Eyes Back in Your Head, Country Boy: 
A Feminist Approach to Luke Bryan and Trace Adkins

Nicki Manaj has one. Kim Kardashian has one. And while that list might seem exclusive, actually everyone everywhere has one: a rear end, a bottom, a booty, a butt. So what is the difference between Manaj’s, Kardashian’s, and the rest of the world’s? Absolutely nothing is different, so why are people everywhere enamored with this female body part? Perhaps one reason is the music industry’s focus on this body area in such a stereotypical and sexist way. Specifically in recent years, male country singers have produced catchy songs focused on the rear end that have an underlying chauvinistic tone and message. Luke Bryan’s “Country Girl (Shake it For Me)” and Trace Adkins’ “Honky Tonk Badonkadonk” are two recent songs that hit this mark. Both songs have topped the charts and men and women alike sing and dance along to them. So what is so wrong with these poems’ lyrics? The diction in both Bryan’s “Country Girl” and Adkins’ “Honky Tonk” illustrate the poems’ speakers to be easily conversational about women’s rear ends with negative and sexist tone and figurative language.

Rarely does one hear an elegant conversation that slangly demeans women as both Bryan’s and Adkins’ songs do; the use of a slang colloquial language is perfectly fitting for such sexist discussion about women and their rears. Both songs make use of a stereotypically country accent with the lack of final “g” sounds on many of their words. Bryan discusses the “young bucks sittin’” (11), the “rednecks rockin’” (12), and the “DJ spinnin’” (13) as each group is watching the girl in question in the song. His message culminates in a string of verbs missing this same sound: “All I wanna do is get to holdin’ you
and get to knowin’ you/And get to showin’ you and get to lovin’ you ‘fore the night is through” (Bryan 46-47). This repetition as he tells the girl what he would like to do with her is both grammatically unsound and demeaning. Likewise, Adkins lists the action happening in a bar with the same dropped “g” sound: “Husslers shootin’ eight ball/ Throwin’ darts at the wall/Feelin’ damn near ten feet tall” (11-13). The lack of this final sound in both songs just sets each one of them up for seemingly low diction; in turn, the subject matter seems to be just as guttural. Adkins continues this same diction in describing some of the people in the bar as well. He reports, “Ol’ T.W.’s girlfriend done slapped him outta his chair” (Adkins 15). Here, not only has the man in the sentence been given a slang prefix to his name instead of a formal “Mr.”, but the rest of the sentence is also completely grammatically incorrect. Many times when people hear this lack of grammatical correctness, they assume a general conversation is going on. The problem with conversational and slang diction in these both songs’ lyrics is that women and their butts appear to be something that everyone should be talking about in all casual conversations. Furthermore, the diction only amplifies the negative tone and use of language in both songs. One example of this tone is in the lack of names and use of derogatory nicknames for the girl character in each song. Bryan even starts his song with “Hey girl” like a quick cat call (1). The word “girl” is mostly used to refer to this character in his song until toward the end when he changes to calling her “Baby” (Bryan 48). Both of these terms give the female character in the song lack of any sort of strength; she is simply a girl to be ogled over. Adkins uses the same gender reference mostly throughout giving his female character a universal stock; he calls her simply “she” and “her” all throughout the song. When he changes it up, however, he insists on calling the woman he is talking about “Honey” (Adkins 30, 49). This is another derogatory pet name for a woman and negatively dissociates a female with the independence, intellect, and strength she may possess. Further, both songs use repetition of negatively associated words to speak about the woman’s body. Bryan’s catch phrase is simply “Shake it
for me” (19-22, 38-41, 57-61). The “it” he is referring to is the woman’s rear end, like she has nothing better to offer him. Adkins, on the other hand, mentions the woman’s backside in two different ways; he first mentions it as a “money-maker” (33). If taken literally, if a woman is shaking a “money-maker,” she is getting paid to dance, so in essence Adkins is calling this woman a type of stripper. Adkins’ repeated line is just as bad: as the title suggests, he is watching the girl’s “honky tonk badonkadonk” (18, 28, 38, 48, 58, 68). This is not even a real word; it is just a word to overemphasize the back side of the human anatomy. Overall, the repetition of these catchy, yet negative words illustrates a detrimental image in how women should be talked about.

Interestingly enough, while looking through both songs for literary figurative language, this poetic device is also used negatively to distort an image of women. Bryan first uses a metaphor comparing the men watching the girl dance to “young bucks” (11). Young bucks in nature are always going through rut – a mating ritual, so in essence, the image that this metaphor portrays is that all these men are doing is looking at the girl shake her butt to be pleased by her physical nature. He makes a more elaborate request of the girl using similes later in the song showing just how physical and intimate he wants to be:

Now dance like a dandelion
In the wind on the hill underneath the pines, yeah
Move like the river flows
Feel the kick drum down deep in your toes. (Bryan 42-45)

Both reference to the dandelion and the river seem to suggest a wild girl as both dandelions grow wild and rivers run wild; he uses sensual images of nature to suggest the girl’s want to give that same sensuality to him. Abhorrently, in Adkins’ song, he only need use one main simile to completely disregard the female gender. Adkins notes that the girl “Got it goin’ on/Like Donkey Kong” in several
areas of the song (21-22, 41-42, 61-62). The use of a large gorilla as a comparison to a woman and her physique is utterly disgusting and totally regards women as physical and animalistic objects. The clever literary elements used in both of these songs serve to degrade women and make them feel like simple sexual objects.

Discussion of a woman’s body parts in poems and songs is not simply limited to country music in this recent era. Many different genres of musicians have compiled songs in ode to women and their physical natures, from soul and rap like “Brick House,” “Rump Shaka’,” and “Baby Got Back” to heavy metal like “You Shook Me All Night Long,” and then to country like the two songs presented here. The lyrics written objectify women no matter how catchy the tune is to dance to or how easy the words are to sing. The poems here illustrate a truly disturbing phenomenon in the presentation and admiration, or lack-thereof, of women and frankly, these male writers should put their eyes back in their heads where they belong.

Works Cited
