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John Denver's autograph: His lyrics as a cultural and literary record

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Middle Tennessee State University, 1994

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**John Denver's Autograph:
His Lyrics as a Cultural and Literary Record
Barbara Ann Klemt**

**A dissertation presented to the
Graduate Faculty of Middle Tennessee State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Doctor of Arts degree
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John Denver's Autograph:
His Lyrics as a Cultural and Literary Record

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Abstract

John Denver's Autograph:

His Lyrics as a Cultural and Literary Record

By Barbara Ann Klemt

Since the early 1970s John Denver has achieved significant success as a singer and songwriter. The types of songs he writes and the prose style conventions found in his lyrics have had much to do with his worldwide appeal as a singer.

Chapter I is a survey of the literature about popular music, notably country, and establishes the importance of lyric analysis. Most books about musical genres chronicle their development and identify common subjects, yet a source examining the thematic and stylistic traits in one singer's lyrics does not exist. Therefore, this study of Denver's content and style helps fill a scholarship void.

Chapter II is a review of Denver's personal life and career. The chapter identifies the important people and events in Denver's personal life, starting with his Air Force upbringing and ending with his second divorce. Afterward, his contributions to the music, television, film, and book industries are highlighted.

Chapter III is an analysis of the themes and style conventions in Denver's love, story, and nature recordings during the 1970s. Typically the love songs, such as the hit "Annie's Song," are a tribute to former or current significant others. The story songs, including "Rocky

Mountain High," are narratives that depict a protagonist's change or rebirth. "Sunshine on My Shoulders" exemplifies the singles that celebrate nature's beauty and goodness, much the way English romanticist William Wordsworth's poetry does. Repetition, simile, and personification are among Denver's style standards that relate to the techniques of classical rhetoricians.

Chapter IV is an examination of the content and style in his love, story, and environment songs during the 1980s. Denver's love and story songs, such as "Perhaps Love" and "Wild Montana Skies," respectively, are quite similar to those earlier types. However, the nature songs become wider in scope, for they are about the global environment. World peace, space exploration, and refugeeism are among the issues in the environment songs.

Chapter V notes the value, especially to English scholars, of lyric analysis. Denver's content and technique represent qualities common in classical oratory and in traditional literature, thereby justifying the inclusion of popular song lyrics in the current literary canon.

To my parents,
Gertrude M. and Warren H. Klemt

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Chapter I

Survey of the Literature

Scholars traditionally have not considered twentieth-century popular music lyrics a part of the formal literary canon. However, these lyrics are slowly gaining acceptance into that canon because of their growing recognition as cultural and literary documents. Since at least 1970, contemporary song lyrics have been included with poetry in English readers such as John Mahoney and John Schmittroth's The Insistent Present and most recently in anthologies such as the third edition of The Bedford Introduction to Literature (1993). They also are being discussed in secondary and post-secondary classrooms in English, history, sociology, and other subjects. Lyrics clearly have become legitimate sources of study and worthwhile additions to the formerly conventional canon, which has long featured formal literature in the short story, novel, and poetry. "Songs" have for years been accepted if they dated from Elizabethan or Middle English times. Analysis of modern popular song lyrics dates from the 1960s (Lewis, "Duellin'" 116). Because lyric analysis is a relatively new critical approach, works exclusively about song lyrics are scarce. Some genres, notably country, have generated limited attention, as have the lyrics of specific entertainers. Consequently, the following analysis will add to this growing field and fill a scholarship need by

explicating the lyrics singer John Denver has written and performed.

Most research about popular music centers on studies of the various genres, including folk, blues, rock and roll, country, and pop music. For the most part, these works provide a history of the genre by detailing the significant developments and artists. Many contain heavy use of names, events, and dates and refer to songs to illustrate the music's thematic and stylistic developments, especially as they relate to changes in society. Nonetheless, popular music's influence as a social barometer still was not being recognized by scholars until the late 1970s because of the music's nature. "Because it is of lesser quality, aesthetically, than elite art, historians and critics have tended to neglect it as a means of access to an era's--and a society's--values and ideas" (10), Russel Nye proposed in 1974.

Books solely about song lyrics are in even shorter supply. Usually the works of lyric analysis feature little in comparison to the amount of analysis devoted to historical material. David Pichaske, for instance, suggests in A Generation in Motion: Popular Music and Culture in the Sixties (1979) that the music of the 1960s "offers the most accurate record of persons and places and spirits" (xx). Yet he incorporates as many, if not more, observers' comments about the music as he does lyrics, limiting the work to select lyrics by singers such as Bob Dylan. Perhaps one

reason for his selectivity is that song commentators find it difficult and expensive to get permission to quote modern songs. R. Serge Denisoff devotes an entire book to protest music in Sing a Song of Social Significance (1972) but relies on historical content rather than lyric analysis. Particular biographies are not that helpful to the field because they offer the same format as the histories, concentrating on the artist's background and influences before examining the performer's music. The biography that comes closest to lyric analysis is Michael Gray's Song and Dance Man: The Art of Bob Dylan, a 1973 work. Dylan, though, is probably the singer whose lyrics are most often examined. Regarding journal contributions, the Journal of Popular Culture, Popular Music and Society, and Journal of Communication are among those featuring study of the music industry and lyrics. Publications in other disciplines, namely sociology, provide similar research too.

Indeed, a survey of the literature about popular music lyrics shows that this important industry element has been receiving much of its critical review since the late 1970s. The majority of the books contain discussion about folk, pop, and rock lyrics. The texts are not the most current, and many include the lyrics of musicians who were popular at the book's publication date. The Sound of Our Time, a 1969 work by David Laing, examines folk, rock, and pop music. While not exclusively formalistic, the study does offer sufficient focus on the lyrics of the then contemporary

stars, such as Elvis Presley, the Beatles, and Dylan. More recent texts such as Pichaske's Beowulf to Beatles: Approaches to Poetry (1972) provide additional lyric analysis. Pichaske states in the preface that "This book accepts the idea of a poetry of rock and uses that poetry in conjunction with the poetry traditionally taught in poetry classes" (xxvi). He proceeds to highlight the link between poetry and lyrics by combining examples of each according to style conventions, referring mainly to folk and rock songs. Philip Furia's 1990 The Poets of Tin Pan Alley: A History of America's Great Lyricists is a study of classical songwriters during the 1920s to 1940s; however, it does not extrapolate the lyrics as extensively as does Pichaske's work.

The lyrics of certain genres have generated considerable study, yet country music, the genre in which Denver first achieved success, has not. A foremost work about country lyrics does not exist among the pre-1980s literature. Country music historian Bill Malone notes in his 1968 Country Music U.S.A. a neglect of "full-scale, scholarly treatment" (vii) of the genre because of "the scarcity of basic source materials and the belief held by many authorities that the music is unworthy of serious attention" (vii). Country has had "durability and commercial success," Malone points out (vii), but "other musical styles are studied because they supposedly occupy higher positions in the American hierarchy of art or because they represent more accomplished musical disciplines" (360). In fact, it has taken country music's

rise during the 1980s and especially the 1990s for the industry to start gaining the recognition other genres have been receiving for years. Jimmie Rogers' 1983 The Country Music Message: All About Lovin' and Livin' is one of the most detailed lyric accounts among the earlier works. He reports his findings from an analysis of fifty top ten songs from 1960 to 1980 and cites more than ninety lyrical examples. Dorothy Hortsman offers a compilation of country lyrics with perceptive yet short commentaries in Sing Your Heart Out, Country Boy (1986). James Satterwhite's master's thesis Is There a Formula for the Top Ten Country Song Lyric? (1983) is a thorough study about the lyrics of hit country tunes.

Since these works were completed, country music has experienced another upswing and now is the fastest growing genre, according to a 1993 Nashville Tennessean article ("Country" 1A). The article indicates that "Country music has hit a new high note, nearly doubling its popularity in the past two years. . . . Country's recent surge in popularity surpasses the Urban Cowboy boom of 1981-82, when country held 15% of total sales" (1A). A 1994 report shows that country music garnered 18 percent of music market sales in America during 1993, behind rock's 33 percent ("Country Music" 6). A July 1993 Tennessean article relates that "Country tours comprised about 18% of total top end of the concert business during the first half of 1993, with seven acts placing in the top 25" (Mansfield 1E). During 1992 just

four country tours made the mid-year list (Mansfield 1E). Because of the current interest in the music, the genre is attracting scholars' attention. Among the recent works, Richard Peterson and Melton McLaurin's You Wrote My Life: Lyrical Themes in Country Music is a collection of essays about country music, particularly songs of the South and country's class consciousness. Even with its release, nonetheless, the literature does not include a text that concentrates solely on the lyrics of one particular country artist.

Many of the books and journal articles about popular music focus on the genres' themes. Researchers frequently state that the themes are linked closely to change in society; thus, scholars in the social sciences and humanities have been the most likely to examine the role of popular music. Sociologist B. Lee Cooper says contemporary music has been regarded as "the dictionary, barometer, microscope, gyroscope, and source of social etiquette for American youth" (qtd. in "Audio" 130). Others refer to music as a historical indicator and say each form possesses its own history (Dunaway 39), which translates into a large number of perspectives for society to acknowledge. While sociologists have tended to highlight popular music's relationship to young people, popular music affects all sectors of the population. "Music has some kind of impact, since listeners pick up information, feelings, even values from their contact with music," suggesting that music's appeal is affective

("Listeners'" 143). Nye proposes, "The popular audience expects entertainment, instruction, or both, rather than an 'aesthetic experience'" (12). Indeed, popular song is persuasive because it relies on ethical and pathetic effects. The former applies in that the character of the performer plays a major part in the way the audience responds to the message. Dating back to classical rhetoricians Aristotle and Isocrates, the ethical proof was the most effective to the speaker, for "The man who wishes to persuade people will not be negligent as to the matter of character" (Benson 49). Antoine Hennion notes, "It is the voice first and foremost that conveys a singer's authenticity" (199), and Rogers concurs, saying, "Credibility . . . is most often bestowed on the singer who has, or appears to have, a sincere approach to lyrics" (12). Peterson and McLaurin contend that entertainers choose material based on the way it reflects upon them. "No performer, no matter how popular, will perform a song, irrespective of how 'true to life' it may be, if the song portrays the performer in a way that does not fit the image he/she wants to project" (7), they claim. The pathetic appeal is significant because it disposes listeners in a specific way, albeit favorably or not: "The pop song tells a story and comments on it in order to provoke in listeners the feelings appropriate to that song" (Hennion 188). Additionally, "the lyrics of songs inevitably express the worldview of their authors and singers" (Dunaway 38).

When scholars examine popular music lyrics, they usually

identify social themes as the most prominent. Sociologists, in particular, tend to focus on social themes because they are not trained to read or interpret literary elements in the lyrics. George Lewis and Cooper claim that lyrics reflect history by relating the feelings, attitudes, values, issues, and events in society ("Duellin'" 103; "Audio" 130). In the process they shape feelings, attitudes, and values, although Ronald Rice contends that analysis of lyrics "cannot link audience attitudes to behavior" (140). Rice reports, however, that studies show "listeners really do hear the lyrics of songs they like, are attracted to, are connected to" (142). A common social subject is relationships, with marriage, children, fidelity, and heartache among the specific concerns. From Elvis Presley's "Love Me Tender" in the 1950s to Whitney Houston's pop remake of "I Will Always Love You" (1992), the nature of relationships has long been a topic. Yet more serious social concerns of national and international scope are becoming as much a norm in music across the genres. Substance and human abuse, adoption, crime, and race relations are some topics gaining unprecedented exposure. For example, in the 1991 "Anymore," country's Travis Tritt discusses the plights of disabled veterans, while pop and rock artist Billy Joel sings about suicide in "You're Only Human" (1985). And the social themes are being highlighted in the mass media, for performers are relying on television's immediacy to make a bigger impact. Pop superstar Michael Jackson treats racial equality in

"Black or White" (1991), while country equivalent Garth Brooks mentions the same in "We Shall Be Free" (1992). Each showcased his song during the 1993 Super Bowl television airing: Jackson's at the halftime show, Brooks' before the game.

Political issues have stimulated musical endeavors, too. War/peace, hunger, work, and the environment are some of these concerns, overlapping somewhat with the social matters. According to Denisoff and Dunaway, political music has its basis in folk's protest songs, which the former says "basically stress the lyric or intellectual aspect of song by attempting to convince the listener that something is wrong and in need of alteration" (Sing x). The political tunes are intended to prompt the audience to action in a way that the social songs do not, even though the latter may. Among the types of political tunes are:

Protest and complaint, direct or indirect,
against exploitation and oppression.

Aspiration toward a better life, a more just
society (Dunaway 39).

.....

Tributes to heroes and martyrs in the
popular cause.

Appeals for renewable energy sources and
environmental betterment. (Dunaway 40)

The types are a sampling of those that have appeared in the mainstream music scene, nationally and internationally. As

one example, a group of American and British singers--from Paul McCartney to Elton John to Dylan--combined for the 1985 Live Aid concert, whose proceeds went to help eliminate famine in Africa. Joel's "We Didn't Start the Fire" (1991) is a tribute to historical events and figures, ranging from international leaders such as the late Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev to national personalities such as the late actress Marilyn Monroe. The country group Alabama honors everyday American workers in its 1985 hit "Forty Hour Week (For a Livin')," while fellow country legend Willie Nelson has had help from rock's Tracy Chapman during his annual concerts to benefit farmers. The Live Aid and Farm Aid efforts fit into some of the categories in Dunaway's account of musical intent: "solicit or arouse support for a movement . . . recruit individuals into a specific movement . . . describe a social problem, in emotional terms" (40).

Although country music has some of the social and political themes that the other genres do, John Buckley suggests that country's most common themes concern satisfying and unsatisfying love relationships, home and family, country, and work (295-96). The themes are not necessarily outright social commentary but do reflect situations and concerns in society. The themes are typical, for "country music has always had a strong strain of traditionalism and conservatism running through it" (Lewis, "Duellin'" 109). Rogers claims that "nearly three of every four popular country songs are about love" (vii) and identifies hurting,

happy, and cheating love tunes. He also refers to "livin'" songs, which "describe a general lifestyle and . . . deal with specific social or economic conditions, personal behavior, and the peaks and valleys experienced in everyday life" (119). Country songs deal with everyday situations, and, as a result, such lyrics "strengthened country music's role as the music of the common man" (Malone 299). Some scholars go so far as to say country music offers "a penetrating and revealing self-portrait of the blue-collar working class" (Gritzner 858) and is "music of, by, and for the folk" (863). They cite folk music as a precursor to country, noting that its "timeless appeal is based on its emotional directness, simplicity, instrumental beauty, and diversity of themes and influences. It's often simple music that reflects the concerns and aspirations of a broad spectrum of people" (Hood 4).

The traditional themes persist in country music, yet many present-day lyrics have a highly contemporary focus. Billy Altman asserts that the industry is entertaining a new audience:

Country music has been appealing of late to a different breed of fan--adults who grew up on rock and have found in country music the kind of listener-friendly melodies and narrative styles that have been elbowed off the airwaves by youth-oriented grunge, metal and hip-hop. (H24)

A 1993 Nashville Tennessean article about country's growth

substantiates Altman's perception of a changed audience, mentioning that "People over age 30 continued to grow in influence in an industry once thought to cater to teen-agers" (2A). Acknowledging that the "genre prides itself on being real people's music" (H24), Altman says country singers are combining a bit of the traditional and the non-traditional as they retain longtime followers and recruit others. Compared to days past, the lyrics are so obviously social and political, conscious of "contemporary concerns like feminism, the men's movement, the environment and AIDS" (H24). In the 1992 release "He Thinks He'll Keep Her" (1992), Mary Chapin Carpenter sings about a woman who asks her husband to leave after he takes advantage of her love and support for fifteen years. Michelle Wright depicts in "He Would Be Sixteen" (1992) a woman who remembers the son she gave up for adoption when she was a teenager.

Country reflects the social and political themes as well as any other genre but makes use of lyrics like no other, scholars say. Buckley proposes that "lyrics are the more important consideration in country music. . . . The landscape, people, and situations encountered in country music, unlike much of popular music, are intended to be realistic reproductions of life" (qtd. in 293-94). Many scholars agree, calling the music secondary. Country music "has long been characterized by its lyrics and a melody designed to transport and complement the lyrics, not to clutter or hinder those messages," notes Rogers (11). For

instance, contrary to heavy metal music, whose explosive sound often drowns the words, country places the lyric over melody. With the words being of such importance, the music "both reflects and shapes popular thought" (Malone 360), even becoming "didactic in nature" (Satterwhite 69) in that it instructs listeners about the world around them. "The essence of a country song is the story," Lewis states ("Country" 38).

The emphasis on the lyric in country music makes the genre particularly appropriate for study in and out of the classroom, where the musical component cannot be so easily analyzed. According to Cooper, "One potentially beneficial resource for analyzing the causes and effects of social change is the medium of popular music" (Images 5). He indicates that popular song, regardless of genre, has been a learning tool because "Since the 1970s, a number of reports have described positive experiences in utilizing contemporary lyrics to promote a variety of learning activities" ("Social" 53). Much of the lyric application has been in history and sociology courses, during which educators introduce lyrics to stimulate debates and writing assignments about pertinent social or political issues. Joel's "We Didn't Start the Fire" attracted media attention for its educational value when history teachers at schools began using the song as a learning tool. The song features a barrage of national and international names and events, thus supposedly enhancing comprehension of past and present history.

The increasingly sophisticated literary qualities of songs make lyrics especially useful in English courses. Scholars suggest that because they relate a story, country lyrics "reflect such concerns as plot and theme" (Satterwhite 1), qualities of traditional literature. Actually, the tunes usually have elements of narrative (Thaxton and Jaret 310) in that they provide the setting, characters, theme, and sequential order of prose. Other songs feature the rhyme of verse. Country lyrics are often presented in a straightforward, easily understandable manner (Rogers 9; Gritzner 859) similar to that of classic storytelling. Singer and songwriter Tom T. Hall, whose nickname is "The Storyteller" (Hall 186), acknowledges that he used this approach because he "chronicled our times and places in song (174). . . . I had learned the valuable lesson of writing about what I knew and what I cared about" (176). Rogers says content and audience considerations influence this style, which is absent the extra lines used to pad song lengths in other genres. Mainly written for the blue-collar audience, the song's essence is "its rough-hewn lyricism, its directness and simplicity, and its refreshing lack of elegance, aristocratic airs, and pretense" (Gritzner 859). Such a storytelling approach is cause for some scholars to say country singers "are known for treating their audience with respect and warmth by singing to them, not at them" (Rogers 24). While the narrative technique is quite apparent, style conventions of formal literary forms also

are noticeable. Metaphor, simile, repetition, and personification are some standards that surface in the lyrics. Therefore, these traits that are so common in the accepted canon make country lyrics a viable learning source.

Lyric analysis is different from traditional critical approaches because the actual text--the lyrics--is being examined outside its natural context, the performance. In the following study of songs written solely or partly by Denver, the lyrics will be examined as text alone, without musical consideration. Denver has composed the tunes with musical concerns in mind; nevertheless, this analysis will not address the particulars of these musical conventions because the reviewer's strength does not lie there. Musical meter, pitch, tone, and the like will not be detailed, and no attempt will be made to diagram the lyrics by verse-chorus-verse-chorus or developing chorus-bridge-developing chorus standards. Simon Frith mentions that sociologists normally have examined only the lyrics because "they mostly lacked the ability to distinguish songs in musical terms" and "by default, had to measure trends by reference to lyrics" (77). Simply examining the lyrics eliminates additional considerations imposed by the manner in which the words are transmitted. The actual song may be performed differently from the way its words read, altering the effect of the song as it appears on paper. "Singers use non-verbal as well as verbal devices to make their points--emphases, sighs, hesitations, changes of tone,"

Frith indicates. "Lyrics involve pleas, sneers and commands as well as statements and messages and stories" (97). Like other entertainers, Denver is not immune to improvising on the original text by adding words or drawing them out into sounds, such as yodels.

What is important to remember, however, is that the lyrics have been written according to space and time restraints. To convey the message in about three minutes (Lewis, "Country" 39), the average length of the country music song, the lyrics do not contain lengthy, complex syntax structures evident in some formal poetry. Rather, they feature short, often repetitious, lines and an overall conciseness conducive to oral delivery. "The restrictions on time and form are two reasons for the use of simple words," Rogers notes about country music (9). So whereas the song performance is not the concern here, the style conventions that help convey the overriding message do need to be examined. Many of these conventions are prominent in traditional poetry, which has led scholars such as Furia to state, "There is simply no simple distinction between lyrics and poetry" (6). Despite the obvious similarities between the two, Denver's lyrics will not be treated as poetry because the latter has, among other elements, a different form, style, audience, and function. That type of analysis is also normally more formulaic than this study intends. Instead, the conventions will be discussed in relation to the way they enhance the transfer of the message. Hennion and

Satterwhite, for example, emphasize the value of certain commonplaces, such as repetition of key words and phrases, to reinforcement of the message.

