P380 No Place to Pillow My Head (1936).
P381 Golden Memories of Mother and Dad (1939).
P382 Drifter, The (2) (1941).
P383 Life Will Be Sad Without Home Sweet Home (1945).

D) Mother laments lost child

P390 There's a Gold Star Hanging in the Window (Where a Blue Star Used to Be) (1943).
P391 There's a Gold Star in Her Window (1944).
P392 Sleeping in a Soldier's Grave (1945).
P393 White Cross on Okinawa (1945).
ii) Return: The main character initiates action that will eventually return her to the side of her loved one in heaven. As in Separation: Return, the scene is one of action, or of re-establishing the previous relationship, even if the actual reunion is only projected.

A) Child returns to mother

P401 Meet Mother in the Skies (bef. 1898).
P402 Will My Mother Know Me There? (1906).
P403 Mother's Love (bef. 1929).
P404 This World Is Not My Home (bef. 1927).
P405 Angels Tell My Mother I'll Be There (bef. 1927).
P406 Just Before I've Crossed Death's River (1928).
P407 Sweet the Memory of My Mother (1928).
P408 I'll Be There (bef. 1929).
P409 Dream Mother (1929).
P410 Old Parlor Organ, The (1930).
P411 Don't You Want to Meet Your Mother Over There (bef. 1931).
P412 Little Mother of the Hills (1932).
P413 Shake Hands with Mother Again (bef. 1933).
P414 Mother's Gone (bef. 1934).
P415 Once I Had a Darling Mother (bef. 1934).
P416 Can the Circle Be Unbroken (1935).
P417 Baby's Prayer at Twilight (To the Angels Up Above), A (1936).
P418 Mother Has Fallen Asleep (bef. 1936).
P419 My Mother Is Waiting (1936).
P420 Shake My Mother's Hand for Me (1937).
P421 Heaven Is Nearer Since Mother Is There (1937).
P422 Only One Step More (ca. 1938).
P423 Last Night I Heard Mother Calling (1939).
P424 Station G-L-C-R-Y (1939).
P425 Some Happy Day (1939).
P426 Where Mother's Laid to Rest (1939).
P427 This World Can't Be My Home (1939).
P428 I Know I'll See My Mother Again (1939).
P429 There's a Light Shining Bright (In God's Heaven Tonight) (1939).
P430 Mother's Faded Picture (1940).
P431 Lonesome for You Mother Dear (1939).
P432 Angel with Bright Silver Wings (1940).
P433 Mother, I'll Meet You There (1941).
P434 Just Inside the Pearly Gates (1942).
P435 Sleep On Darling Mother (bef. 1943).
P436 I'll Meet My Mother in Heaven (1944).
P437 I Dreamed of Mother Last Night (1945).
P438 What Will Cheer My Weary Soul (1945).
P439 Mother's Prayer (2) (1945).
B) Child returns to father

P440 When I Find My Dear Daddy Is Waiting (1939).
P441 Dear Daddy I'm Coming (1944).

C) Child returns to parents

P450 I Dreamed I Met Mother and Daddy (1936).
P451 Our Heavenly Home (1938).
P452 On My Way to Heaven (1940).
P453 Will Our Kin Folks Know Us in Heaven (1943).
P454 Yes, Daddy's Up There (1945).
P455 Dream of Mother and Dad, A (n.d.).

D) Mother returns to child

P460 Tell My Mother I'm in Heaven (1933).

d) Separation/Death: A merging of the two types of parting—after being physically separated, one or both of the characters die through mischance. This heading resembles Violation: Crime: Rebellion (2a.ii), in which a child departs against a parent's wishes, causing the kindly parent to die of a broken heart. Here, however, the song indicates that there is a causal relationship between the crime and the consequences, while in Separation/Death there is no indication that death is a punishment. Rather, the songs give the characters double reason for bereavement, since circumstances first part the loved ones physically, then cause the survivor additional grief.

i) Child leaves mother, then dies

P501 Who Will Care for Mother Now? (1863).
P502 Last Fierce Charge, The (bef. 1885).
P503 Bring to Me My Harp Again (bef. 1934: 19th C?).
P504 There's a Dear Spot in Ireland (1878).
P505 When the Battle It Was Won (bef. 1928).
P506 When the Work's All Done This Fall (1893).
P507 Break the News to Mother (1897).
P508 Take the News to Mother (bef. 1935).
P509 Break the News to Mother Softly (ca. 1898).
P510 Just as the Sun Went Down (1898).
P511 Dying Soldier, The (bef. 1930).
P512 There's a Little Box of Pine on the 7:29 (1931).
P513 Tell Mother I Will Meet Her (bef. 1927).
P515 After the Round-up Is Done (1934).
P517 Snow Covered Face (1930s).
P518 On the Gundagai Line (1936).
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<td>P519</td>
<td>Cowboy, Don't Forget Your Mother</td>
<td>1937</td>
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<td>P520</td>
<td>Just Tell My Dear Old Mother</td>
<td>1940</td>
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<td>P521</td>
<td>Hobo's Last Ride, The</td>
<td>1942</td>
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<td>P522</td>
<td>His Message Home (ca. 1942)</td>
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<td>P523</td>
<td>Soldier's Last Letter, A</td>
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<td>P524</td>
<td>Rock My Cradle (Once Again)</td>
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<td>P525</td>
<td>Serviceman's Letter Home, The</td>
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**ii) Child leaves parents, then dies**

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<td>P530</td>
<td>Boys in Bl'ue, The</td>
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<td>P531</td>
<td>Last Request, The</td>
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**iii) Child leaves mother, then mother dies**

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<td>Your Mother Still Prays for You, Jack</td>
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<td>P541</td>
<td>Three Leaves of Shamrock</td>
<td>1889</td>
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<td>P542</td>
<td>Letter Edged in Black, The</td>
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<td>P543</td>
<td>I Miss My Dear Sweet Mother</td>
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<td>P544</td>
<td>Gambler's Return</td>
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<td>Cowboy's Mother (1)</td>
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<td>P546</td>
<td>Lonely Ho Be (Answer to Wabash Cannon Ball)</td>
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<td>P547</td>
<td>That Sweet Old Lullaby</td>
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<td>Little Gray Stone, The</td>
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<td>P549</td>
<td>Take Care of Mother</td>
<td>1944</td>
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**iv) Child leaves father, then father dies**

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<tr>
<td>P550</td>
<td>Dear Old Daddy</td>
<td>1932</td>
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**v) Child leaves parents, then parents die**

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<td>Take Me Back to Renfro Valley</td>
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<td>P561</td>
<td>They're Gone</td>
<td>1936</td>
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<td>P562</td>
<td>Nobody Answered Me</td>
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<td>P563</td>
<td>Rank Strangers to Me</td>
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<td>P564</td>
<td>I Dreamed of the Old Home Last Night</td>
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