Analyzing the lyrics of one performer can document thematic changes and relate their significance to developments in society, thereby revealing popular song as a cultural barometer. Pichaske, who connects rock music to traditional poetry, cites the benefit of studying the latter, which by extension seems to apply to lyrics. He proposes:

From a historical point of view, of course, there are any number of reasons, the most compelling of which is the fact that the poetry of an age or a country or even an individual poet tells us quite a bit about what that age or country or poet thought about human existence as it was experienced. (Beowulf 2)

Denver seems to perceive his music as a personal record of life, as his signature rather than as the conventional autograph. He says:

I hate signing autographs. . . . I can't think of anything less meaningful. What is meaningful is the music and how you feel about it--whether or not you get from my music the love that I feel from you. This is my autograph, this is what I want people to remember. (Okun, Anthology 372)

And his 1979 composition "Autograph" reflects his position, for it mentions:

To be always with you

And you always with me

This is my autograph

Here in the songs that I sing. (15-18)

Here, Denver's lyrics during the 1970s and 1980s will be examined. Because not every popular artist writes his/her own material, those who do are able to use their lyric writing to enhance their public image and vice versa. Denver achieved significant success during the 1970s as a country singer and by the next decade was received by pop, adult contemporary, and easy listening audiences as well.¹ Initially he wrote mainly love, story, and nature songs, which usually can be distinguished by genre from song to song, even though some pieces feature a combination of genres. His 1980s songs, on the other hand, are about love and world issues such as peace, hunger, and space exploration. The songs became increasingly reflective of major social and political concerns. Daniel Goczy states that topical songs "tell a story or express a personal emotion in direct lyrics" and are "increasingly experimental, continually daring, and overtly reflective of the social and political issues of the day, most notably civil rights and the threat of nuclear war" (15).

The closest thematic similarity between the older and newer material is relationships, for he celebrates current

love and remembers lost love in each. The story and nature themes become much less prevalent because his 1980s albums have few songs that fit neatly into either genre. Rare are the story and nature songs such as the crossover hits "Rocky Mountain High" (1972) and "Sunshine on My Shoulders" (1974), respectively. His albums from 1977 to the late 1980s offer few songs with a narrative format and fewer exclusively about nature. Denver begins to refer to nature as part of a larger context, such as when he indicates the importance of preserving the earth in the 1983 "It's About Time" while stressing the need for world peace as well. The nature song ultimately becomes an environment one in his 1980s works.

Denver's music is distinctive because he continued writing topical compositions even when his popularity had started to wane. Performers such as Joan Baez and Dylan were particularly active in singing about political and social issues during the late 1960s folk movement, yet years after they had limited the releases that encouraged human rights and the like. Denver's singing in "African Sunrise" (1985) about the hardships of African people and advocating international peace in "One World" (1986) and "It's a Possibility" (1985) were commonplaces for him at the time but not for other entertainers. His devotion to topical songs is also significant because it has helped him develop a multi-genre career. The songs show his folk beginning, evident for instance in his 1970 Whose Garden Was This album, and his later entrance into the country, pop, adult

contemporary, and easy listening fields. Denver has had a crossover appeal unlike that of many entertainers, with hits on at least three charts other than country shortly after his initial impact. His solo and crossover successes during the 1970s are consistent with the trends in popular music at the time because Charles Hamm cites a swing "more strongly in the direction of solo singing" (467) and "a steady succession of 'crossovers' between mainstream popular music and the country-western repertory" (469). His musical diversity is noticeable to some extent in his selection of singing partners. In recent years country acts Emmylou Harris and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, opera star Placido Domingo, French singer Sylvie Vartan, Russian rock performer Alexander Gradsky, and Japanese artist Kosetsu Minami have recorded with Denver.

The thematic changes in Denver's songs are the focus of this study, yet his use of prose conventions merits mention as well. His lyrics from the 1970s to early 1980s feature a stylistic consistency that shows Denver's attention to delivery. The common conventions in his lyrics are repetition, simile, metaphor, personification, and antithesis, even though others appear too. Satterwhite notes that longtime country songwriter Bob McDill suggests that "characterization, imagery, and the effective use of rhyme and alliteration are necessary for a hit country lyric" (13). Denver's reliance on style conventions certainly enhanced his singing and his image, for he was named Colorado's poet

laureate in 1974. Therefore, the conventions will be mentioned regarding their effect on the delivery and appeal to the audience.

Although Denver's lyrics are the prime concern of this study, his personal and professional development are examined before the actual analyses of his songs. The 1970s and 1980s lyrics, discussed in separate chapters, are analyzed according to genre, with each containing the same number of songs. The selections have been chosen so as to give a representative sample of Denver's music and to show the shift in his musical focus, both of which reflect his change as a performer and as a popular draw. In addition, the selections are representative because they offer his biggest hits and lesser known releases. The love, story, and nature songs are from his 1971 Poems, Prayers and Promises, 1972 Rocky Mountain High, 1973 Farewell Andromeda and John Denver's Greatest Hits, 1974 Back Home Again, 1975 Windsong, and 1978 John Denver albums. The love, story, and environment tunes are from the 1982 Seasons of the Heart, 1983 It's about Time, 1985 Dreamland Express, 1986 One World, and 1988 Higher Ground albums.

Excerpts of the lyrics often appear during the analysis of each song, and longer citations appear in traditional block quotations. Because of the block quotation format, the original form for overly long lines has been changed so that they extend onto the next and are indented two spaces. The complete lyrics are placed at the end of each song's

analysis. Whenever possible, the lyrics are printed according to the way they first appeared on Denver's album liner notes in order to reproduce the original form. The lyrics of "Annie's Song," for example, were initially printed on the Back Home Again liner notes but have been featured on subsequent albums with more lines and stanzas. The words for "Sunshine on My Shoulders" were not included with the Poems, Prayers and Promises album, so they are printed according to the way they appear in the John Denver Anthology. Of course, sometimes lines on the liner notes run over to a subsequent line in order to accommodate for the narrow column width on the liner notes. When it seems obvious that lines have been split because of the column width, they are reproduced as they would have appeared otherwise. As often as possible, the researcher has consulted album and cassette liner notes and anthologies to determine the original, and most common, form. In most instances the lyrics are double-spaced without there being any confusion as to the spacing in between verses. Some songs, such as "Sunshine on My Shoulders," have additional spacing in the printed form here to make it clear that the verses are separate according to the way they appear on the liner notes. Therefore, the lyrics printed at the end of each song analysis are closest to the form on album and cassette liner notes or in anthologies. The lyrics printed in their entirety have line numerals given in the left-hand margin. Accompanying the study is a discography of songs on

Denver's solo albums, including demonstration, radio promotion, and foreign. The discography has the lyricists' names and is in chronological order.

Texts about lyrics of popular music genres and musicians exist, yet a study of this magnitude about a crossover artist's lyrics does not. Such an analysis will be of value because of its attention to one singer's lyrics, especially the social and political themes and style conventions. Most notably, it will show that contemporary lyrics are cultural and literary pieces worthy of recognition in the canon.

Notes

¹In his Music Business Handbook and Career Guide, which is used as a text for university recording industry management courses, David Baskerville defines adult contemporary as a "soft rock music genre popular with Baby Boomers, emphasizing romantic songs and lush orchestrations" (522). The reference guide Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook 1993 indicates that adult contemporary music is "recent popular songs, with a few oldies. The songs tend to be upbeat and soft" (B-511).

Baskerville cites easy listening as a "primarily instrumental music genre, gentler in sound than Adult Contemporary" (525). Easy listening is referred to as "Beautiful Music" in the Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook 1993. The guide states that it is "uninterrupted, instrumental soft music" (B-511). Denisoff claims that "easy listening as it exists in the 1980s is generally a mix of traditional ballads and soft rock doing love songs" (Tarnished Gold 6).

Chapter II

Personal Life and Career

John Denver was born Henry John Jr. to Erma and Henry John Deutschendorf on December 31, 1943, in Roswell, New Mexico. His mother was a housewife and father a test pilot and lieutenant colonel in the United States Air Force. Because his father's work involved frequent relocation, Denver lived in Japan, Arizona, Alabama, and Texas during his childhood (Morse 11). His only sibling is brother Ron, born in 1948. Although his parents and brother have supported Denver's career by accompanying him to many of his functions, his father and brother have had especially active roles in his career. His father was chief pilot on Denver's Lear jet until he died of a heart attack in 1982, and his brother has helped direct Denver's career (Birnbach 5).

As a youngster, Denver became interested in music. The first recording of his music was when he performed "The Hills of Virginia" at age seven. "I used to sing in the church choirs, and I joined the boys' chorus," he said ("Biography" 18). While attending Arlington Heights High School in Fort Worth, Texas, he was a football player, worked after school washing dishes, and played in a rock and roll band. From twelve until graduation from high school, Denver played an acoustic 1910 Gibson guitar his grandmother gave him. He received a Fender Jazz Master electric guitar and a Fender Pro Amp as high school graduation gifts. He set aside the

electric guitar when the Kingston Trio released "Tom Dooley," and he joined the folk music movement (Baggelaar and Milton 102). According to country historian Bill Malone, "More than any other single recording, 'Tom Dooley' set off the urban folk-music boom" (335). Despite being known for his singing and guitar playing while growing up, Denver did write songs. At thirteen, he penned his first tune, "Sitting on the Banks of a Lazy Little Stream," during a church summer camp.

During his childhood Denver developed a love for the outdoors, which is apparent in his music. He ties that love to the early influence of family members, notably his father and father's brother, whom Denver had in mind when he wrote in "Matthew" (1974) about growing up on a Kansas farm.

He claims:

I first became in touch with the earth and aware of the seasons on the small family farm that my father was raised on. That's where the land--Mother Earth--started to mean something to me. . . . in all the places we lived while I was growing up, what I enjoyed most was getting away from the towns or cities and into the desert, mountain and woods. ("Higher Ground" 2)

Denver went on his first camping trip with his father and brother when he was about eleven, yet he received other opportunities to explore in nature. "I was a Boy Scout," he notes, "and that's a great way for a kid to be introduced to

the outdoors" (Interview, Horton 7). Because of his longstanding love for the outdoors, Denver said, "Playing [singing] outdoors is my favorite thing. My music goes with the outdoors, people sitting under the stars" (Rutkoski).

When he was twenty-two, Denver met the woman he would marry. As the lead singer of The Chad Mitchell Trio, he met Ann Marie Martell during a concert stop in St. Peter, Minnesota, in 1965. Martell, a junior at Gustavus Adolphus College there, was using signs to introduce each act of a skit being performed by one of the college's clubs (McGreane 16). "I fell in love with her right then," Denver said, adding that he "sang every song to her" (McGreane 16). They were married less than two years later and remained together until 1982, when they separated. They divorced in 1983. Denver attributes the breakup to his career and humanitarian efforts (Jaeger, "Grown-up" E1). "It got to the point where I couldn't give my time to them and still give Annie the time and attention she needed," he explains (Jaeger E1). During their marriage they adopted son Zachary John, who is part Indian, and daughter Anna Kate, who is part Japanese, because Denver thought he was sterile.

On a Colorado mountaintop in 1988, Denver married Australian singer, actress, and dancer Cassandra Delaney after a nearly two-year courtship. Daughter Jesse Belle was born in 1989. "I delivered this baby, you know," he says about Jesse. "I wanted to. I was married 15 years to Ann and was not supposed to be able to have children" (Brady 18).

Unlike Annie, Delaney had an active part in Denver's career. Among her contributions were singing and dancing during his social club shows and providing vocal accompaniment and photographs on his 1990 Higher Ground release. However, in 1991 Denver filed for divorce, claiming that the union was "irretrievably broken" (Savoie 3A), and the divorce became final during fall 1993.

While music and social activism have kept Denver busy, in 1994 he still makes time for his hobbies. Flying and photography have been his chief interests. He inherited a desire to fly from his father, "who held three world aviation speed records" ("Shuttle") and pays tribute to flying and his late father in the 1983 "On the Wings of a Dream" on the It's About Time album. A licensed pilot, Denver has flown his Cessna and Lear jets to performances and other events, such as the space shuttle Columbia's scheduled liftoff in 1981. He has flown at public events as well, including an hour piloting a United States Navy A-4 Skyhawk in 1984. Denver started photography as a hobby in 1965. "Photography, like music, is a way to communicate a feeling, a way of life," he said in 1980 (Martin, "John" 60). He exhibited a collection of sixty photographs, mainly nature scenes, during a five-week show at the Hammer Art Gallery in New York City during 1980. The proceeds benefited the Windstar Foundation, an organization he founded in 1976 to work toward world peace and ecology. He has featured his photographs on several albums. For example, his self-portrait in the Purple Dragon

Cave in Huan, China, is the cover shot for his 1982 Seasons of the Heart (Liner notes), and the 1988 Higher Ground contains additional photographs (Liner notes).

Moreover, Denver is fond of outdoors activities, astronomy, and, most recently, golf. Although he says he is no hunter, Denver likes to fish and to hike and camp in the mountains. His children enjoy the outdoors life, he adds, noting that he started taking Zachary camping at age two (Interview, Horton 8). Denver also has gone on horseback riding and camping trips with the Durango Mountain Caballeros, a group of people who gather yearly from across the country for a weeklong outing (Interview, Horton 9). "When life is most difficult, I find peace of mind out in nature, whether it be the mountains or forests . . . but my life in the mountains gives me peace--the strength to go on singing anywhere," he states ("John Denver Champions"). During recent years Denver's outdoors adventures have been featured on television, notably ESPN's Fly Fishing the World (Jones). A 1992 telecast shows Denver and Zachary fishing in Brazil, and a 1994 episode has Denver in Alaska. Denver is an avid skier too, and for years has had his own celebrity skiing event in which professionals and amateurs competed. Astronomy is one more interest, and Denver even helped design his Aspen home so that it features a glass-roofed observatory (Current 110). "I'm an amateur astronomer," he notes, "and one of my favorite things to do is go camping during the Perseid meteor shower, which usually

occurs one night between August 12th and 15th" (Interview, Horton 8). Actually, Denver wrote "Rocky Mountain High" based on a trip to see the meteor shower. For the past several years, Denver has been showcasing his golf talent in various tournaments, such as the February 1994 AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am (Hershey 5C).

Denver's musical career progressed during his time at Texas Technological University, which he entered in 1961. An architecture major, he was a member of several bands, including a rhythm and blues one. But desiring a future in music, he left school during his junior year to go to California. Denver worked as a draftsman and sang at the Leadbetter Coffee House in West Los Angeles (McGreane 11). Originally inspired by Elvis Presley's music, Denver was a fan of folksingers Joan Baez, Tom Paxton, and Peter, Paul and Mary (Stambler and Landon 178), all of whom sang songs that contained social commentary. Malone cites Baez as one of the folksingers "who marshalled their protest songs to combat America's growing involvement in the Vietnam War" (Country Music U.S.A., 1985 317), whereas R. Serge Denisoff suggests about Paxton that "many of his songs were personal statements of discontent" (Sing 112). Denver performed their songs at area coffeehouses, nightclubs, and colleges. He was even a guest on Paxton's BBC-TV program in England during 1972 (Current 109). Later during his career, Denver continued performing tunes written by folksingers. He sang the Paxton tune "Bet on the Blues" on his I Want to Live (1977) album

and sang "The Bells of Rhymney," a Pete Seeger song The Mitchell Trio had performed, during concerts.

While out west to establish his career, Denver changed his surname in honor of his favorite city. A producer suggested that Deutschendorf was too difficult to pronounce and too lengthy for display on albums and marquees. Denver then went to Phoenix and performed at the Lumbermill. He returned to California and heard that Chad Mitchell was leaving The Chad Mitchell Trio, at the time a major group, especially among college students. The group arranged for Denver to fly to New York, where he was chosen over some 250 others (McGreane 13) to be the new lead singer and guitarist of the group. Denver assumed some of the group's debt incurred under Mitchell's guidance and later had the group renamed to avoid legal problems concerning the use of Chad's name (McGreane 21). The name was first changed to The Mitchell Trio and then to Denver, (David) Boise and (Michael) Johnson. The group remained known for its satirical accounts of social and political issues. As a member of the trio, Denver wrote "Leaving on a Jet Plane," which he said he composed with Martell in mind. Peter, Paul and Mary made the song a hit, and Denver eventually included the single on his Greatest Hits album (1973). The tune later was the theme song for United Airlines (Current 109). Denver stayed in the trio for two and one-half years, singing on Mercury albums Violets of Dawn and That's the Way It's Gonna Be and Reprise release Alive.

With those efforts to his credit, Denver opted to go solo.

His earliest solo effort was the 1966 John Denver Sings, which he released on his own. The album contains Denver's versions of four Paul McCartney and John Lennon compositions. He followed with the 1969 Rhymes and Reasons, the title song of which he cited in 1973 as having his best lyrics (Okun, Anthology 9), and Take Me to Tomorrow and Whose Garden Was This in 1970. The latter featured the singer's political protest, at a time when the Vietnam War was in progress. The album cover shows Denver wearing a medallion that reads, "War is not healthy for children and other living things." The Denver tune "Sail Away Home" has lyrics that state, "I can't take the guns anymore / I can't take the screams anymore" (McGreane 27). David Dunaway mentions complaints and appeals as traits of such music (39-40). Denver also sang "Whose Garden Was This," written by Paxton.

Nonetheless, it was not until 1971 that Denver's music started generating nationwide interest. Coast-to-coast concert appearances helped boost a career that really flourished with the 1971 release of Poems, Prayers and Promises, containing the number one Cash Box pop hit "Take Me Home, Country Roads" (Hoffmann, 1950-1981 158). Some years later West Virginia's governor signed a bill making "Almost Heaven," a phrase from the number one song, the motto on the state's license plate ("More" 30). Denver now sang the praises of family, home, and nature, topics that

appealed to society at large. By 1973 he had four straight gold albums and then released his Greatest Hits album, whose sales eventually enabled him to become the first RCA premier artist to have an album that sold ten million copies (Stuart D13).¹ "Denver's was the way we wanted the world to be," Hugh Mooney remarked in his analysis of country music during the 1970s. "He was for everyone. . . . He was especially popular during the very laid-back years 1972-1975" (209). And Denver wanted to reach everyone, for he said during 1974, "What I'm trying to do is give each generation a certain slant on what the others are doing. . . . but I'm a contemporary singer-songwriter" (Miller 113). Indeed, Denver's music seemed to affect many, not unusual according to Simon Frith, who asserts that lyrics with folk strains are "the authentic expression of popular experiences and need" (81). With nine solo albums to his credit, Denver became in 1974 "the largest selling popular artist" in the country ("More" 30).

Denver reached the peak of national popularity in 1975, when he was named the Country Music Association Entertainer of the Year and his "Back Home Again" was cited as Song of the Year. "When I wrote the 'Back Home Again' music and recorded it, I was really trying to communicate with people, share with them what I feel . . . what my roots are . . . what my heritage is, if you will," said Denver (Battle 16). In any case, Denver's top CMA honor created quite a backlash. Similar to the year before when Olivia Newton-John won the

entertainer award, the country music industry was mixed in its reaction to Denver's winning. A number of industry veterans did not believe Denver was truly country, even though other singers, such as Tammy Wynette and Ronnie Milsap, defended Denver. Everett J. Corbin says the Association of Country Entertainers, a group formed in response to Newton-John's CMA honor, "tried to take action when Olivia Newton-John and John Denver crept in unawares, stealing the country music thunder" (44). Evidently certain established singers did not appreciate an outsider such as Denver receiving acclaim so quickly. The criticism of Denver's music, which by 1975 had found success in the pop music arena, prompted him to answer his critics by stating that he considered himself a country artist. He said shortly after winning the entertainer award:

There's a kind of a crossover, more and more country artists who are having more acceptance, not only in the United States, but all over the world, and not only on country music stations. I really feel like I'm a part of that, not only in reaching the people, but also in the evolution of the music itself. Regardless of what people think about me being an outside artist coming into country music, country music is a part of my life. (Harvey 2)

Actually, Denver's recognition as a country artist

extended to other industry associations because that same year the Academy of Country Music honored Back Home Again as the year's best album ("Awards" 28). The album's success resulted in reward closer to home too. Colorado Governor John Vanderhoof declared June 24 to 30 as "Welcome Back Home Again John Denver Week" and named Denver the state's poet laureate (Stambler and Landon 180). Calling Denver a "country music superstar" at the time, Cleveland journalist Bruno Bornino indicated in 1976 that Denver's influence was far-reaching because "In the 1975 Billboard year-end listings, he was No. 1 on four different charts (top singles artist, overall pop artist, easy-listening artist and country artist)." Denver was selected the American Music Awards best male vocalist in 1976. That year Maureen Orth wrote in a Newsweek article, "Today John Denver, at 32, is the most popular pop singer in America" (60). Excluding the 1966 demonstration and radio promotion albums, Denver had released nine solo records by 1974. Six of those have been certified as gold by the Recording Industry Association of America (White 63). The singles "Take Me Home, Country Roads," "Annie's Song," "Sunshine on My Shoulders," "Back Home Again," and "Thank God I'm a Country Boy" from those albums have been certified gold (White 63).²

Despite the initial country success, Denver was unable to find a niche in the country music industry, a foreshadowing of his career to come. While the string of gold albums remained intact into the 1980s, with the first

two of his three efforts achieving that status (White 64), his albums and singles did not garner the same country attention that his earliest works did. Though twenty-three of his songs appeared on the top 100 Cash Box country chart from 1971 to 1981 (Hoffmann, 1958-1982 91-92), he did not have a number one single there after 1975. "Some Days Are Diamonds (Some Days Are Stone)" reached number eight on the Cash Box chart in 1981 (Hoffmann, 1958-1982 92), but other songs did better on the pop, easy listening, and adult contemporary charts. And the same is true of his country album success. After the number one Spirit in 1976 (Hoffmann and Albert 48), Some Days Are Diamonds was his next most rewarding effort because it peaked at the fourth spot in 1981 (Hoffmann and Albert 47).

Richard Peterson and Melton McLaurin say that "within five years" after winning the CMA Entertainer of the Year award, Denver "was no longer considered country" (2). Some observers contend that "the break with mainstream country was probably preordained" (Sullivan). During 1990, more than twenty years into his career, Denver said, "I said from the very beginning I wasn't in music to make hit records. I wanted to touch people with my music and other things I do" (Rutkoski). He acknowledges that he has not conformed like other artists have in an effort to strike gold. "I don't want to go to Nashville and do a bunch of country songs that were written by four or five guys all looking for a hit record. I want to do music that's moving to me," he said

later in 1990 (Sullivan). Actually, being true to himself matters most because he says, "I hope that people remember or know to some degree that I have always tried to be true to myself, first of all, and true to the gift that I have, true to the songs that come through me" (Interview, Klemt). In spite of his intentions, however, Denver suggests that the industry has not been exactly warm to him. "Country seems to resent me, because I've had such big successes outside of country," he said in 1990 (Sullivan). One indication of his distance from the country industry was that his December 1993 concert at Nashville's Grand Ole Opry House was just his second date at the Opry House during his career (Roland 10).

Regardless, Denver maintains that he is pleased with his efforts during the 1990s. "The best albums I've made have been in recent years," he notes, "yet people aren't aware of that. It was partly the fault of my record company then [RCA] and partly my fault" (Brady 18). Differences with RCA led to the parties' split after Denver's 1986 One World album, and Denver has been singing on his own label, Windstar, since then. "They [RCA] really took me for granted," he said, indicating that the company did not want to grant a new contract for the money Denver sought. "RCA's promotional people never supported me anyway. Radio was resistant to me and I was a hard sell, so why bother?" (Berry 3). Denver hoped to restart his radio career by recording on his own label. "One of the reasons for establishing my own label was to have the clout and the budget to say, 'This is

what I want to be done' and get this record on the air," he says (Berry 3). Denver released the 1988 Higher Ground, 1990 The Flower That Shattered the Stone, and 1991 Different Directions, none of which revitalized his popularity. And his 1990 Earth Songs, new versions of old Denver songs with environmental themes, had a limited availability because it was purchasable only through his concert promoters and the National Wildlife Federation.

The label switch did not help Denver recapture the earlier singles success either. Denver believes that his failure to have recent Top 40 hits was the reason he was not invited to sing on the 1985 "We Are the World" record, whose proceeds went to aid the hungry in the world (Birnbach 4). "Perhaps I abused, unknowingly, the record business," he remarks. "I lost touch. . . . For a time I almost disappeared from the record business" (Brady 18). In fact, most of Denver's biggest hits during the 1980s have been his collaborations with veteran acts. The single "Perhaps Love" with opera star Placido Domingo reached number fifty-nine on the Billboard pop chart in 1982 (Whitburn, 1955-1986 140), but its crossover appeal kept Denver from being seen as the country star of years past. He joined Emmylou Harris in 1983 for "Wild Montana Skies," which peaked at fourteen on the Billboard country chart (Whitburn, 1944-1988 81). He reached the same spot on the country chart with the 1989 "And So It Goes (with Everything But Love)," a song he performed with the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band (Hot Country 56). The tune was

nominated for the Country Music Association Vocal Event of the Year. With his music not fitting neatly into any genre, Denver said the next year, "It's not country, although I still do some country songs. It's not rock 'n' roll, although I do some rock 'n' roll songs" (Cowan 1B).

Despite the drop in popularity, Denver has remained one of the most distinguished musicians internationally. According to Adam White, Denver's "accumulation of 16 gold albums places him in the top 10 most-certified solo singers" (94). Denver's solo career alone has been impressive, for as of 1994 he has released at least forty-six albums, including radio promotion, and foreign works and their releases in the United States (Pinto 6-25; Hearts in Harmony 33.3 30). He has performed on at least six albums of solo artists and on at least sixteen albums with various artists, excluding The Mitchell Trio (Pinto 6-25; Hearts in Harmony 33.3 30). In addition to the sixteen gold albums, four have been certified platinum (White 64).³ He has toured all across the world, including the Soviet Union, Australia, Japan, China, Zimbabwe, New Zealand, Holland, and Philippines. His world tours during the 1980s actually overshadowed his national appearances, for he was more well-received elsewhere than at home. In 1984 he became the first entertainer in a number of years to perform a public concert in the Soviet Union (Bonelli), and he is the only Western artist who has been invited to perform at select locales in China, where he has a particularly large following (Mann). While in office,

former Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang and former Communist Party Vice Chairman Deng Xiaoping were such avid Denver fans that they were treated to special performances during visits to the United States (Bonelli). Because of his popularity in China, Denver went there during May 1994 and "is working on an album of rerecorded material designed specifically for release in China" ("Denver Charts" 3A). Denver reportedly was the lone foreigner invited to perform during the 1989 Australia bicentennial (Larsen 2).

Some of the international tours have been for special causes. In 1984 the Zimbabwe trip was part of his crusade against hunger, and the free concert in Japan was to promote environmental awareness. During May 1994 Denver performed three times in Vietnam to become just the second major Western artist to sing there since the Vietnam War ended in 1975 ("Vietnam" 3A). His manager acknowledged beforehand that the Vietnam dates were "a money loser," yet Denver cites his belief in music as a "healing force" as a reason for his decision to perform (3A). The causes aside, Denver wants his world appearances to have an impact on all people. "I'm a global citizen. Whatever I do, I want to work in a way that is directed toward a world in balance, a world that creates a better quality of life for all people," he says (Don Hall 2B).

Coinciding with the worldwide touring, however, has been a drop in Denver's recognition as a popular draw in this country. During the 1970s until the beginning of the 1980s,

he sang at the biggest coliseums and toured throughout the year. But once he became serious about international touring, he opted for mostly summer tours and intimate settings in this country. In the New Jersey and New York area, as one example, he usually performed at the Brendan Byrne Arena in East Rutherford, New Jersey. His concerts during the late 1980s and into the 1990s have been at the Garden State Arts Center in Holmdel, New Jersey, and at the Waterloo Village in Stanhope, New Jersey. These locales seat about five thousand and fewer, respectively. Many of his summer appearances have been at state fairs, often as one of a series of performers. Denver took a year off from touring from late 1992 until the fall of 1993 because of personal difficulties arising from his second divorce. He wrote in a 1993 letter to fan club members, "I have chosen to minimize my activities so that I can reflect on where I am, how I got here, and what I really want to do with the rest of my life" ("Dear Fans" 14). In September 1993 he began a mini-tour during which he performed in sixteen locations across the United States after starting in Vancouver, British Columbia. During the spring of 1994 he has been touring abroad, with concerts in England, Ireland, Germany, Thailand, Korea, Vietnam, and elsewhere (Hearts in Harmony 32.3 45; 33.3 30).

Denver has appeared on numerous television programs, including his own and others' variety and sports specials, documentaries, movies, and commercials. As of 1982 he had appeared in or provided the narration or music for nineteen

shows, sixteen of which were his own variety specials (Sing with 1982 40). Among his specials have been John Denver and the Muppets--A Christmas Together (1979), which still airs on cable television, Two of a Kind with Denver and George Burns (1981), and John Denver: Music and the Mountains (1981) with classical artists Beverly Sills, Itzhak Perlman, and James Galway. The 1975 An Evening with John Denver earned him an Emmy Award ("Awards" 28). He has been a guest on Bob Hope, Dick Van Dyke, and Barry Manilow specials, among others. He has written the music for several shows, including the 1973 television drama Sunshine, 1973 documentary The Bighorn Country, and 1974 show The New Land (Current 110). For several years during the early 1980s, CBS aired Denver's annual celebrity ski classic from Lake Tahoe, Nevada. Denver played in the 1991 televised Bob Hope (Brady 18) and 1994 AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am golf tournaments. During ABC's coverage of the 1984 Winter Olympics, he sang "The Gold and Beyond" as a tribute to the games and athletes. The tune, one he wrote, is featured on his Autograph album. Other television appearances have been as host for the Emmy and Grammy awards shows and as guest host for Johnny Carson on The Tonight Show (Stambler and Landon 180). Denver's dramatic television credits include a co-starring role with Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn in the 1987 Foxfire, which inspired him to write "Foxfire Suite" for his Different Directions album. He had the lead part in the 1988 movie Higher Ground, which featured his musical scores. During

fall 1993 Denver filmed Walking Thunder, in which he stars as a frontier father, to be released during 1994 ("Denver Charts" 3A). A former guest on the major networks' news and talk shows, Denver is further recognized for his commercials advocating the planting of trees and the sales of Raisin Bran cereal.

Other professional venues Denver has explored are films and books. Denver's only film credit was his appearance with George Burns in the 1977 hit Oh, God!. Although he was offered the lead part in An Officer and a Gentleman, which Richard Gere subsequently helped make a hit, Denver did not think the role was right for him at the time. "I made a very big mistake not to pursue films more seriously after the success of Oh, God!, so now it's as if I have to break into film all over again," he acknowledged in 1991 (Brady 18). Though he has not acted in a motion picture since then, the 1993 Son-in-Law contains a scene in which star Pauly Shore lip syncs Denver's version of "Thank God I'm a Country Boy." Denver released in 1990 his first book Alfie: The Christmas Tree, intended for children, and further displayed his writing ability in a USA Today opinions piece that same year. Denver reports that his autobiography is due for release in 1994 (Hearts in Harmony 32.3 2).

While Denver's singles failure has contributed to his fading mainstream popularity, his social activism has affected his success too. Denver has been an activist since the 1960s. As of 1981, he held advisory positions with the

Windstar, [Michio] Kushi, Living Music, and Human Dolphin foundations; Cousteau and Wilderness societies; est [Erhard Seminar Training], "an educational corporation founded by Werner Erhard" (Hearts in Harmony 31.2 50); Hunger Project; Friends of the Earth; National Space Institute; Save the Children; World Wildlife, Environmental Defense, and U. S. Skiers Educational funds; Alaska Coalition; Sierra Club; and Environmental Action (Sing with 1982 43). "I have a vision of a better world out there, and I recognize it's going to take all of us working together to do that," comments Denver. "Everything I've tried to do in my life and in my work has been directed toward bringing people together, to work together on these issues" (Lustig 20). Denver's involvement in causes has reduced his time for touring, yet Ron Deutschendorf claims that his brother is aware of his career direction. "John and I talked a long time ago about how he could use his tool of communication," Ron states. "It becomes a responsibility. You can't turn it off. John's record career has given us the financial ability to do certain things, and we must trust our consciences to guide us sometimes" (Birnbach 5). And Denver maintains that he is content with his choices, in spite of the disappointment:

I think there's the music business, and I think that that's where it's been most frustrating and especially over these last few years. I think I've earned the right to do what I want to do--to record the songs

that I want to record. . . . You know, it's frustrating where I can obviously see that it has cost me. You know, people think I'm not serious about my career because I give so much other time to these other things. And they misread that in ways that I can't comprehend, quite frankly. (Interview, Klemt)

Denver's efforts have not gone unnoticed, nevertheless. He was presented in December 1993 the Albert Schweitzer award for his dedication to music and humanity. He became the first nonclassical musician to receive the award (Hearts in Harmony 32.3 25)

The entertainer's early involvement was most evident in the fight against world hunger. Jimmy Carter named Denver to the president's Commission on World Hunger. Consistent with his fight against hunger, Denver converted to the macrobiotic dietary principles of Michio Kushi during 1980 and has since supported benefits for the Brooklyn-based Kushi Institute. Denver's service on the presidential commission inspired him to help found The Hunger Project with Werner Erhard of est, and he was elected to the organization's Board of Directors in 1981 ("Elected" 20). He has appeared at legislative proceedings about hunger and has performed at functions raising money to end hunger. For example, at the 1981 World Hunger symposium at Utah State University, he sang "I Want to Live."

One more international issue to which Denver has devoted

himself is peace. He performed in "An Evening of Peace" during 1982 to promote world peace. Singers Jimmy Buffett and Judy Collins were among those to take part in the event, held at the Colorado capitol. Denver went on a ten-day tour of the Soviet Union during 1984, returning to say that he was going to ask President Ronald Reagan "to consider a summit meeting in Moscow on world hunger, nuclear disarmament and peace" ("Denver Will"). During 1986 Denver became the first Western performer to perform at a benefit for victims of the Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster (Roura and Poster 13). "I'm the best known Western performer in the Soviet Union and China. I have sung for world leaders, presidents of nations, prime ministers and premiers," he said in 1986 (Birnbach 5). His singing at the October concert in Kiev, Soviet Union, was the third time he had traveled to the Soviet Union since 1984 (Roura and Poster 13). The previous year he had a twelve-day concert tour there. Also during 1986 he wrote the antiwar song "Let Us Begin (What Are We Making Weapons For?)" that is featured on his One World album.

Additionally, Denver has been a spokesman for causes, particularly environmental ones, closer to home. He founded an educational-research organization, the Windstar Foundation, in 1976. Located on 1,000 acres in Snowmass, Colorado, the facility has a mission "to inspire individuals to make responsible choices and take direct personal actions to achieve a peaceful, environmentally sustainable future"

("Dear Windstar" 33). Its employees and volunteers work to develop solutions to problems such as world hunger, to incorporate energy conservation plans, and to create models for scientific and technological progress. Educational workshops deal with gardening, energy, communications, meditation, and aikido, and in the past have been conducted in conjunction with the University of Colorado School of Environmental Design ("Windstar 1978-1982" 44). Among its practical applications are agricultural and aquacultural facilities, including greenhouses and wind generators, and projects such as planting trees. The foundation has local chapters called Windstar Connection Groups and organizes the Choices for the Future Symposium, whose host is Denver. Begun in 1986, the conference brings together all sorts of international leaders and citizens to address a different theme each year. Denver indicates that Windstar seeks "to demonstrate clearly--politically, environmentally, economically, and socially--the benefits of new and appropriate technologies and lifestyle alternatives is a project worthy of everybody's commitment" ("Windstar"). Similarly, Denver helped found the Aspen Institute on Global Change, a group of leading scientists who gather each summer to work to save the global environment ("Denver Aims").

The welfare of Alaska has been a prime concern as well. He sang about Alaska during a 1977 House of Representatives hearing and spoke in favor of the Alaskan wilderness bill during a 1980 presidential reception in the nation's capitol.

His 1980 album Autograph contains several songs about Alaska and its people, including "American Child" and "Whalebones and Crosses." He appeared in the television shows John Denver in Alaska: The American Child and Higher Ground, the latter of which has him cast in the lead role as a FBI agent who becomes an Alaskan bush pilot. His 1990 Higher Ground album features "Alaska and Me," about a bush pilot's wife.

Regarding other national causes, Denver has long been a supporter of NASA. He helped start NASA's civilian space program (Berry 3) and lobbied to become the first civilian aboard a space shuttle mission in 1986. That distinction went to Christa McAuliffe, who with six others was killed in the 1986 Challenger disaster. "I had virtually been told that first flight was mine until President Reagan said he was gonna send a teacher first. NASA didn't turn me down," he mentions (Oermann). Denver honored those killed by serving as host at a memorial concert during which he sang "Flying for Me," a tune he composed in the memory of the Challenger astronauts and NASA personnel. The concert raised \$50,000 for the victims' families ("A Song"). NASA awarded Denver a public service medal in recognition of his efforts to "increase awareness of space exploration by people of the world" (Don Hall 2B). When NASA officials decided to suspend the civilian program after the Challenger accident, Denver contemplated in 1988 going on a Soviet space flight. "The Soviets asked me if I would like to fly with them," he reports. "I did not go to them" (Oermann). He disapproved

of the \$10 million the Soviets wanted him to pay, saying:

It's not ethical and it makes it look like whoever can come up with \$10 million can fly in space. . . . I want to do something up there. I'd like to do a radio program for the week I'm up there for children all over the world and also host a television show. (Berry 3)

Certainly, Denver has led a full life since becoming a successful recording artist during the early 1970s. Without letting the cost interfere, he has incorporated his personal and professional roots into his career as a singer, actor, and activist. Even though his mainstream popularity has faded, he remains a particularly significant personality in the music and television industries and a notable contributor to the world's betterment.

Notes

¹According to David Baskerville, the "most comprehensive market research in the record industry is carried on (or commissioned)" by the Recording Industry Association of America (260). Adam White indicates that the RIAA standard for gold certification has changed for the album. He says:

From 1958 through 1974, the minimum requirement for a gold album was \$1 million in sales at manufacturer wholesale prices, based on 33 1/3 percent of the list price for each album. From January 1, 1975, an additional requirement was that an album sold a minimum of 500,000 copies. (3)

²Like that for an album, the gold certification for a single has changed. White notes that

from 1958 to 1988, a single had to sell a minimum of one million copies to qualify for gold certification. From January 1, 1989, the gold-single certification was cut from a minimum sale of one million to a minimum sale of 500,000 copies--the criterion in effect today. (3)

³The platinum certification for an album has remained the same since January 1, 1976, when it was introduced (White 3). It "requires that an album has a minimum sale of one million copies, with at least \$2 million in manufacturer

wholesale value, based on 33 1/3 percent of the list price of each album" (White 3).

Chapter III

Lyrics during the 1970s

Denver's greatest commercial success occurred during the 1970s. He first established himself in country music, garnering three number one singles (Albert and Hoffmann 92) and the Country Music Association's highest honor, Entertainer of the Year, by 1975. His songs and performance style contributed to his initial recognition as a country artist. Throughout his career, he has shown a preference for love, nature, and story songs that relate to the life he knows and cherishes in Colorado, where he has lived since 1970. He sang about family, home, and outdoors life, topics that scholars John Buckley and Charles Gritzner say are prominent in country music. In addition to the lyrics, Denver's musical accompaniment was characteristic of country because he relied on instruments such as the guitar, banjo, dobro, fiddle, mandolin, and dulcimer when recording his earliest albums. During a 1993 performance, Denver introduced a song from his 1974 Back Home Again album by mentioning that "it was my country album. . . . There was not an electric instrument on it" (A Christmas Together). According to Everett Corbin, "The guitar, fiddle, and banjo are essentially the basic musical instruments in country music" (25).

Denver's music tended to remain primarily country until the end of the 1970s, even though by 1975 he had already

gained acceptance on the pop and easy listening charts. In fact, he finished 1975 as Billboard's biggest-selling artist in country, pop, and easy listening (Bornino). Joel Whitburn, who has compiled numerous books of Billboard hits, often includes rankings of artists' achievements during particular decades. He places Denver seventh of the top twenty pop artists during the 1970s (1955-1985 481) and fortieth of the top two hundred pop artists from 1955 to 1985 (477).¹ Compared to his early work, the content and music of his new material had changed considerably. The 1976 Spirit, Denver's first album after receiving the CMA award, features some country, such as the remake of "San Antonio Rose" and the narrative "Hitchhiker." But his version of the popular standard "Polka Dots and Moonbeams," performed by the legendary Bing Crosby decades before, and "Pegasus," which he sings with a children's choir, are not traditional country. Nonetheless, the album was well-received in the country industry and advanced to the top of the Cash Box chart (Hoffmann and Albert 48). Yet the album's success on the pop chart, where it was a Billboard number seven hit, only added to Denver's crossover appeal (Whitburn, 1955-1985 99). For the 1978 John Denver, he went to the extreme with a rock sound that has not been duplicated in any other of his albums. Singles such as the remake "Johnny B. Goode" and "Downhill Stuff" are among those with the loudest, fastest rock beat. Even with the dramatic sound change, the album was a top ten Cash Box country effort (Hoffmann and Albert

47) and top twenty-five Billboard pop release (Whitburn, 1955-1985 99).

Despite becoming more diverse, Denver continued to write love, nature, and story songs, all of which helped propel him to his mainstream popularity. Except for the 1975 "Thank God I'm a Country Boy," he has solely or partially written the biggest hits during his four-decade career. Typically the love songs are about a woman, usually a former or current partner. Years before the success of ballads such as "Annie's Song," Denver had recorded a number of love songs that were not as popular, at least not upon their initial release. He first recorded "My Sweet Lady" for his 1971 Poems, Prayers and Promises album. Even though it did not become a hit single then, it reached number forty-four on the Cash Box pop chart in 1977 after Denver included it on his Greatest Hits Volume 2 album that year (Hoffmann, 1950-1981 158). According to Denver, "My Sweet Lady [sic] is an absolute love song. . . . My Sweet Lady [sic] seems to be one of the most popular of my songs for lovers" (Okun, Anthology 54). Other love songs start out as a tribute to one person and then assume a broader application, whether to family, nature, or life. The nature and story songs usually reflect personal experiences or realizations, albeit through the use of a first-person speaker or third-person characters.

The following are a representative selection of Denver's love, nature, and story songs, respectively, during the 1970s. The nine songs have been chosen because they are

either among his most successful recordings or among his personal favorites. They are lyrics he has written or co-written and represent his earliest and latest music during the decade because they appear on his 1971 Poem, Prayers and Promises, 1972 Rocky Mountain High, 1973 Farewell Andromeda, 1973 John Denver's Greatest Hits, 1974 Back Home Again, 1975 Windsong, and 1978 John Denver albums.

"For Baby (For Bobbie)"

One of Denver's early love songs that was initially written for one woman is "For Baby (For Bobbie)." He wrote the tune in 1965, and it is featured on his 1972 Rocky Mountain High album. Although the song did not reach the Cash Box singles charts, it is the type of love tribute that would later bring Denver significant success. Denver says the song, the first he ever wrote and recorded, was intended for a girl "I was in love with once upon a time when I was first starting out in the world with my music" (Okun, Anthology 88). The song exemplifies the way Denver has written throughout his career. Denver claims that he writes "out of my own experiences, out of my own emotions, out of my own observations or opinions, out of my own reflections of myself and the life around me" (Interview, Klemt).

Denver begins by professing his love to an unidentified "you" in "I'll do anything to keep you satisfied / I'll love you more than anybody can" (3-4). His words are an ethical appeal because they depict him as a moral character, which

has been important to orators since the Greek and Roman times. Rhetorician Aristotle proposes that "we trust good men more and sooner, as a rule, about everything" (Benson 57), and Quintilian states, "The good man will without doubt more often say what is true and honourable" (Benson 119). Because he is openly speaking about a woman dear to him, Denver appears to be a man of goodness and honesty. Denver indicates that although he "care[s] more that people remember the songs," he adds, "If they remember me, I hope it's more than just as a singer, you know, the man that I am and the songwriter" (Interview, Klemt). Moreover, Denver's closeness to the subject benefits him and his song. Marjorie Boulton says oratory "is certainly to be considered as spoken prose . . . and if it does not come naturally off the tongue it is worse than useless" (30).

Denver's saying, "I'll do anything to keep you satisfied / I'll love you more than anybody can" (3-4), is also a pathetic appeal because it moves the audience. According to Quintilian, there are "three aims which the orator must always have in view; he must instruct, move and charm his hearers" (Benson 143). Denver says he has always tried to affect his audience members:

I know that in the shared experience
of listening to a song is that people
do go through profound changes. . . .
I always felt . . . that I wanted to do
more than entertain people, that I

wanted to touch people. And that has
been the source of everything I've done
musically (Interview, Klemt)

In communicating his love for this woman in "For Baby," then, Denver indicates that he will give and take in the relationship because he will offer comfort "when you're feelin' down" (9) and "cling to the warmth of your hand" (2). Regardless of the situation, he vows to "do anything to help you understand" (19) and to "share with you all the happiness I've found" (11). He speaks of unconditional love, a favorable ideal for many. His directness enhances the song's appeal because listeners can easily relate to his feelings, an approach that classical orators advocate. Quintilian identifies "clearness as the first essential of a good style; there must be propriety in our words, their order must be straightforward . . ." (Benson 221).

Denver's commitment is obvious, but the way he writes about it sets a precedent for his songs into the 1990s. Denver immediately places the couple in nature, with "I'll walk in the rain by your side" (1). He says nature will pay homage to Bobbie, as he will do in his actions and words. Together, Denver and nature will celebrate his love for her. "And the wind will whisper your name to me / Little birds will sing along in time / Leaves will bow down when you walk by," he states (5-7). Because his feelings for Bobbie and nature overlap, Denver suggests that they both mean much to him. Yet, by stressing the way he and nature react, Denver

describes an interaction between the two, almost as if each knows what the other is doing. He understands, after all, that the wind is whispering Bobbie's name. This mutuality is even more evident in his claim, "And I'll sing you the songs of the rainbow" (13), which indicates that he knows the language of nature. The English literary movement of romanticism "often sees in nature a revelation of Truth" (Holman and Harmon 416), so his technique of connecting nature to love resembles that of English romanticist William Wordsworth, who suggests that "love of nature leads to love of Man" (Gill xviii). The nature references are consciously incorporated, Denver notes. "It's not that I try to use any specific techniques other than the degree I think I use images of nature in my music," he comments about his writing style. "And I think that that's part of the reason my music works the way that it does for people" (Interview, Klemt). Denver's efforts to convey his feelings about love and nature are typical of country music, according to scholars. Early in Denver's solo career, James Irvine and Walter Kirkpatrick indicated that he fit the country singer image because he tends to "romanticize rural life" and performs songs of "simple, basic, homespun pleasures" (284). The way Denver places the individual, Bobbie, at the center of life is characteristic of the romantic movement as well.

"For Baby" does not have the numerous prose style conventions that distinguish his latter lyrics. However, the tune was his first recorded composition and does include some

techniques that become prominent in subsequent material. Most notably, the song has anaphora, repetition at the beginning of lines (Boulton 164). Repetition has long been a rhetorical commonplace to convey meaning. "Our aim must be not to put him [the listener] in a position to understand our argument, but to force him to understand it," Quintilian argues. "Consequently we shall frequently repeat anything which we think the judge has failed to take in as he should" (Benson 222). Nine of the twenty-four lines start with "I'll," placing the emphasis on Denver and what he will do to be with Bobbie. Yet the technique also creates the kind of parallelism that is only successful in oratory. The other notable convention is personification, for Denver describes nature as behaving the way humans do. "And the wind will whisper your name to me," he states, indicating that the wind has a voice and ability to communicate to another at an appropriate time, such as when the pair is walking in the rain (5). The mention of the wind's voice is particularly important because Denver uses it throughout his career, right up until the title track from the 1990 The Flower That Shattered the Stone. Denver also notes that "Leaves will bow down when you walk by" (7). Just as the wind seems to be able to control its voice, the leaves appear to decide their responses to passers-by. The line is an example of the pathetic fallacy because "it is the carrying over to inanimate objects of the moods and passions of a human being" (Holman and Harmon

347). Elsewhere, he cites the "songs of the rainbow" (13), so nature again has a voice.

Denver, John. "For Baby (For Bobbie)." Rocky Mountain High.

RCA, AQL1-4731, 1972.

I'll walk in the rain by your side

I'll cling to the warmth of your hand

I'll do anything to keep you satisfied

I'll love you more than anybody can

5 And the wind will whisper your name to me

 Little birds will sing along in time

 Leaves will bow down when you walk by

 And morning bells will chime

I'll be there when you're feelin' down

10 To kiss away the tears if you cry

I'll share with you all the happiness I've found

A reflection of the love in your eyes

 And I'll sing you the songs of the rainbow

 A whisper of the joy that is mine

15 And leaves will bow down when you walk by

 And morning bells will chime

I'll walk in the rain by your side

I'll cling to the warmth of your tiny hand

I'll do anything to help you understand

20 And I'll love you more than anybody can

 And the wind will whisper your name to me

 Little birds will sing along in time

Leaves will bow down when you walk by
And morning bells will chime

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"Annie's Song"

Contrary to "For Baby," "Annie's Song" was a huge commercial success for Denver. He wrote the song in ten and one-half minutes for his wife at the time, Ann Martell. Off the Back Home Again album, "Annie's Song" reached number five on the Cash Box country chart in 1974 (Albert and Hoffmann 91) and number one on the Cash Box pop (Hoffmann, 1950-1981 157-58) and Billboard easy listening charts (Whitburn, 1961-1974 28). Frequently played or performed at weddings, the tune is "popular all over the world," Denver claims (Interview, Klemt). The song clearly shows Denver's love for Annie, but according to Denver, it applies to others too:

It's great to sing it now, because I can sing it not only to Annie, but I sing it to everybody. I sing it to people--to them, not just for them, but to them, to let them know that they too fill me.

(Okun, Anthology 150)

Because Denver and Annie have been divorced since 1983, the song seems to apply more to his listeners now, especially because they can easily represent the "you" to whom he pays tribute. "I try to take my experiences, and I try to share them in as universal a way as possible," Denver notes. "So

even a song like 'Rocky Mountain High,' which is so much about Colorado, can have meaning to somebody someplace else in the world" (Interview, Klemm). Indeed, with its broad application, "Annie's Song" still receives radio airplay and is a standard in Denver's live performances (A Christmas Together) twenty years after its chart success.

The text of the song exists in at least two printed versions. The text on the Back Home Again liner notes has two stanzas. Subsequent reprints of the lyrics, such as on Denver's Greatest Hits Volume 2 liner notes or in Denver anthologies, feature three stanzas, the first and third of which are the same. For this study, the song will be analyzed as it first appeared, on the Back Home Again album. The song begins, "You fill up my senses, like a night in a forest / Like the mountains in Springtime, like a walk in the rain" (1-2). The lines describe how Annie's effect on Denver is all-encompassing. Denver appropriately compares her to nature because he cherishes it and her so much. In fact, her presence makes his life complete because she does touch him in many ways. She provides a calmness "like a sleepy blue ocean" (3) or creates a turbulence "like a storm on the desert" (3). Whether favorably or not, she fills up his life enough to have him respond, "come fill me again" (4).

Whereas the first stanza stresses Annie's effect on him, the second focuses on Denver's desire to reciprocate her love. "Come let me love you, let me give my life to you," begins the stanza (5). Denver pledges his love for her yet

becomes even more open in his devotion by professing, "Let me drown in your laughter, let me die in your arms" (6). The juxtaposition of laughter and death is quite extreme but illustrates the range of the writer's emotion and desire to be with her at both the lightest and darkest moments. At the time Denver wrote the song, at least, he appears to have wanted to be with Annie forever. He said in 1979, "When I die, if they say I was Annie's husband and Zachary John and Anna Kate's father, boy, that's enough for me to be remembered by" (Martin, "It Wasn't Easy" 71). Denver's intention is traditional and the love theme typical for country music, claim George Lewis ("Duellin'") and Jimmie Rogers. His sincerity and compassion seem genuine, for he says, "let me give my life to you" (5) and "let me always be with you" (7). The statements are ethical and pathetic appeals, respectively, because they make Denver seem credible and touch the listener.

The style convention most obvious in "Annie's Song" is anaphora. The first and fourth, and second and third, lines in each stanza begin with the same word, thereby creating continuity and emphasis. Coherence is further apparent because certain clauses are parallel, such as "like a walk in the rain. / Like a storm on the desert" (2-3). These lines of the first stanza also have epanodos, "the same word or phrase repeated at the beginning and middle or middle and end of a sentence" (Boulton 164). Each clause begins with "like," thus adding to the continuity. And the middle lines

of the second stanza contain the same two words, "let me," at the beginning of each clause. Because the emphasis here is on Denver's desire to be with and to give to Annie, the phrase stresses his devotion. Along with repetition, the simile is present. Annie's presence resembles that of "the mountains in Springtime" (2) or "a sleepy blue ocean" (3), again connecting nature and humanity. The simile adds sensory appeal as well in the sight of nature, touch of rainfall, and sound of laughter.

Denver, John. "Annie's Song." Back Home Again. RCA, AQL1-0548, 1974.

You fill up my senses like a night in a forest
Like the mountains in Springtime, like a walk in the
rain.

Like a storm on the desert, like a sleepy blue ocean
You fill up my senses, come fill me again.

5 Come let me love you, let me give my life to you
Let me drown in your laughter, let me die in your arms.
Let me lay down beside you, let me always be with you
Come let me love you, come love me again.

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"You're So Beautiful"

Like "For Baby" and "Annie's Song," "You're So Beautiful" was written primarily with a particular woman in

mind. Off the 1978 album John Denver, it was not a Cash Box or Billboard single. Denver says the song

resulted from looking at my wife and my
children, looking at the world, our beautiful
mother Earth, and looking at the spirit
of life and people everywhere. It really
is a love song to all of that--to being
alive, to sharing this life with you, to
interacting with you. (Okun, Anthology 328)

And the lyrics fit Denver's explanation because one initially assumes that he is addressing a person. However, the content is ambiguous enough for the wider interpretations to be feasible, mainly because the song does not immediately specify the subject of Denver's affection the way the former love songs do.

The beginning verse features recollection of "a dream in someone's eyes / A dream that's like a promise meant to be" (2-3). Denver seems to be relishing his present happiness by remembering the past, how he arrived at this moment. It only becomes clear that he is thinking about "you" when he says, "If I've ever been there / It's when you were with me" (6-7). Based on his thoughts when writing the song, the "you" is wife Annie, at least originally. Denver makes it known that his subject has a special place in his heart. His feelings are noticeable in the chorus, which is indented for emphasis:

You're so beautiful
I can't believe my eyes

Each time I see you again
You're so beautiful
That I'm in paradise
Each time I see you again. (8-13)

The physical presence of Annie brings him considerable happiness. He later mentions "true love's eyes / Shining in the night" (19-20). He places her in nature because he "remember[s] some hidden valley" (14), "alpine meadows" (16), and "the hill" (18) before recalling the look in her eyes. As in "For Baby" and more so in "Annie's Song," Denver links his loved one and nature. Denver even becomes extreme in that he says, "And if paradise is everything you see / Then the place you must be coming from is ecstasy" (27-28). The latter lines are indented more than the normal indentation for the chorus, suggesting that they are most important and an emotional climax. The final verse, which ends the song, reaffirms his affection because he repeats the lines, "I want to be with you again / I just need to love you again" (36-37). The straightforward expression portrays him as an honorable speaker, one who has a positive affect on his audience.

Although the "you" appears to be a person, for the "you" is "with" (7) Denver, other people or even nature can also be with him. Beginning with the first verse, he cites paradise as being "when you were with me" (7). By the time "You're So Beautiful" was released in 1979, Denver already had charted with several songs, including "Sunshine on My Shoulders" and

"Rocky Mountain High," that mention nature's ability to create euphoria. Here, then, he is consistent with his thoughts about being in nature. The broader interpretation is further likely because Denver refers mostly to nature in the second verse. He recalls "some hidden valley" (14), "alpine meadows" (16), and "the hill" (18). Right afterward he repeats the chorus, inserting, "And if paradise is everything you see / Then the place you must be coming from is ecstasy" (27-28). The nature "with" (7) Denver has an unparalleled beauty that gives him his most intense feeling of appreciation.

Stylistically, "You're So Beautiful" lacks the variety of conventions present in "For Baby" and "Annie's Song." The most prevalent standard is repetition because the six-line chorus appears three times, and within the chorus two lines are repeated. The final verse, additionally, has two lines that are repeated. The repetition makes the song rhythmic, for the lines are parallel, and emphatic. Each line in the final verse ends with "again," stressing Denver's desire to maintain his relationship. Unlike in the earlier love songs, though, Denver indents the chorus for more emphasis.

Denver, John. "You're So Beautiful." John Denver.

RCA, AQL1-3075, 1978.

Born on a quiet morning

Just a dream in someone's eyes

A dream that's like a promise meant to be

Giving rise to speculation
5 On a place called paradise
If I've ever been there
It's when you were with me
 You're so beautiful
 I can't believe my eyes
10 Each time I see you again
 You're so beautiful
 That I'm in paradise
 Each time I see you again
I remember some hidden valley
15 Where the skies are never still
And alpine meadows burn in the evening light
I remember the path to glory
And the way around the hill
I remember true love's eyes
20 Shining in the night
 You're so beautiful
 I can't believe my eyes
 Each time I see you again
 You're so beautiful
25 That I'm in paradise
 Each time I see you again
 And if paradise is everything you see
 Then the place you must be coming from is ecstasy
 You're so beautiful
30 That I can't believe my eyes

Each time I see you again
 You're so beautiful
 That I'm in paradise
 Each time I see you again

35 Just want to see you again
 I want to be with you again
 I just need to love you again
 Just wanna touch you again
 I just need to love you again

40 I want to be with you again

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In addition to love, Denver's songs feature nature themes that go beyond the mere references to nature in other types of tunes. Whether he is recounting memories of time in Colorado, Alaska, or Australia, the latter two of which have also become favorite locales for him, he describes his experiences in and observations of the outdoors. "Aspenglow," from his 1970 Take Me to Tomorrow album, is a tune Denver has performed during concerts through 1993 (A Christmas Together). His thoughts about the meaning of Aspenglow help one understand why nature has been such a fond topic of his. Denver identifies Aspenglow as

a sense of family, of living here,
 of being able to appreciate the little
 subtleties which are so often missed;
 sunlight through the pine, the warmth

of winter wine, sitting down and having
 a glass of wine with someone at a picnic
 on the side of a mountain. (Okun, Anthology 25)

He wrote "Wrangell Mountain Song" from his 1976 Spirit album and "American Child" from his 1980 Autograph about his time in Alaska. Denver lobbied for the Alaskan land bill, which when approved added "104.3 million acres" to the nation's wilderness system ("Ah, Wilderness!" 28), and dedicates "American Child" as well as Alaskan tunes written by others, to "all the people in Alaska . . . the Eskimos, Aleuts and all the men and women who emigrated from the Lower 48 to make that wild place their home" (Autograph liner notes). His 1988 Higher Ground contains "Alaska and Me," which Denver performed during ESPN's Fly Fishing the World telecast of his fishing trip to the state (Hearts in Harmony 32.3 45). Therefore, his experiences in nature tend to be sources for his songwriting.

"Rhymes and Reasons"

One of Denver's earliest nature tunes is "Rhymes and Reasons," off the 1969 album of the same name, his first for RCA. The tune did not reach the Cash Box and Billboard singles chart but is one of Denver's favorites because as he states,

it is, I think, one of the best songs
 I've ever written. . . . It comes from
 a very real and consistent thought that

the children and the flowers are my sisters
 and my brothers. I do not feel separate
 from any aspect or form of life. . . .
 I intend to lead people to the mountains;
 I intend to lead them back to earth, back
 to the spirit. (Okun, Anthology 9)

Denver's preference for the song showed in that he included it on his 1973 Greatest Hits album and opted to omit "Friends with You" and "Farewell Andromeda," both Cash Box (Hoffmann, 1950-1981 158) and Billboard (Whitburn, 1955-1986 140) pop singles from earlier albums.

The lyrics convey a desire to promote people's oneness with nature as a respite from uncertainty and dissolution. He begins by referring to "sadness" (1), "fear" (3), and "dreams that have escaped you" (5), which suggest a feeling of loss by the generic "you." The person(s) to whom Denver addresses "wonder where we're going / Where's the rhyme and where's the reason" (9-10). Realizing this inability to make sense of life, Denver proposes looking to children and nature for guidance: "It is here we must begin / To seek the wisdom of the children / And the graceful way of flowers in the wind" (12-14). The children and nature are to provide insight that eludes the uncertain one, again characteristic of Wordsworth in that the universe is "alive and vitally connected with the human mind; awakened consciousness leads to an awakened moral sense" (Gill xviii). The lines are an early indication of the faith Denver has held in young people

and in the environment up until the present. For instance, his commitment is apparent in his Windstar efforts to promote a "peaceful, environmentally sustainable future" ("Dear Windstar" 33). In the song Denver actually places much faith in children and nature to be significant forces in daily living when he describes a scenario in which "the cities start to crumble / And the towers fall around us" (23-24). Whether natural or man-made events, the crumbling of cities represents gloom and failure. But Denver believes the children and nature will make a difference, for

. they shall lead us
 By the hand and by the heart
 And they will comfort you and me
 In their innocence and trusting
 They will teach us to be free. (28-32)

Although the children lack the experience of their elders (31), they have other qualities that Denver thinks can benefit adults. Their "innocence and trusting" (31) enable them to lead naturally, mainly because they do not know to behave otherwise. Actually, their naturalness makes them seem "graceful . . . in the wind" (14) the way flowers are. Denver says they will be instructive during difficult times, even intimating that they will help those trapped in the drudgery of everyday existence to realize another side of life.

In contrast to the song's pessimistic start, the piece ends on an encouraging note. Denver urges people to "Come

and stand behind us / We can find a better way" (39-40), a pathetic appeal. He believes the "promise of the future" (21) lies in the youth and in nature because they will provide some sense and relief to an often complicated and challenging society. Children and nature have a "loveliness" (17) that "Would clear a cloudy day" (18), he suggests. Denver relies on sensory appeals to indicate their ability to affect those around when he cites "the music of the mountains / And the colors of the rainbow" (19-20). These "blessing[s] for today" (22) are naturally soothing, ones capable of brightening the cloudiest of days and perspectives. The song has a political theme because Denver advocates children and nature as saving graces in society. Given its composition date, it seems to be influenced from Denver's time as a Mitchell Trio member. "I started being a little bit more socially and politically aware," he says about his time with the group (James Martin 33).

"Rhymes and Reasons" contains several style conventions, particularly repetition, that enhance Denver's message.

Denver's obvious repetition is in the key lines:

For the children and the flowers
 Are my sisters and my brothers
 Their laughter and their loveliness
 Would clear a cloudy day. (15-18)

Anaphora occurs with the coordinating conjunction "and" because six of the first ten lines begin with it. The use of the conjunction gives the song a coherence. Robert Miles and

others suggest that "Anaphora creates a compelling sense of rhythm" (166). Epanodos, in repetition at the beginning and middle of a sentence (Boulton 164), gives the song parallelism. Among the lines of symmetry created by such repetition are "Where's the rhyme and where's the reason" (10) and "By the hand and by the heart (29). The parallelism is significant, moreover, because classical orators note that "symmetry in the form reflects the 'vigour of thought'" (Graves 171). Besides the repetition, the song has metaphor in "For the children and the flowers / Are my sisters and my brothers" (15-16). Metaphor, "the most important figure of speech, and the commonest" (Boulton 153), becomes a more frequent standard in later Denver lyrics. Denver usually compares humans to elements in nature the way he has done here, thereby promoting nature and humanity as a family. Simile is evident in that the children's effect is as positive as that of nature. Their behavior and beauty (17) are "like the music of the mountains" (19). The children and nature appeal to the senses because they can "clear a cloudy day" (18) and are "like the music of the mountains" (19).

Denver, John. "Rhymes and Reasons." John Denver's Greatest Hits. RCA, AQL1-0374, 1973.

So you speak to me of sadness
 And the coming of the winter
 Fear that is within you now
 That seems to never end

5 And the dreams that have escaped you
And a hope that you've forgotten
And you tell me that you need me now
And you want to be my friend
And you wonder where we're going
10 Where's the rhyme and where's the reason
And it's you cannot accept
It is here we must begin
To seek the wisdom of the children
And the graceful way of flowers in the wind
15 For the children and the flowers
Are my sisters and my brothers
Their laughter and their loveliness
Would clear a cloudy day
Like the music of the mountains
20 And the colors of the rainbow
They're a promise of the future
And a blessing for today
Though the cities start to crumble
And the towers fall around us
25 The sun is slowly fading
And it's colder than the sea
It is written, from the desert
To the mountains they shall lead us
By the hand and by the heart
30 And they will comfort you and me
In their innocence and trusting

They will teach us to be free

For the children and the flowers

Are my sisters and my brothers

35 Their laughter and their loveliness

Would clear a cloudy day

And the song that I am singing

Is a prayer to non-believers

Come and stand beside us

40 We can find a better way

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In Okun, Milton, ed. John Denver's Greatest Hits.

Piano Vocal songbook. Port Chester, NY: Cherry Lane,
1977. 33.

"Sunshine on My Shoulders"

While "Rhymes and Reasons" is a relatively unheralded Denver composition, "Sunshine on My Shoulders" remains one of his most popular songs throughout the world. It was featured with other Denver compositions for the 1973 television movie Sunshine, which was about a terminally ill woman. The song became a number one hit on the Cash Box pop (Hoffmann, 1950-1981 158) and Billboard easy listening charts (Whitburn, 1961-1974 28). Moreover, it was a number sixty-nine Cash Box country hit (Albert and Hoffmann 92). Just one example of the song's lasting appeal is that it was the number one single in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for three months during

late 1981, seven years after its chart success in America, and was the theme song for one of that country's soap operas ("Keeping" 4).

The nature tune offers a simple message--sunshine brings joy to the speaker. Because of Denver's interest in nature and outdoors since childhood, however, it seems clear that Denver is the speaker who views sunshine so highly. His use of first-person language actually heightens the message because it adds an individual touch to the song. Yet the sun's effect on the speaker represents a pathetic appeal, too, because it persuades listeners to recognize that the sun's presence affects people's emotions in general. Denver indicates that "Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy" (1) and "almost always makes me high" (4). Denver's technique here is typical of his writing even to the present because he defines nature with a drug reference. The beauty that the sun represents and creates enhances its appeal. When not shining on his shoulders (1), "Sunshine on the water looks so lovely" (3). The sun literally has more significant impact because Denver says, "Sunshine in my eyes can make me cry" (2). The sun has such special meaning, in fact, that Denver wants it to be a part of others' lives, evident when he notes, "If I had a wish / That I could wish for you / I'd make a wish the sun shine all the while" (18-20). While less clear in its meaning, Denver earlier suggests, "If I had a day / That I could give you / I'd give to you a day just like today" (5-7). Nonetheless, because he has previously

stressed the goodness in nature's light, he appears to be speaking about a sunny day. Apparently Denver believes that the sun--nature, really--can bring others the same happiness it brings him. Denver's disposition, then, is an ethical appeal because it prompts the audience to perceive him as a wholesome individual who wants to share his happiness.

Though the song's message is simple, it is enhanced by literary conventions that appeared in previous singles such as "Rhymes and Reasons." What is first obvious to the listener is the repetition, which is even more noticeable when one reads the lyrics. Denver does not limit the repetition to the chorus here and in other songs, nevertheless. Boulton claims, "It is natural and usual, in common speech, to repeat things for emphasis or emotional effect" (164). Four lines starting with "sunshine" begin the song, and the same lines are given twice more. Additionally, two stanzas have two lines each that begin with "If," "That," and "I'd," so the song contains considerable anaphora. The song has anadiplosis, "in which the last words of one sentence or phrase are repeated at the beginning of the next" (Boulton 164). Denver writes in the second and fourth stanzas, respectively, "If I had a day / That I could give you / I'd give to you a day just like today" (5-7), and "If I had a tale / That I could tell you / I'd tell a tale sure to make you smile" (15-17). The repetition and parallel lines within these stanzas (lines 5 and 8, and 15 and 18) and from stanza to stanza (6 and 16, and 9 and 19) create more

consistency for the listener, who can recognize the patterns without much difficulty. Lines of alliteration contribute a positive tone by adding a smoothness to the language, shown in "I'd sing a song to make you feel this way" (10) and "Sunshine almost always makes me high" (4).

Denver, John. "Sunshine on My Shoulders." Poems, Prayers and Promises. RCA, AFL1-4499, 1971.

Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy
 Sunshine in my eyes can make me cry
 Sunshine on the water looks so lovely
 Sunshine almost always makes me high

5 If I had a day
 That I could give you
 I'd give to you a day just like today
 If I had a song
 That I could sing for you
 10 I'd sing a song to make you feel this way

Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy
 Sunshine in my eyes can make me cry
 Sunshine on the water looks so lovely
 Sunshine almost always makes me high

15 If I had a tale
 That I could tell you

I'd tell a tale sure to make you smile
 If I had a wish
 That I could wish for you
 20 I'd make a wish the sun shine all the while

Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy
 Sunshine in my eyes can make me cry
 Sunshine on the water looks so lovely
 Sunshine almost always makes me high
 25 Sunshine almost all the time makes me high

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In Okun, Milton, ed. John Denver's Greatest Hits.

Piano Vocal songbook. Port Chester, NY: Cherry Lane,
 1977. 28.

"Windsong"

One other song that typifies Denver's emphasis on nature is "Windsong," the title track of his 1975 album. Like "Rhymes and Reasons," it was not a chart single, although it is one of the numerous songs Denver has written with Joe Henry. Denver says in the liner notes:

I wanted to record the songs that the wind makes, to play for you between the bands on this album, to share her music with you in the same way that I am able to share mine. . . . what I found was that you simply can't get it on tape.

Denver's reference to the wind as "her" gives an idea of how he perceives nature. He and Henry continue depicting the wind in human terms when they begin the song with "The wind is the whisper of our mother the earth" (1). The wind, however, is also "the hand of our father the sky" (2). Even though Denver frequently assigns feminine or masculine traits to elements of nature, he and Henry immediately show that the wind is multi-dimensional and pervasive, which becomes more apparent later. Other times the wind is neuter, "the singer who sang the first song" (8), and then animal, "a wild stallion running" (11). The writers use enough references to the wind as a living entity to stress that nature is worth recognizing and embracing as a part of humanity. In the Wordsworthian tradition, they assert, "So welcome the wind and the wisdom she offers / Follow her summons when she calls again" (17-18). Listeners are advised to respect nature's offerings and to respond to its signs, whether they be "a twister of anger and warning" (9) or "The thunder of mountains, the roar of the sea" (14). The audience is encouraged to unite with nature so that "In your heart and your spirit let the breezes surround you / Lift up your voice then and sing with the wind" (19-20). The song actually is remarkably similar to "Rhymes and Reasons" because it symbolizes nature as a capable leader of and comfort to humanity.

Nevertheless, the wind does more than "watc[h] over our struggles and pleasures" (3). As with other natural elements

mentioned in Denver compositions, it possesses an unprecedented beauty that is depicted through sensory appeals. For instance, the wind is "The weaver of darkness, the bringer of dawn" (6), and "The wind gives the rain, then builds us a rainbow" (7). The wind provides color in the everyday sunset and sunrise and in the less common rainbow. The colors show nature's widespread appeal and reinforce the images present in the earlier "Rhymes and Reasons." The wind affects other senses as well, especially hearing and smell. It is "the singer who sang the first song" (8) and as such "knows the songs of the cities and canyons / The thunder of mountains, the roar of the sea" (13-14). So the wind is not alone in providing sound because the mountains and ocean do too. The appeal to smell is present in "The wind brings the fragrance of freshly mown hay" (10).

Like "Rhymes and Reasons" and "Sunshine on My Shoulders," "Windsong" has certain prose style conventions. Notably, it has repetition, though much more. Most obvious is the extensive anaphora, for the first five lines begin with "The wind," and thirteen of the twenty lines start that way. Denver claims that he does not intentionally incorporate that much anaphora:

When they [prose style conventions] come up
that way, it's not that I'm trying to find
those . . . tools and then to write a song.
But when you're writing the song, some of
them just, you know, they lend themselves to

that. And you know a great example is
 "Windsong." When you're talking about the
 wind, then it makes sense to say "The wind
 is this" and "The wind is that"

(Interview, Klemt)

Denver and Henry use the anaphora to focus on the wind and make it appear as a far-reaching entity responsible for many happenings in life. "The wind gives the rain, then builds us a rainbow" (7), although it is also "the bearer of bad and good tidings" (5). By depicting the wind in various ways, the writers help the audience to respond with admiration to its versatility. Denver and Henry rely on other means to that end, too. Using a technique still common in Denver's current writing, they juxtapose unlike elements by indicating that the wind is "The weaver of darkness, the bringer of dawn" (6) and "The wind is the taker and giver of mornings" (15). Nature has a hand in much that occurs in life, taking as well as giving. The antithesis results in parallel lines, such as the one about dusk and dawn, that make the content coherent.

Moreover, the song features frequent metaphor, which the classic rhetoricians say is "designed to move the feelings, give special distinction to things and place them vividly before the eyes" (Benson 225). "The wind is a twister of anger and warning" (9) and "The wind is a racer, a wild stallion running" (11) are descriptive, active appeals to the audience. The vibrant images complement the oral message.

According to Boulton, "the human mind, after thousands of years of civilization, still does not take very kindly to abstract thought" (104), so "we generally have to use some concrete examples in order to make our meaning clear" (104). And because "The wind is the whisper of our mother the earth / The wind is the hand of our father the sky" (1-2), the song introduces personification. Boulton calls personification "really a special kind of metaphor, in which some object, place or abstract idea is turned into a person with human attributes so that we can talk about it more intelligibly or vigorously" (155). The wind appears human because of its association with the senses and functions such as "watch[ing]" (3), "know[ing]" (13) and "call[ing]" (18). The wind is not just a passive entity; instead, it has life-giving traits.

Denver, John, and Joe Henry. "Windsong." Windsong. RCA, APL1-1183, 1975.

The wind is the whisper of our mother the earth
 The wind is the hand of our father the sky
 The wind watches over our struggles and pleasures
 The wind is the goddess who first learned to fly
 5 The wind is the bearer of bad and good tidings
 The weaver of darkness, the bringer of dawn
 The wind gives the rain, then builds us a rainbow
 The wind is the singer who sang the first song
 The wind is a twister of anger and warning

10 The wind brings the fragrance of freshly mown hay
 The wind is a racer, a wild stallion running
 The sweet taste of love on a slow summer's day
The wind knows the songs of the cities and canyons
The thunder of mountains, the roar of the sea
15 The wind is the taker and giver of mornings
 The wind is the symbol of all that is free

So welcome the wind and the wisdom she offers
Follow her summons when she calls again
In your heart and your spirit let the breezes
surround you

20 Lift up your voice then and sing with the wind

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Besides the lyrics with love and nature themes, Denver prefers songs that tell stories. These tunes sometimes are inspired by Denver and immediate family members, relatives, and nature. They often reflect a journey motif in which individuals learn about themselves or their environment as a result of their experiences. Other songs, conversely, show the value of family, home, or nature in the protagonist's life, even if the central character does not undergo a significant change or rebirth. Because the songs are narratives, they are in chronological order, which is noticeable in the time transitional expressions and references to age and/or year. The story song has been such

a Denver trademark that he has considered releasing a compact disc that will feature "Life/Love/Story" songs (Pinto and Blevin 22).

"Rocky Mountain High"

One example of the story song is "Rocky Mountain High," which Denver said took three months to write. The 1972 release was a number seventy-five Cash Box country hit (Albert and Hoffmann 92) and a number seven Cash Box pop hit (Hoffmann, 1950-1981 158). And it peaked at number three on the Billboard easy listening chart (Whitburn, 1961-1974 28). In a 1976 Denver biography, Leonore Fleischer quotes the singer as saying:

My perfect song is "Rocky Mountain High."

I couldn't change one word or note of it

to make it better. It says exactly what

I want it to say. Many people think it's

a dope song. When I write a dope song,

everyone will know it's a dope song. (66)

Denver says he believes the lasting appeal of "Rocky Mountain High," still a standard during concerts and radio shows, will classify it as a folk song in the future. "To me, folk songs are old songs that have survived; songs that came from people who were pretty close to the land," he states. "Things like Leaving on a Jet Plane and Rocky Mountain High and Calypso [sic] will be considered folk songs one day" (Haworth 28). Denver was inspired to write the song after moving to the

Rocky Mountains, where "everything I had longed for all my life was now here and around me" (Okun, Anthology 88). But at the time, he said,

. . . there was also a big controversy in Colorado--working to get the Winter Olympics of 1972 in Colorado. The feeling was that what they were going to do, the money that was going to be spent and the scars that would be made were going to support something that most probably would never be used again. (Okun, Anthology 88)

Additionally, Denver incorporated mention of a friend who recently had been killed. His conscious attempts to share his feelings about community and personal happenings make it clear that the song is a cultural barometer. The singer "must be able to express himself on stage in a role which . . . is generally 'true to life,'" asserts Antoine Hennion. "It is that 'truth' which will be heard by the public, which will enable his audience to identify with him, and which will bring him success" (200).

The song is a tale of a man who goes to the mountains, where he becomes "born again" because of his newfound friendship with the country. It describes chronologically the man's change, starting with, "He was born in the summer of his 27th year" (1). Denver and Annie moved to Aspen when Denver was 27, suggesting that the opening of the song is autobiographical (Current 110). The hero is reborn because

previously "his life was far away" (6). His regeneration seems to be physical because he has spent his time elsewhere trying to gain acceptance--in Denver's case through singing. However, the rebirth appears to be a moral one as well because his new home helps him reconnect with values he apparently lost during his pursuit of musical success. He appreciates regaining command of his life and "doesn't really care" (8) about the past. Denver left college in Texas to pursue a musical career in California yet traveled across the country to perform. The changing lifestyle that accompanied his days as a struggling singer seems to be referred to in the line, "On the road and hangin' by a song" (7). Eventually, the man "left yesterday behind him" (3) and finds a home and new opportunities in Colorado, where "he found a key for every door" (5). His holding the right key indicates his acceptance in Colorado, so naturally he is happy in his new environment.

The song continues as an account of the man's time in the mountains and his growing appreciation of the area. The grandeur and openness are particularly impressive, for "He climbed cathedral mountains, he saw silver clouds below / He saw everything as far as you can see" (14-15). Contrary to cluttered California, Colorado offers refuge from people, noise, and pollution. In Colorado Denver "walks in quiet solitude the forests and the streams / Seeking grace in every step he takes" (19-20). Indeed, the mountains are much different from the metropolitan areas of California and the

District of Columbia, because they afford not only new opportunities but also improved living. "The serenity of a clear blue mountain lake" (22) makes Denver rethink his perspective about life because "His sight has turned inside himself to try and understand" (21). This heightened awareness shows that he believes he has a better life upon settling in the country. Nevertheless, he appears to be alone in his awareness when he walks among the "forests and the streams" (19). Others "say that he got crazy once" (16), not knowing that what he has gained from his time in nature.

Denver includes his own experiences to make the tale more immediate for listeners. Classical orator Cicero maintains that "the narrative will be plausible if it seems to embody characteristics which are accustomed to appear in real life" (Benson 199). Denver describes his witnessing of the annual Perseid meteor shower while camping with friends in the Rockies. "Everyone started applauding," he says about the experience. "For two hours we watched nature's fireworks" (Orth 63). Because it was so spectacular, the shower is mentioned in a place of importance--the chorus:

But the Colorado Rocky Mountain High
I've seen it rainin' fire in the sky
The shadow from the starlight is softer
than a lullabye

Rocky Mountain High. (10-13)

Besides its exhilarating effect, the meteor shower has a soothing effect on its observers. The effect of this natural

occurrence reaffirms Denver's newfound "high" from living in Colorado. Yet the indirect references to the meteor shower also serve to promote a relationship between humanity and nature. The third line in each of the subsequent choruses changes, however, making it appear that Denver has incorporated additional autobiographical material. The last chorus mentions "friends around the campfire and everybody's high" (39). The changes stress the wealth of experience provided by nature, evident when he states, "I know he'd be a poorer man if he never saw an eagle fly" (35). The implication is that Denver has benefited from his time in nature.

The other topical consideration is the reference to the creation of the 1972 Winter Olympics facilities. Though the lyrics do not specifically refer to the Olympics, Denver applies his thoughts about the proposed facilities in a universal way by including a general comment about the threat of development. Consistent with his long-standing effort to relate individual experience to society at large, Denver proposes that the protagonist's appreciation of natural beauty makes him realize the land needs protection from outside forces, noticeable in the lines:

Now his life is full of wonder
but his heart still knows some fear
Of a simple thing he cannot comprehend
Why they try to tear the mountains down
to bring in a couple more

More people, more scars upon the land. (27-32)

Finally realizing where he belongs, where home is, he cannot fathom outsiders coming in and altering the land. With "more people" (32), the area will begin to resemble the crowded place from where he moved and threaten the peace he has found. Consequently, the personal experiences help validate the man's journey toward awareness of himself and of the environment and help make the narrative emotionally appealing to listeners.

Despite its different structure, "Rocky Mountain High" has some of the same style conventions as do the nature and love songs. The song, nonetheless, remains thematically richer than it is stylistically. Epistrophe is most apparent, especially in the final chorus because three of the four lines end with "high," a fitting position because the euphoria received from communion with nature is being emphasized. The first and fourth lines of the other choruses conclude with "high" as well, so he has consistently reinforced his point. The song has several lines with antithesis, including "Comin' home to a place he'd never been before" (2). Located early in the song, the line suggests that Colorado is a place of permanence for Denver, if only he realizes it. Even after he recognizes that it is home, his learning process continues because

. . . his heart still knows some fear
Of a simple thing he cannot understand
Why they try to tear the mountains down

to bring in a couple more. (28-31)

That latter line of antithesis links the song's finish to the opening because it seems to propose that the truth is there for Denver to realize--but that he will see the answers in time. Alliteration is rare, even though the descriptive images present in "He climbed cathedral mountains, he saw silver clouds below" (14) help move the audience to identify with the protagonist.

Denver, John. "Rocky Mountain High." Rocky Mountain High.

RCA, AQL1-4731, 1972.

He was born in the summer of his 27th year
Comin' home to a place he'd never been before
He left yesterday behind him,

you might say he was born again

5 You might say he found a key for every door

When he first came to the mountains his life was
far away

On the road and hangin' by a song
But the string's already broken and he doesn't really
care

It keeps changin' fast, and it don't last for long

10 But the Colorado Rocky Mountain high

I've seen it rainin' fire in the sky

The shadow from the starlight is softer than a

lullabye

Rocky Mountain high

He climbed cathedral mountains, he saw silver clouds
below

15 He saw everything as far as you can see
And they say that he got crazy once
and he tried to touch the sun
And he lost a friend but kept his memory

Now he walks in quiet solitude the forests and the
streams

20 Seeking grace in every step he takes
His sight has turned inside himself to try and understand
The serenity of a clear blue mountain lake
And the Colorado Rocky Mountain high
I've seen it rainin' fire in the sky

25 You can talk to God and listen to the casual reply
Rocky Mountain high

Now his life is full of wonder
but his heart still knows some fear
Of a simple thing he cannot comprehend

30 Why they try to tear the mountains down
to bring in a couple more

More people, more scars upon the land
And the Colorado Rocky Mountain high
I've seen it rainin' fire in the sky

35 I know he'd be a poorer man if he never saw an
eagle fly

Rocky Mountain high

It's a Colorado Rocky Mountain high
 I've seen it rainin' fire in the sky
 Friends around the campfire and everybody's high
 Rocky Mountain high

40

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"I'd Rather Be a Cowboy (Lady's Chains)"

Denver's 1973 "I'd Rather Be a Cowboy (Lady's Chains)" is another story song. It reached number fifty-one on the Cash Box country chart (Albert and Hoffmann 92), twenty-seven on the Cash Box pop chart (Hoffmann, 1950-1981 158), and twenty-five on the Billboard easy listening chart (Whitburn, 1961-1974 28). Denver claims that it "is another of my favorite songs" (Okun, Anthology 128). Whereas the "Rocky Mountain High" protagonist goes to the country to find himself, the unnamed protagonist in this song remains a contented soul in the country while his unfulfilled lover, Jessie, leaves for the city. The speaker never makes it clear whether the two are married, although he suggests that they have been cohabitants for a while when he says, "After all our time together it was hard to see her go" (2). Obviously, the narrator is happy in his environment, enough to reject Jessie's requests that he join her (3). Saying that "Livin' on an L. A. freeway ain't my kind of havin' fun" (4), he insists, "I think I'd rather be a cowboy" (5). He

wants "to ride the range" (6) as cowboys do and prefers his lifestyle because of his surroundings, which allow him to "laugh with the rain and sunshine / And lay down my sundown in some starry field" (19-20). Moreover, the setting affords him a leisurely existence, for he can "la[y] back up in the mountains singin' songs for sunny days" (10). As in many of Denver's songs, the importance of nature to the protagonist or the association of the protagonist to nature is mentioned through the references to rain and sunshine. The narrator appreciates the ability to commune with nature; the city is sterile and cold, a "canyo[n] of concrete and steel" (18). It is mainly "in the mornin' when [he] awake[s] alone" (21) that the man feels Jessie's loss because "the absence of her laughter is a cold and empty sound" (22). The feeling is not enough of a reason, though, to relinquish his comfort to become trapped in the city and in a commitment, "love and lady's chains" (8).

Unlike her lover, Jessie becomes unhappy with the country life and seeks a change. Denver wrote the song based on his observations of couples, for he says he

became aware that there were many people involved in relationships in which the woman felt unfulfilled and had no opportunity to express herself. They needed to separate from the relationship in order to complete themselves as individuals. (Okun, Anthology 128)

By sharing his thoughts about the woman's role, Denver again shows that his music is a cultural record. In this case Jessie's lover realizes her growing dissatisfaction and loves "her just enough to let her go" (24). Apparently Jessie was initially content to share time with her lover but becomes unfulfilled in wifely duties, which her partner acknowledges when he claims, "she got tired of pickin' daisies and cookin' my meals for me" (11). And he indicates that he misses having her by his side when he awakens, so it seems that she wants more than to serve his needs and wants. Because it is not clear that they are married, perhaps she believes she can leave without the added difficulty that comes with divorce. She sees the opportunity to get out of the relationship before she becomes even more committed. Therefore, whereas he does not choose to become trapped in his "lady's chains" by going to Los Angeles with Jessie, she wants to be free of his "chains" imposed by country living.

The common style convention in "I'd Rather Be a Cowboy (Lady's Chains)" is repetition. The song begins with an emphasis on Jessie because the first stanza describes her departure. After that, Denver alternates the chorus, which expresses Jessie's lover's feelings, and stanzas that focus on him. Anaphora appears in the chorus, yet just as significant is that the repetition is about the man:

I think I'd rather be a cowboy

I think I'd rather ride the range

I think I'd rather be a cowboy
 Than to lay me down in love and lady's chains.

(5-8)

The emphasis on the "I," Jessie's lover, suggests that even though the song relates a woman's place in a relationship, the man remains the focus. Otherwise, the lyrics feature conventions such as metaphor in Denver's reference to cities as "canyons of concrete and steel" (18) and alliteration in "Layin' back up in the mountains singin' songs for sunny days" (10).

Denver, John. "I'd Rather Be a Cowboy (Lady's Chains)."

Farewell Andromeda. RCA, APL1-0101, 1973.

Jessie went away last summer, a couple of months ago
 After all our time together it was hard to see her go
 She called me right up when she arrived, asked me one
 more time to come
 Livin' on an L. A. freeway ain't my kind of havin' fun.

5 I think I'd rather be a cowboy
 I think I'd rather ride the range
 I think I'd rather be a cowboy
 Than to lay me down in love and lady's chains.

When we were just beginning it was such an easy way
 10 Layin' back up in the mountains singin' songs
 for sunny days

But she got tired of pickin' daisies and cookin'
my meals for me
She can live the life she wants to, yes, and it's
all right with me.

I think I'd rather be a cowboy
I think I'd rather ride the range
15 I think I'd rather be a cowboy
Than to lay me down in love and lady's chains.

I'd rather live on the side of a mountain
Than wander through canyons of concrete and steel
I'd rather laugh with the rain and sunshine
20 And lay down my sundown in some starry field.

Oh but I miss her in the mornin' when I awake alone
And the absence of her laughter is a cold and
empty sound
But her memory always makes me smile and I want you
to know
I love her, yes I love her just enough to let her go.

25 I think I'd rather be a cowboy
I think I'd rather ride the range
I think I'd rather be a cowboy
Than to lay me down in love and lady's chains.

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"Matthew"

A third story song is "Matthew," off the 1974 Back Home Again album. Though it was not a chart single, it has a special meaning for Denver because he wrote it as a tribute to his father's brother, Uncle Dean, who grew up with the other Deuschendorfs and later was killed in a car accident (Okun, Anthology 151). In the fall 1986 Windstar Journal, Denver said, "I believe that the small family farm, the small family business, is the foundation of any society, and if we lose these foundations, the society will crumble" ("Let Us Begin" 5). The song, not surprisingly, is one of Denver's favorites, and during his fall 1993 tour in the United States, he sang it while featuring a screen tribute that details the toils of a farm family (A Christmas Together).

Denver relates in the song some of his uncle's tales of growing up as an only child on a farm in Colby, a remote town in northwestern Kansas (3). "Matthew" reflects the happiness the uncle's family has on the farm. An only child, Matthew is "his mother's pride and joy" (4), and his "Life is mostly havin' fun / Ridin' on his Daddy's shoulders" (14-15). He has the full adoration of his parents, who seem to have his admiration too because of "the stories that he told" (9) and "all the good times that he had" (12). And even after his parents die, the boy retains the memories (11) from his time with them. The boy has the beauty of the "gold . . . windy Kansas wheatfield" (7) and the "blue . . . summer sky" (8), and he has the love of a family. With nature and family

beside him, it is no wonder that "joy was just a thing that he was raised on" (5). Denver suggests that the family's oneness with nature contributes to its fortune, although their faith in the Lord also is significant (27-28).

The boy's ties to the land, family, and God help him survive when he is left orphaned after "A twister came and stripped 'em clean" (24). With no farm or family left, "he came to live at our house," says Denver (33). Helped by "A faith as solid as a stone" (28), the boy quickly adjusts to living with his new family by resuming the lifestyle he had before. And he is a welcomed addition as well, for "he came to work the land / He came to ease my daddy's burden" (34-35). Once young enough to ride "on his Daddy's shoulders" (15), Matthew eventually applies his childhood learning on the farm to become a helper to his own uncle's family. Like "Rocky Mountain High" and "I'd Rather Be a Cowboy," the tale shows the boy's adjustment to a new situation even though his challenge is greater than that of the other songs' characters because he has experienced personal loss they have not. In addition, the tune resembles the former story songs in that it features a central character's place in family, home, and nature. In the sense that "Matthew" portrays death and love, it seems characteristic of the Latin and Greek elegy, which "originally signified almost any type of meditation, whether the reflective element concerned death, love, or war, or merely the presentation of information" (Holman and

Harmon 162).

"Matthew" has the repetition apparent in many of Denver's songs. Anaphora is mainly in the third stanza:

All the stories that he told me
 Back when I was just a lad
 All the memories that he gave me
 All the good times that he had. (9-12)

Interestingly, the emphasis on "all" the information Uncle Matthew shares occurs in a stanza that cites the narrator's young age, appropriately reflecting that the boy is overwhelmed by his uncle's tales. Excluding the chorus, stanzas five through seven each start with two lines of anaphora. The anaphora in the fifth stanza is particularly emphatic in revealing Uncle Matthew's "loss." But symplote, "repetition at both the beginning and end of a sentence" (Boulton 164), stresses the uncle's misfortune even more because Denver indicates, "He lost the farm and lost his family / He lost the wheat and lost his home" (25-26). Furthermore, the lines feature parallelism resulting from repetition of "major conceptual terms, particularly nouns, verbs, or adjectives" (Graves 175). Less common prose style elements are simile in "But he found the family bible / A faith as solid as a stone" (27-28) and inversion in "Blue was just the Kansas summer sky" (8). Miles and others maintain that inversion is "a departure from the customary arrangement of words" (164). Instead of having the line reading "The Kansas summer sky was blue," Denver inverts the word order to

enhance the emphasis of "blue" and to keep the line parallel with those immediately before, including "Gold was just a windy Kansas wheatfield" (7).

Denver, John. "Matthew." Back Home Again. RCA, AQL1-0548, 1974.

I had an Uncle name of Matthew
Was his father's only boy
Born just south of Colby, Kansas
He was his mother's pride and joy

5 Yes and joy was just a thing that he was raised on
 Love was just a way to live and die
 Gold was just a windy Kansas wheatfield
 Blue was just the Kansas summer sky.

All the stories that he told me

10 Back when I was just a lad
 All the memories that he gave me
 All the good times that he had.

Growin' up a Kansas farm boy

Life is mostly havin' fun

15 Ridin' on his Daddy's shoulders
 Behind a mule beneath the sun.

 Yes and joy was just a thing that he was raised on
 Love was just a way to live and die
 Gold was just a windy Kansas wheatfield
20 Blue was just the Kansas summer sky.

Well I guess there were some hard times
And I'm told some years were lean
They had a storm in '47
A twister came and stripped 'em clean.

25 He lost the farm and lost his family
He lost the wheat and lost his home
But he found the family bible
A faith as solid as a stone.

Yes and joy was just a thing that he was raised on
30 Love was just a way to live and die
Gold was just a windy Kansas wheatfield
Blue was just the Kansas summer sky.

And so he came to live at our house
And he came to work the land

35 He came to ease my daddy's burden
And he came to be my friend.

And so I wrote this down for Matthew

And it's for him this song is sung

Ridin' on his Daddy's shoulders

40 Behind a mule beneath the sun.

Yes and joy was just a thing that he was raised on
Love was just a way to live and die
Gold was just a windy Kansas wheatfield
Blue was just the Kansas summer sky.

45 Yes and joy was just a thing that he was raised on
 Love was just a way to live and die
 Gold was just a windy Kansas wheatfield
 Blue was just the Kansas summer sky.

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The love, nature, and story songs analyzed are a sample of those on Denver's albums during the 1970s. However, they share distinctive thematic and stylistic qualities that characterize those in other releases during the decade should one wish to do additional study. His writing technique is worth noting because it remains fairly consistent through the 1980s. The main difference in his latter material is that Denver embraces broader, less traditional topics.

Notes

¹Whitburn's ranking is derived from a formula that takes into consideration the artist's charted albums and number of weeks on the chart. Points and bonus points are awarded based on the "highest charted position" of an album (479). A number one album results in more points and bonus points for the artist than does a number five release. Besides the points, the total weeks on the chart and total weeks at the number one position are included in the formula (479).

Chapter IV

Lyrics during the 1980s

After a decade during which he became the biggest selling artist in the country, Denver failed to reclaim his mainstream popularity during the 1980s. Though he was productive in releasing ten albums, excluding promotion, just one album and two singles advanced to the top ten of the Cash Box and Billboard country, pop, and easy listening charts. The lone top ten country album was Some Days Are Diamonds, which advanced to number four in 1981 (Hoffmann and Albert 47). Denver did not have the hit singles that he had written either. Unlike his efforts during the 1970s, several albums contained primarily others' compositions. For each of the 1980 Autograph, 1981 Some Days Are Diamonds, and 1985 Dreamland Express albums, Denver wrote fewer than half of the songs, including just two of the ten on Some Days.

Any chart success Denver had was fairly widespread, actually, because he had top twenty singles on the easy listening and adult contemporary charts to go with his infrequent country hits. "Some Days Are Diamonds (Some Days Are Stone)" was a number eight Cash Box country hit in 1981 (Albert and Hoffmann 92), and "Dreamland Express" peaked at ninth on the Billboard country chart in 1985 (Whitburn, 1944-1988 81). The increase in crossover appeal kept Denver from finding a particular audience because by the 1980s he had recorded songs with folk, country, pop, rock, opera, and

reggae strains. For example, Placido Domingo introduced an opera sound to Denver's music when the two sang "Perhaps Love" (1982), and relatives of the late reggae singer Bob Marley provided music and background vocals for Denver's "World Game" (1983). Most of Denver's success came at the start of the decade. His next most successful effort after Some Days Are Diamonds was the 1982 Seasons of the Heart, a number twenty Cash Box album (Hoffmann and Albert 47).

Accompanying the decline in popularity was the mutual dissatisfaction between Denver and his record company, RCA. He submitted a Perhaps Love album to RCA in 1981 and had it rejected (Pinto 16). RCA wanted Denver to record in Nashville a country album, which he did in Some Days Are Diamonds (Pinto 16). "They coerced me into doing a country album with a very successful country producer [Larry Butler], but not one of my own choosing," he states (Repak 31). He later rerecorded the Perhaps Love material, produced it, and released it under the 1982 Seasons of the Heart (Pinto 16). By 1987 Denver had already parted from longtime manager Jerry Weintraub and had formed his own record label, Windstar, after RCA was unwilling to give him what he thought was just reward for his years of service. His last RCA effort was One World, which he claims he "had to force them to release. They paid me for it and virtually said they weren't going to release it" ("Denver Peddles"). He says about the split:

I was one of the few artists on the label
and I probably had the best contract they

had and I was in the black. At the time I delivered my last album (One World in 1986), RCA had just been sold to General Electric and I was in line for a new contract. I had every right to expect as good a contract as I had, if not better. But the new management wanted to show a profit quickly and it was more than they wanted to spend. (Berry 3)

Since 1987 Denver's albums have been distributed mainly through American Gramophone Records. Allegiance Records released his first Windstar effort, but Denver switched to American Gramophone when Allegiance went bankrupt (Pinto 23).

Even though he did not match his 1970s achievement, Denver continued singing songs like those of that decade. He still performed the love and story songs, and they brought him his greatest singles success during the 1980s. Nevertheless, this achievement was on other charts. The love songs "Shanghai Breezes" and "Perhaps Love," for instance, were hits on the pop and adult contemporary charts. Denver's nature tunes changed the most because they started featuring broader topics, ones no longer romanticizing the wilderness and outdoors activities. Instead, he started singing more about world peace, nuclear weapons, space exploration, and homeless people--topics not traditionally country. Denver says it has only been in recent years that country singers, such as Garth Brooks, have started addressing social and political issues. "I think of country and western music, you

know, country and western music, it's very rare that you find a song about something," he notes. "In country music it's a rare thing" (Interview, Klemt).

The following nine songs have been chosen so as to represent Denver's lyrics during the 1980s. Although none achieved the chart success that his 1970s singles did, the songs are still his biggest hits and less known releases. The love songs are quite similar to those of the previous decade and, accordingly, are among his most successful releases. However, the story and nature singles are rather different. Whereas his earlier story songs usually stress characters' realizations that result through a communion with nature, those of the 1980s do not emphasize that relationship in individual development. And the songs that originally focused on nature's well-being in a particular setting, such as Colorado or Alaska, offer a broader perspective because they address environmental issues in worldwide locations. The love, story, and environment songs are from his 1982 Seasons of the Heart, 1983 It's about Time, 1985 Dreamland Express, 1986 One World, and 1988 Higher Ground albums.

"Perhaps Love"

One of Denver's most successful love songs was "Perhaps Love," off his 1982 Seasons of the Heart album. Denver performed the tune with opera star Placido Domingo, who included the duet on his 1981 Perhaps Love album. The two sang the song at the May 1984 Metropolitan Opera House gala

concert (Kisselgoff). The single reached number twenty-two on the Billboard adult contemporary chart (Top 50 Adult 25) and fifty-nine on the Billboard pop singles chart in 1982 (Whitburn, 1955-1986 140). While love is a given in "Annie's Song," love is not easily definable here. Love is "perhaps" this and "perhaps" that through most of the song, though not so much for the narrator, Denver. In fact, some of the descriptions of love suggest that it is "Full of conflict, full of change" (24). Among its various forms, love is a refuge during the "times of trouble" (5) described in the first two stanzas. Whether "A shelter from the storm" (2) or a "memory" (7) "When you are most alone" (6), love protects and guides those in need. And its effect is powerful and lasting, for even the "memory" can help provide direction and stability in the present. "The memory of love will bring you home" (7), and it "will see you through" (14) "if you lose yourself / And don't know what to do" (12-13). Although Denver's language changes throughout, the second person makes the first two stanzas more effective in presenting love as a source of comfort. The "you" enhances the narrator's believability because he seems to be speaking to any person.

Love becomes less predictable as the song proceeds, nonetheless. Actually, it takes on a broader meaning because it can be quite different depending on the person. Love to some is weak "like a cloud" (15) and for others "strong as steel" (16). The contrasting images add to the overall uncertainty of what love is, yet they introduce a stanza in

which love has varying significance. Denver's use of third person adds to the latter effect because he offers a disparity of feelings. "And some say love is holding on," Denver writes, "And some say letting go" (19-20). Love's importance or lack thereof is further apparent in "some say love is everything / And some say they don't know" (21-22). So love for some is essential, "a way of living" (17), but not for others.

The song ends with a reaffirmation of love's changeability, at least to those other than the narrator. While acknowledging that "Perhaps love is like the ocean / Full of conflict, full of change" (23-24), Denver is more sure about love's meaning. "If I should live forever / And all my dreams come true / My memories of love will be of you," he notes (27-29). He is not clear about whether the "you" is a woman, especially because he has started the song by singing to a generic "you." Similar to "You're So Beautiful," the song is ambiguous in that his source of love can be a woman or other individuals, perhaps his fans. The sudden switch to first person, a climax of emotion, reduces the distance between the singer and listeners because now Denver shares his feelings. His view surfaces at this moment, for the "you" takes on personal meaning and represents a love that is undefinable to others. The first person is an ethical appeal because it provides insight about Denver's character and is a pathetic appeal in that it stimulates listeners to consider their feelings about love.

"Perhaps Love" has the anaphora that "Annie's Song" does. Eight of the twenty-nine lines, including four straight, begin with "And," while four each start with "Perhaps" and "It." The conjunction provides an easy and quick transition from line to line, and the "Perhaps" reinforces the uncertainty of love. Six lines in the third stanza contain anaphora in "For some" and "And some," both of which reaffirm the narrator's perspective. Just as in "Annie's Song," the simile is a commonplace. "Perhaps love is like a window" (8), Denver mentions, or "Perhaps love is like the ocean" (23). Other times he joins the simile and antithesis, noticeable in "Oh, love to some is like a cloud / To some as strong as steel" (15-16). The images, however, are not always so concrete, which is evident in, "And some say love is holding on / And some say letting go" (19-20). For the most part, nonetheless, the simile and antithesis are emotional appeals because they stress the varying interpretations of love and offer concrete images of something that is abstract--love.

Denver, John. "Perhaps Love." Seasons of the Heart.

RCA, AFL1-4256, 1982.

Perhaps love is like a resting place

A shelter from the storm

It exists to give you comfort

It is there to keep you warm

5 And in those times of trouble

When you are most alone
The memory of love will bring you home

Perhaps love is like a window
Perhaps an open door

10 It invites you to come closer
It wants to show you more
And even if you lose yourself
And don't know what to do
The memory of love will see you through

15 Oh, love to some is like a cloud
To some as strong as steel
For some a way of living
For some a way to feel
And some say love is holding on

20 And some say letting go
And some say love is everything
And some say they don't know

Perhaps love is like the ocean
Full of conflict, full of change
25 Like a fire when it's cold outside
Or thunder when it rains
If I should live forever
And all my dreams come true

My memories of love will be of you

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"Shanghai Breezes"

Like "Perhaps Love," "Shanghai Breezes" is off Denver's 1982 Seasons of the Heart album. It advanced to number thirty-one on the Billboard pop singles chart (Whitburn, 1955-1986 140) and was an adult contemporary single too. He wrote the song for Annie when he was away from her on a tour through China, one of the countries in which he is extremely popular. Denver says the tune came about in an unusual way:

Paul [Stookey of Peter, Paul and Mary] once said that sometimes he doesn't feel so much as the writer of a song as the instrument of that which wants to be written. And I have that experience. . . . It's really, really exciting when a song is happening and especially when, you know, it kind of takes over . . . over your life. I remember writing "Shanghai Breezes" in Shanghai. This day I was out getting a tour by some people I was staying with, a very special tour. I was meeting people and seeing things that people don't usually get to see, and I don't remember a thing about it. I do not remember one thing about that day because I had this song happening, and

I was lost in the song. (Interview, Klemt)
Ironically, the song is one of the last ones that Denver wrote for Annie while they were married, for they separated in 1982 and divorced by the next year. It appropriately appears on Seasons of the Heart because that album "painfully chronicled" (Bell 37) Denver's marital problems.

Contrary to that in "Perhaps Love," the love in this song is easily definable--it is Denver's love for Annie. The song is not so much about Annie's physical presence in his life as it is about her emotional effect. Denver begins by indicating the distance between the two, "half a world away" (2). He then relates his reflections of Shanghai to their relationship, thereby suggesting a cultural basis for the song. Denver's love for Annie transcends the physical separation because he mentions, "I can't remember when I felt so close to you" (5). His ability to feel close to her surprises him, leaving him at a loss "to find the words I'm looking for / To say the things that I want to say" (3-4). Because his comfort is unexpected, he says, "it's almost more than I can bear" (6). While the song certainly represents the couple's love, its meaning has greater significance. Denver prefaced the song during his 1993 mini-tour by stating, "We should always remember we all live under the same moon and same stars" (A Christmas Together). He asserts that people are bound by nature and are one in soul, capable of universal love.

Though Denver feels close to Annie in spite of their

separation, his love is reinforced because of his interaction with and thoughts of her. Her voice on the telephone "is like heaven" to him (11) and helps keep her in his "heart and living there" (8). His love for her stays grounded as well because he comments, "especially when I sing the songs I wrote for you / You are in my heart and living there" (19-20). Denver is reminded of Annie's place in his life because he constantly performs songs he has written about her. Whereas Annie's presence affects him in the real world, she intrudes on his dream world too (18). Thoughts of her are so everlasting that he claims, "Oh, I couldn't leave you even if I wanted to" (17). He seems to have the strength to be one of the "lovers who walk all alone" and "who lie unafraid in the dark" (14-15). Ultimately, Annie's significance increases until he says, "Your love in my life is like heaven to me" (29). By first recognizing her voice, then her "face" in his dreams (23), and finally her love, Denver shows that she is "heaven" (29) on earth for him.

Denver links his love for Annie to nature, just as he has done in many other songs. Initially he proposes that their emotional closeness results because they share nature. "And the moon and the stars are the same ones you see / It's the same old sun up in the sky," he states (9-10). He realizes a connection in these natural elements, which brings him closer to Annie if only in spirit. Elsewhere, Annie is directly related to nature when Denver likens her voice, face, and love to "the breezes here in old Shanghai"

(30). The "old Shanghai" (30) reference resembles other "Shanghai" citations in lyrics, particularly those during the 1920s. The 1926 "Shanghai Honeymoon" and 1927 "Shanghai Dream Man" mention "old Shanghai," with the former also describing a scenario of "love winds blowing, 'Neath a Chinese moon" (Sheet music 3). Most notably, the 1951 "(Why Did I Tell You I Was Going to) Shanghai" is a love song that became a best-selling single for Doris Day (Popular Music 2: 1593). The song, which Bing Crosby performed as well (Lissauer 733), even contains the line, "It's just a lover's device" (Sheet music 3), when referring to a trip to Shanghai. Denver's use of a romantic cliché seems to have contributed to the song's crossover success and his popularity with an older audience. The "soft and gentle" (26) breezes are "evening's sweet caress" (25) to Denver, possessing an ability to comfort. Similar to the nature in "For Baby," among other songs, nature here is good the way that the loved one is. The breezes "remind me of your tenderness," Denver notes (26), so in nature he feels nearly "right next door" (1) to his wife "half a world away" (2).

Stylistically, "Shanghai Breezes" contains fewer classical devices than are present in previous songs. Repetition occurs much less often than in other songs and, for the most part, is limited to the first word. The main exception to the latter is a middle stanza in which two lines feature the same first four words and two others have the same first three words:

There are lovers who walk hand in hand in
 the park

And lovers who walk all alone

There are lovers who lie unafraid in the dark

And lovers who long for home. (13-16)

Here Denver generalizes about lovers, helping listeners relate to his message, yet the emphasis on others sets up the next lines in which he reveals his feelings for Annie.

One other time Denver repeats more than one word is in "Shanghai breezes cool and clearing evening's sweet caress / Shanghai breezes soft and gentle remind me of your tenderness" (25-26). Also apparent is the simile, which connects Denver's feelings to Annie and to nature. "And your voice in my ear is like heaven to me / Like the breezes here in old Shanghai," he states (11-12), suggesting the euphoria he receives from each. Additionally, the simile is associated with the senses: hearing, vision, and touch. Annie's "voice" (11), "face" (23), and "love" (29) make her appear tangible to him, despite their physical separation.

Denver, John. "Shanghai Breezes." Seasons of the Heart.
 RCA, AFL1-4256, 1982.

It's funny how you sound as if you're right next door
 When you're really half a world away

I just can't seem to find the words I'm looking for
 To say the things that I want to say

5 I can't remember when I felt so close to you

It's almost more than I can bear
And though I seem a half a million miles from you
You are in my heart and living there

And the moon and the stars are the same ones you see
10 It's the same old sun up in the sky
And your voice in my ear is like heaven to me
Like the breezes here in old Shanghai

There are lovers who walk hand in hand in the park
And lovers who walk all alone
15 There are lovers who lie unafraid in the dark
And lovers who long for home
Oh, I couldn't leave you even if I wanted to
You're in my dreams and always near
And especially when I sing the songs I wrote for you
20 You are in my heart and living there

And the moon and the stars are the same ones you see
It's the same old sun up in the sky
And your face in my dreams is like heaven to me
Like the breezes here in old Shanghai
25 Shanghai breezes cool and clearing evening's sweet
caress
Shanghai breezes soft and gentle remind me of your
tenderness

And the moon and the stars are the same ones you see
It's the same old sun up in the sky
And your love in my life is like heaven to me
30 Like the breezes here in old Shanghai

And the moon and the stars are the same ones you see
It's the same old sun up in the sky
And your love in my life is like heaven to me
Like the breezes here in old Shanghai
35 Just like the breezes here in old Shanghai

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"For You"

"For You" was written for Denver's second wife, Cassandra Delaney, and appears on the Higher Ground album, which was originally released in Australia, where Delaney was an actress and singer at the time. Denver says of the song:

When I wrote the song I'd been with my lady Cassandra for about four months and she had to go back to Australia, and it was in her absence that I wrote this song. And I said, Holy Moly, that's a wedding song, JD, you better slow down here [sic]. . . . We released the song in Australia and they couldn't keep the sheet music in the stores because everyone was using it for their weddings. People asked me if I was

going to sing it at my wedding, and I
couldn't do it. I would've turned into
a puddle right there beside my bride.

(Hearts in Harmony 30.2 29)

While participating in Australia's bicentennial during 1988,
Denver dedicated his performance of the song to Cassandra
(Pinto and Blevin 17).

Unlike "Perhaps Love," it clearly expresses his love for
one woman, whom he calls Cass. He even concludes his tribute
by citing "the words of a love song" (25) as "the pledge of
my life, my love for you" (27). His commitment to her is
serious, for he indicates "that you're here in my heart to
stay" (21). Probably because she was returning to Australia,
the tune reflects Denver's desire to be with her all the
time, enough to witness her every move from dawn until dusk.
It seems important for him to offer physical and emotional
support because he wants "to be the first one always there
for you" (3). At the end of the day, he wants to "touch in
the night / Just to offer a prayer each day for you" (8-9).
Clearly, he does not want her "really far away" (18) because
he wants to share himself with her. Like in "Annie's Song,"
he becomes selfless in his intentions because he wants "to be
everyone [sic] of your dreams come true" (6). Denver
actually helped his wife's career by having her sing with him
on albums and during live performances. In the song,
moreover, Denver is willing to make himself exclusive to her
because he says, "For you alone, only for you" (15).

Despite his desire to be there for Cass, Denver seems to want her near for his own sake. She has become his "reason for living" (19), and his whole being seems to depend on her presence. It is important for him to be able to have physical contact, to be able to "look in your eyes" (1) and "lay in your arms" (2). Other interaction is vital too, including being able "to say I adore" (20). With or without her, he will have those desires, anyway, because he already is thinking about a future with her. Although the song is so much about him conveying his feelings, he appears to need that opportunity. "Just to long for your kisses / Just to dream of your sighs" (10-11), he states. Even the slightest behavior, her sighs, keeps him captivated. In addition to the physical affection, he wants an emotional commitment for himself. "Just to sing in your heart" (5), he says, suggesting that knowing he has a place in her heart will keep him content. Perhaps because of the divorce from Annie, whom Denver said ultimately could not accept the demands of his career, he needs "to know that you're here in my heart to stay" (21). He appreciates Cass's laughter (4) and companionship (17-18) enough to know that he wants it for the rest of his life (13). Even though her singing background made her a more suitable candidate than Annie to perform with Denver, their professional projects seem to mirror his efforts to have Cass there for him (18).

Denver's statements are ethical appeals in that they create credibility, thus making him appear the moral speaker,

one who would be heartbroken by the loss of a woman he wanted "all the rest of my life" (13). And his "pledge" proved sincere because Denver admits that life without Cass has been difficult. In the midst of the divorce proceedings, which he says lasted two and one-half years (Hearts in Harmony 32:3 52), he wrote in a March 1993 letter to fan club members that

events in my personal and professional life have been emotionally draining and incredibly frustrating. To say the least, they have been an enormous distraction to me and have gotten in the way of my being able to work and perform at the level I want to. . . .

("Dear Fans" 13-14)

The personal concerns included the custody arrangement for Jesse Belle, their now five-year-old daughter. As a result of the marital split, Denver took a break from performing through much of 1993, choosing to resume with a fall mini-tour. Denver indicated during a 1993 interview in the United Kingdom, "I'll take a long time to fall in love again" (Messent 5). And during a 1994 interview, he said:

Divorce is the worst goddamn thing that ever happened to anyone under any circumstances. . . . I haven't allowed myself to get close to anyone since my last marriage broke up. Right now I couldn't

even have a platonic relationship with a woman. I'm scared to death. (Honan)

Furthermore, the statements in "For You" are pathetic because they appeal to listeners' emotions. Denver's claims that "you're here in my heart to stay" (21) and that "I'd give my life for you" (12) create a commonality because audience members can relate to such expressions of love. Yet they are likely to prompt even more emotion in Denver's faithful followers, who know that he is, by his own admission, "a hopeless romantic" (Berry 3). Classical orators propose that knowledge of audience members helps the speaker convey his or her message, a premise that also applies to written communication. Cicero suggests:

Wherefore the speaker will not be able to achieve what he wants by his words, unless he has gained profound insight into the characters of men, and the whole range of human nature, and those motives whereby our souls are spurred on or turned back.

(Benson 97)

Denver's delivery enhances these appeals. During concerts he has performed the song solo while standing stationary behind a microphone. The musical accompaniment is soft and secondary to his vocals (A Christmas Together). "The good speakers bring, as their peculiar possession, a style that is harmonious, graceful, and marked by a certain artistry and polish," asserts orator Cicero (Benson 96). Without the

stage movement and loud accompaniment to distract from his singing, the message elicits the effect he desires.

Consequently, "For You" resembles "Annie's Song" and "Perhaps Love," other popular songs at weddings, in that "the words of a love song" (25) do reflect "the beat of [the] heart" (26).

"For You" has more repetition than any other song in this study of Denver's 1970s and 1980s lyrics. The repetition is mainly anaphora, with twenty-one of the twenty-seven lines beginning with "Just" and the others starting with "For you." Each line in the first two stanzas begins with "Just to," followed by a variety of actions, emotions, and desires Denver seeks. Initially each action, emotion, or desire is "just" this or that, probably unnoticed in everyday life. Whether a "touch in the night" (8) or a "dream of your sighs" (11), these individual moments do not seem so noteworthy. But the "just to" creates a coherence so that, collectively, they become significant to Denver because they represent his complete love for Cass. The lines, "For you all the rest of my life / For you all the rest of my life / For you alone, only for you" (13-15), keep the emphasis on his devotion to her. The repetition creates parallelism, which Aristotle argues is effective in oratory when combined with other style conventions (Benson 249). Among the lines with anaphora and parallelism are "Just to live in your laughter / Just to sing in your heart" (4-5). Denver primarily achieves effect through these conventions because the song lacks the metaphor and simile common in others, such

as "Annie's Song" and "Perhaps Love." Interestingly, the metaphor and simile are absent in a song that does not have the nature images normally so prominent in Denver's lyrics, regardless of song type.

Denver, John. "For You." Higher Ground. Windstar, WR-53336-2, 1988.

Just to look in your eyes again

Just to lay in your arms

Just to be the first one always there for you

Just to live in your laughter

5 Just to sing in your heart

Just to be everyone [sic] of your dreams come true

Just to sit by your window

Just to touch in the night

Just to offer a prayer each day for you

10 Just to long for your kisses

Just to dream of your sighs

Just to know that I'd give my life for you

For you all the rest of my life

For you all the rest of my life

15 For you alone, only for you

Just to wake up each morning

Just to you by my side

Just to know that you're never really far away

Just a reason for living

20 Just to say I adore

Just to know that you're here in my heart to stay

For you all the rest of my life

For you all the rest of my life

For you alone, only for you

25 Just the words of a love song

Just the beat of my heart

Just the pledge of my life, my love for you

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Taking advantage of his power and prestige as an entertainer, Denver was particularly active in humanitarian causes during the 1980s. Even though he sang about social and political issues during the previous decade, notably the latter half, he became increasingly outspoken in his music about those issues. Therefore, he is especially original when writing about the environment, making him a rarity in the music industry. Denver notes that during his Mitchell Trio days he learned singers can address serious matters. "I realized that you could express your deepest feelings and quite often reflect the feelings of your audience through music and that music could be a lot more than just about love songs," he states (Interview, Klemt). Style authorities

contend that "the person who has original thoughts is likely to be more intelligent than the person who does not, and thus will also be skilled in the handling of words" (Boulton 77). Denver believes that his humanitarian interests have contributed to his lasting musical appeal. "I think that how I've sustained . . . an audience over all these years is because I've been involved in all these issues and not just singing about them but giving time and energy to them also," he says (Interview, Klemt).

A survey of Denver's album jackets and liner notes during the 1980s shows that he became more outspoken in his concerns than during the previous decade. Excluding his greatest hits, Christmas, and promotion releases, every 1980s album except Some Days Are Diamonds has liner notes with at least one song dedication or political comment from Denver. The inside album jacket of the 1983 It's about Time features a colorful Dymaxion World Map created by longtime friend R. Buckminster Fuller, for whom Denver wrote "What One Man Can Do," which appears on the Seasons of the Heart album. Fuller writes in a message accompanying the Dymaxion map:

The objective of the game would be to explore ways to make it possible for anybody and everybody in the human family to enjoy the total earth without any human interfering with any other human and without any human gaining advantage at the expense of another. (Liner notes)

Moreover, it has Denver's "The Peace Poem," an excerpt of which reads:

But there's still time to turn around
 And make all hatred cease
 And give another name to living
 And we could call it peace. (5-8)

Some of Denver's albums, such as It's about Time, contain several releases that address global concerns. "World Game," for instance, is a plea for world peace. "If it gets right down to it, you against your friend," he claims in the song (11). "I swear that this is not the answer / As far as I can see it is the way it all ends" (12-13). Therefore, the 1970s songs that were primarily about nature started being replaced by ones about the environment. Whereas the mountains and wind in Colorado inspired much of the music that garnered him mainstream acclaim, the war and hunger in other countries now became an incentive. Denver's lyrics originated from his travel experiences to other countries, especially because he was touring abroad more often than during the 1970s. Underprivileged countries, including Zimbabwe ("Singer"), and worldwide powers, such as the Soviet Union ("Denver Will"), were frequent stops during international tours in the mid-1980s and inspired songs such as "African Sunrise" (1985) and "World Game," respectively.

"It's about Time"

One example of the environment song is "It's about

Time," which is on the 1983 It's about Time album. Denver calls the single

one of the best songs I've ever written. There's never been a song that came more from my heart in relating the work of [Mohandas Karamchand] Gandhi to the Pope [John Paul II], who travel around the world spreading the word of peace, to the life of any individual who thinks of his fellow beings as brothers and sisters and recognizes that we are a human family.

(Hearts in Harmony 28.2 14)

Symbolic of Denver's perspective during the 1980s, the song encourages global unity by stressing that "It's about time we start to live it the family of man" (23). In some ways the single has qualities apparent in songs before and after its release. For example, it builds upon the "Shanghai Breezes" idea that "In the eyes of all the people the look is much the same" (3). Just as the "Shanghai" moon and stars are the same to Denver and Annie despite their being in different countries, people and their experiences are the same here. No matter their location, people need to "realize it [sic] we're all in this together" (5). Denver conveys the same during speeches, such as in his address at the 1986 Choices for the Future Symposium, which his Windstar Foundation sponsors:

We are all on the same path, no matter

what language we speak, no matter how we
 express our faith, no matter what color
 we are, no matter how we live our lives
 politically. We are all the same as
 spiritual beings, children of God, on
 the same path back home to that from
 whence we came. ("Human Spirituality" 77)

By advocating "you and me together" (26), Denver hopes all
 people will share in another's misfortune and act for
 universal change. He tries to support his argument by citing
 personal experiences from travel abroad. He claims:

There's a man who is my brother, I just
 don't know his name
 But I know his home and family because I
 know we feel the same
 And it hurts me when he's hungry and when
 his children cry
 I too am a father and that little one is mine.
 (17-20)

Given his service to the Hunger Project since the 1970s,
 Denver appropriately includes a reference to the hungry.
 Even though he does not know every person he meets while
 touring, these people affect him enough so that he
 incorporates his experiences and emotions into his music.
 The example is both an ethical and pathetic appeal because it
 reflects Denver's moral nature and garners listeners'
 sympathies.

Furthermore, the song is a predecessor to "Let Us Begin," the 1986 antiwar record. Denver advocates a world of peace and of plenty (25), with equal opportunity and respect for all. "Who's to say you have to lose for someone else to win," he wonders (2). Indeed, he thinks, "it's about time we start to see it the earth is our only home" (13), and work to eliminate the discord and destruction. He sees a domino effect if nations start fighting because "the first is just the last one when you play a deadly game" (4). Without "changes" (8), he foresees little reality for peace, "the dream we've always known" (22). After the release of the album, Denver said, "The human family has to start working together. That's the only way we'll have a little less chance of blowing ourselves up" (Hinckley). In addition to working with those in other nations, people need to appreciate what the earth has to offer because it is common ground for all. Denver cites the world's chief peace advocate, the pope, as an example for others to follow in this respect. "I suppose I love him most of all when he kneels to kiss the land / With his lips upon our mother's breast he makes his strongest stand" (11-12), he states. Just as the pope gives his blessing to the land, others should as well. "It's about time we start to listen to the voices in the wind" (15) and to "recognize it [sic] these changes in the weather" (7), he proposes. Nature can be a guiding force if individuals embrace it, similar to the way it functions in "Rhymes and Reasons" and "Windsong."

Compared to some of his other songs, "It's about Time" has a variety of style conventions, although repetition again dominates. Such repetition is in keeping with the aural characteristics of the song as a genre. Anaphora occurs mainly in the second, fourth, and sixth stanzas, in which Denver develops the notion that "It's about time, it's about changes and it's about time" (8). "It's about time" reinforces the urgency he feels if people everywhere are "to turn the world around" (21). Isocolon and parallelism are evident in the eighth line, too, because the "It's about time" is repeated and the series of three is parallel. The former style convention is also present in "It's about peace and it's about plenty and it's about time" (25). With the anaphora, isocolon, and parallelism, the song has a rhythmic effect that naturally reinforces the immediacy of Denver's message. Other style conventions are antithesis and parallelism. Denver contends that universal gain is feasible when he notes, "Who's to say you have to lose for someone else to win" (2). Elsewhere, he cites the global loss in war because "the first is just the last one" (4). To promote the earth as a valuable resource, Denver uses personification. The pope "kneels to kiss the land / With his lips upon our mother's breast. . . ." (11-12) The land is Mother Earth, whose human qualities prompt respect and love, both of which Denver suggests the "voices in the wind" (15) warrant.

Denver, John. "It's about Time." It's about Time.

RCA, AFL1-4683, 1983.

There's a full moon over India and Gandhi lives again
Who's to say you have to lose for someone else to win
In the eyes of all the people the look is much the same
For the first is just the last one when you play a
deadly game

5 It's about time we realize it we're all in this together
It's about time we find out it's all of us or none
It's about time we recognize it these changes in the
weather

It's about time, it's about changes and it's about time

There's a light in the Vatican window for all the world
to see

10 And a voice cries in the wilderness and sometimes he
speaks for me

I suppose I love him most of all when he kneels to kiss
the land

With his lips upon our mother's breast he makes his
strongest stand

It's about time we start to see it the earth is our
only home

It's about time we start to face it we can't make it
here all alone

15 It's about time we start to listen to the voices in
the wind
It's about time and it's about changes and it's about
time

There's a man who is my brother, I just don't know
his name
But I know his home and family because I know we feel
the same
And it hurts me when he's hungry and when his
children cry

20 I too am a father and that little one is mine

It's about time we begin it to turn the world around
It's about time we start to make it the dream we've
always known
It's about time we start to live it the family of man
It's about time, it's about changes and it's about time

25 It's about peace and it's about plenty and it's
about time
It's about you and me together and it's about time

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"Flying for Me"

A later environment song is "Flying for Me," which appears on the 1986 One World album. Denver wrote it in honor of the Challenger members who died when the space

shuttle exploded in 1986, as well as for their families and NASA personnel. "I believe that that was my flight," he says about the launch ("John Denver's Lofty"). A longtime supporter of NASA, Denver helped found the civilian space program and was scheduled to be the first civilian in space until President Ronald Reagan decided he wanted a teacher to have the honor. Once in space, Denver hoped to do a radio show for children (Berry 3), using his music to communicate his experiences. Denver explains that he has always wanted

to somehow be a vehicle that puts them
[people] a little bit more in touch with
themselves. And I think that's the real
value of art and most specifically music.

. . . it's a window into your own soul. That
when you see a work of art, whether it's a
painting or a dance or a piece of music . . .
whatever it is, and how it speaks to you,
you learn something about yourself. You see
something about yourself. (Interview, Klemt)

NASA put on hold the civilian program after the shuttle disaster (Berry 3). Should NASA reconsider, Denver probably will have support that he go. Republican Senator Jake Garn said about Denver in 1986, "If any civilian deserves it--for 15 years of dedicated work for the space program--he does" (Birnbach 5).

Though "Flying for Me" is mainly a tribute to the astronauts and NASA personnel, it reflects the importance of

the space program to Denver too. He acknowledges that "I was the one who wanted to fly" (2), citing service to others as the motivation. Before the shuttle mission, Alice Steinbach reported that "Denver admits that he would like to become a role model for young people" (57). Actually, Denver considers himself a more than competent candidate, for he remarks, "I wanted to carry the dreams of all people right up to the stars" (6). Denver said in 1983 about his desire to fly, "I'd be the most qualified person to do it. I've got a pilot's license. I'm a diver, so I'm used to zero gravity" (Hinckley). His confidence rests in his abilities and song, the primary means by which he intends to educate the people on earth about space exploration. Years before the civilian flight, he also said, "Most important, as a communicator, I could put my space experiences into songs and reach millions of people" (Hinckley). He relates in the song, "Or maybe I would find a song / Giving a voice to all of the hearts that cannot be heard" (8-9). The lines seem to have a dual meaning. On the one hand, Denver suggests that he believes his music will convey the thoughts and actions of those like him, citizens whose dreams often go unnoticed or unrealized, as Denver's did in this case. Denver, however, further seems to be saying that he thinks his music will be representative of common people who will never experience a space flight. As it is, he sees the astronauts that way because "They were flying for everyone" (14). Either way he views his role, he perceives the opportunity for everyone's benefit because he

states, "I wanted to give myself and free myself, and join myself with it all" (22).

Despite believing himself to be a capable civilian in space, Denver realizes that the learning experience will be his too. "And I prayed that I'd find an answer there" (7), he notes, indicating that he understands his duty is more as learner than teacher. After the shuttle disaster, Denver said, "If I were to go up in the shuttle--and not as an entertainer, not as an educator, not as a journalist, but as Everyman, as a world citizen--I think it would get some notice" (Birnbach 4). Even though the launch failed, Denver notes, "They gave us their light" (16). He recognizes that the astronauts possess insight, not to mention "spirit" (17) and ambition (17). Denver said in 1983:

I look around today and I see a real sense
of futility among young people. What do they
do with their education? Why bother? . . .
But if we can show kids that space is a new
frontier, where we'll need technicians and
workers, that might rekindle their enthusiasm.

(Hinckley)

Denver continues to include himself with the general population--and its education--throughout the song. For instance, he indicates, "The promise of tomorrow is real / Children of spaceship Earth / The future belongs to us all" (24-26). He thinks he will benefit from others' experiences, just as he believes that people learn from his, notably those

described in his music. To him, space is humanity's hope, one worth appreciating. His position of sincerity is apparent because as the song proceeds, Denver switches the focus from himself to the astronauts. He refers to Christa McAuliffe, the teacher who was given the first civilian spot. "She was flying for me," claims Denver, whose comment could not be more literal (27).

In addition to being a voice for others, Denver wants to promote harmony. He refers to space exploration opponents, perhaps those who resent the government's support of space technology and advancement when the nation has problems that could be reduced or eliminated with some of the aid given to NASA. He mentions "all of those who stand apart" (11) and "all of the ones who live in fear" (10). For whatever reason, there is a resistance that Denver thinks he can help reduce by participating in a space mission. "My being there would bring us a little step closer together," he cites (12). He thinks his presence, especially his song, will make others relate to space exploration and thus to one another. Indeed, Denver wants everyone to be a part of such a historical endeavor. And because he wants "to wish on the Milky Way / And dance upon a falling star" (20-21) in order to join himself with this outer world, he seeks a more active role in the space program. The song exemplifies what Denver tries to achieve in his music, for he suggests that his music is "about our sense of ourselves and who we are and our connection to each other and all of life" (Interview, Klemt).

"Flying for Me" has repetition more than any other style convention. Anaphora is noticeable mostly in the chorus:

They were flying for me
 They were flying for everyone
 They were flying to see a brighter day for
 each and everyone

They gave us their light
 They gave us their spirit and all they could be
 They were flying for me
 They were flying for me. (13-19)

The chorus later changes when Denver speaks of McAuliffe, for he replaces the "they" with "she" (27-32) yet basically keeps the rest of the lines the same. In some cases, then, Denver relies on repetition (13 and 18-19) or repetition and parallelism (13-14) to emphasize his message. Additionally, there is epanaphora, in which "the same words are repeated at the beginning of each clause" (Benson 260). Denver claims, for example, "And I wanted to go for every man / Every child, every mother of children" (4-5). According to the classical orator Demetrius, such repetition adds to the "forcefulness" of the message (Benson 260). Metaphor exists in "I wanted to ride on that arrow of fire right up into heaven"(3).

Denver, John. "Flying for Me." One World. RCA, AFL1-5811, 1986.

Well I guess that you probably know by now

I was one who wanted to fly
I wanted to ride on that arrow of fire right up into
heaven

And I wanted to go for every man
5 Every child, every mother of children
I wanted to carry the dreams of all people right up to
the stars

And I prayed that I'd find an answer there
Or maybe I would find a song
Giving a voice to all of the hearts that cannot be heard
10 And for all of the ones who live in fear
And all of those who stand apart
My being there would bring us a little step closer
together

They were flying for me
They were flying for everyone
15 They were trying to see a brighter day for each and
everyone

They gave us their light
They gave us their spirit and all they could be
They were flying for me
They were flying for me

20 And I wanted to wish on the Milky Way

And dance upon a falling star
I wanted to give myself and free myself, and join
myself with it all

Given the chance to dream, it can be done
The promise of tomorrow is real
25 Children of spaceship Earth
The future belongs to us all

She was flying for me
She was flying for everyone
She was trying to see a brighter day for each
and everyone

30 She gave us her light
She gave us her spirit and all she can be
She was flying for me
They were flying for me
They were flying for everyone
35 They were trying to see a brighter day for each
and everyone

They gave us their light
They gave us their spirit and all they could be
They were flying for me

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"Falling Leaves (The Refugees)"

Among the other global concerns Denver has addressed is the plight of refugees. He used his own travel experiences to write "Falling Leaves (The Refugees)," featured on his 1988 Higher Ground album. Like "Shanghai Breezes," the tune is one of those that "started happening" for Denver, who describes the experience as "spiritual" ("Human Spirituality" 77). According to Denver:

I wrote this in Bombay, India which has one of the largest slums in the world. And here with the people living in the most desperate conditions that I've ever experienced, what I found was an incredible sense of family, a sense of hospitality, [sic] they had nothing and they wanted to give you something just for being there. To them just to have another day was a blessing, a gift. The song is really a prayer. (Hearts in Harmony 30.2 29)

Although "Falling Leaves" did not become a chart single, it is special to Denver. It was among the songs he included during his 1993 concert tour, which was foremost a celebration of Christmas. He introduced the song by noting that "the people who were living there [India] were full of such joy and full of life" (A Christmas Together).

Denver makes it clear that the song is a tribute to "the refugees / The ones without a home" (9-10). The lyrics of

the first and fourth stanzas are the same to emphasize Denver's appreciation of the homeless people in India. Because the refugees have touched him so deeply, he gives "praise for all I see" (4). He indicates that their presence alone makes his "heart so full of love" (3) for them. Denver mentioned that during his visit the communal spirit was such a rarity that "I've never seen it more, with the possible exception of some villages in Africa, than I experienced in that slum" ("Human Spirituality" 77). As a result, when he refers to "These gifts you give to me" (2), it appears that he means the "sense of family" and "sense of hospitality" (Hearts in Harmony 30.2 29). The people's ability to withstand their living conditions also seems to stimulate his admiration, however. He remembers "every mother's love" (5) for the children who cry (6). Similar to the adults in the parent-child relationship in "It's about Time," the mothers are a source of comfort and strength for the children. Denver's technique here is the use of the pathetic appeal to create a situation that prompts emotion in the observer and, subsequently, listener of their ordeal.

As he has done before when depicting the less fortunate, Denver describes the refugees' plight so that others can relate to it. He points out the refugees who try to escape on "a boat out on the ocean" and those who try to endure on a "city street alone" (11). Their different attempts to adjust show their "sacrifice" (15), thereby prompting listeners to identify the way that observers such as Denver do. Moreover,

he cites the parent-child relationship and questions, "Are they not some dear mother's child / Are they not you and I" (12-13). The lines recognize the commonality of all people and illustrate the fear for future generations, both traits apparent in "Let Us Begin." He acknowledges his concern about these people's well-being, wondering whether they are expendable "like falling leaves / Who give themselves away" (16-17). He even admits:

If I could have one wish on earth
Of all I can conceive
T'would be to see another spring
And bless the falling leaves. (20-23)

The leaf image shows the vulnerability of the homeless, death in the natural process. The spring, conversely, represents the rebirth of the people, life in that process. Denver's sincerity makes his character and message appealing, for Aristotle asserts that "we like those who have some earnest feeling towards us, as admiration, a belief that we are good, or a delight in us" (Benson 152). Denver further establishes his character by proposing that the refugees are not to blame for their misfortune. Rather, he thinks, "Are we the ones to bear this shame / And they this sacrifice" (14-15). Without offending listeners, he suggests mutual accountability for the problem. And he hopes others will share his prayer for a better world when he says, "Oh sing for all the stars above / The peace beyond all fear" (7-8).

Despite the beginning and ending stanzas, the song does

not have that much repetition. The first and last stanzas emphasize Denver's gratitude about being able to appreciate "this precious day" (1). But they effectively set up the middle stanzas that deal with the refugees, who are unable to fully share in his feeling despite appearing to be "full of joy" (A Christmas Together). Anaphora occurs mainly in the second stanza with "Are they not some dear mother's child / Are they not you and I / Are we the ones to bear this shame" (12-14). Though the "are" seems to depict Denver's uncertainty about his and others' relationships to these people, he really conveys his belief that refugeeism is a global concern. The anaphora in "Oh sing for every mother's love" (5) and "Oh sing for all the stars above" (7) supports that position because he is encouraging universal song for "every" one, albeit mother or child. Denver includes simile when he comments that the refugees are "just like falling leaves" (16). As in so many of his songs, nature images are tied to the topic at hand. He links the refugees to death because they are apt to fall. Nonetheless, he remains hopeful that these people have "another spring" (22) and experience the rebirth associated with the season. He wishes them "peace beyond all fear" (8), for they are likely to be the most afraid given their situation.

Denver, John. "Falling Leaves (The Refugees)." Higher Ground. Windstar, WR-53336-2, 1988.

Thank you for this precious day

These gifts you give to me
My heart so full of love for you
Sings praise for all I see
5 Oh sing for every mother's love
For every childhood tear
Oh sing for all the stars above
The peace beyond all fear

This is for the refugees
10 The ones without a home
A boat out on the ocean city street alone
Are they not some dear mother's child
Are they not you and I
Are we the ones to bear this shame
15 And they this sacrifice

Or are they just like falling leaves
Who give themselves away
From dust to dust from seed to shear
And to another day
20 If I could have one wish on earth
Of all I can conceive
T'would be to see another spring
And bless the falling leaves

Thank you for this precious day
25 These gifts you give to me

My heart so full of love for you
Sings praise for all I see
Oh sing for every mother's love
For every childhood tear
30 Oh sing for all the stars above
The peace beyond all fear
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One notable difference between Denver's music of the 1970s and that of the 1980s is the lack of story songs in the latter material. Indeed, he wrote or co-authored few narratives, particularly ones reflecting the country experiences that were so prominent in the hits "Rocky Mountain High" and "Back Home Again" and in the less popular releases "Matthew" and "Rocky Mountain Suite (Cold Nights in Canada)." The singles that most resemble the story songs do not always depict in full a character's journey, a common feature of his earlier singles. Some of the journeys occur in the protagonist's mind rather than in the body, such as in the 1985 "Dreamland Express." Because the songs are not necessarily extended narratives, they describe protagonists' realizations that appear less significant.

"Wild Montana Skies"

A rare example of the Denver story song during the 1980s is "Wild Montana Skies." Denver recorded the tune with Emmylou Harris, and it was a number fourteen Billboard

country hit in 1983 (Whitburn, 1944-1988 81). A narrative, it introduces an unidentified male character who rediscovers himself by returning to the country after living in the city. The song is remarkably similar to two Denver story songs from the 1970s, "Matthew" and "Rocky Mountain High." The boy's upbringing, for example, is nearly the same as that of Uncle Matthew in the former because Matthew is orphaned when a youngster and raised by his mother's brother. And just as in "Rocky Mountain High," the man realizes his place is in the country after time in the city. Furthermore, nature in each song represents a source of stability to the protagonist. Despite its release nearly ten years after the other songs, "Wild Montana Skies" illustrates Denver's continued interest in promoting basic values such as love of nature and of family.

From the start of "Wild Montana Skies," the protagonist's well-being is linked to nature. Born "in the Bitterroot Valley" in Montana (1), he comes into the world during the spring, a time of rebirth. The geese are "headin' north and home again / Bringin' a warm wind from the south / Bringin' the first taste of the spring" (2-4). His birth is associated with the "early morning rain" (1), the wildlife, and the wind. Once he is born, his mother wants him to remain tied to the land because she sings to him, "Give him the wild wind for a brother and the wild Montana skies" (9-10). The boy remains close to nature even after his mother dies, leaving him without a parent because "he never

knew his father" (11). His relationship with the countryside seems to fill the void created by his mother's death and father's absence because it helps him adjust and learn. Through his farming, he "learn[s] to make a stand" (18) and "he learn[s] to read the seasons" (17).

His maturity results from his experiences outdoors, whether he is communing with nature or farming (16) the land. In becoming a capable farmer, he starts his life anew because he becomes secure and self-confident. Because "he learned to know the wilderness and to be a man that way" (13), he decides to "set out on his own" (23). Later, when he returns to Montana after nine years away, he regains his former life because "there was somethin' in the country that he said he couldn't leave" (30). At that moment, his peace of mind is renewed as well. The storm (25) seems to reflect his inner unrest, which has probably resulted from time in a place where "he couldn't breathe" (29). The heartache suggests personal loss while in the city because "there was somethin' in the country that he said he couldn't leave" (30). During his escape, then, the man has the "fire in his heart" and "light in his eyes" (8) that his mother hoped he would have. His life starts over when he decides to rejoin his natural family--the "wild wind for a brother" (9). And when the protagonist "is gone" (35), the country people left behind "try to carry on" (36) by "Giving a voice to the wilderness and the land that he lived on" (38). Therefore, they try to give life to his memory, continuing the

association between nature and personal livelihood until the song's end.

Although the protagonist's journey shows the benefits of nature, it offers the advantages of familial love too. The love of family offers the boy the livelihood and comfort that nature does. When the boy's mother dies "that summer" (10) after his birth, her brother is there to raise him. The youngster receives the same physical and emotional support that Matthew ("Matthew") does, for the family "Gave him a hand that he could lean on and a strength to call his own" (15). With their love, he is able to find his place in life through farming. The uncle's "family and his home" (14) provide a sense of security for the protagonist, especially when "He was 30 years and runnin'" (24) from the city, where "he said he couldn't breathe" (29). Regardless of whether "he was a lawyer" or "a John" (28), he feels stifled in the city until he becomes willing "to make a brand new start" (26). Even after the man "is gone" (35), the area residents seem to act as a family trying to preserve the memory of a lost loved one. They hope to "carry on" (36) by "giving a voice" (37) to nature, the way that he has through his love of the land (16). So what is initially a family of two--the boy and his mother--extends much further as the boy matures because the relatives and community members become "the love of a good family" (7).

As with his other songs, "Wild Montana Skies" is structured around repetition. Anaphora is present in all but

the third to last stanza and is most obvious in the chorus:

Oh Montana, give this child a home
 Give him the love of a good family and a
 woman of his own
 Give him a fire in his heart, give him a
 light in his eyes
 Give him the wild wind for a brother and
 the wild Montana skies. (6-9)

The emphasis on "give" shows the mother's interest in the boy's well-being, which in the next stanza becomes jeopardized when she dies. Additionally, the focus on "give" indicates her hope in Montana as her son's caretaker, a wish that appears to come true because he later sees the state as a home. Anaphora also is present in the second and third stanzas. The former juxtaposes the chorus because it stresses what he loses: his mother (10), father (11), emotion (10), and answers (12). The latter is a contrast to the former because it reflects what he gains, especially from his farming (16-18). Certain lines that feature anaphora have internal repetition and parallelism too, such as in "Giving a voice to the forest, giving a voice to the dawn" (37). And eleven lines, including three straight in the chorus, feature isocolon, "word-for-word repetition of two or more members (phrases, clauses, and so forth)" (Graves 175). Denver writes, "And he learned to be a farmer and he learned to love the land / And he learned to read the seasons and he / Learned to make a stand" (16-18). Depending on the stanza,

such repetition reminds the listener of the protagonist's loss or gain, thus communicating the journey motif more effectively. Still other lines have a combination of conventions, such as metaphor and parallelism. The metaphorical "Give him a fire in his heart, give him a light in his eyes" (8) has the conceptual repetition in the emphasis on the verb "give" and demonstrates parallelism. Because of the metaphor, repetition, and parallelism, the line has an advantage over lines with fewer conventions. Aristotle contends that

The greater the number of conditions which the saying fulfils [sic], the greater seems the smartness: as, for instance, when the words are metaphorical, and the metaphor of a certain kind,--with antithesis, parallelism of structure, and actuality. (Benson 249)

Nonetheless, the line additionally portrays the man as having a new vision and, subsequently, a burning desire to return home.

Denver, John. "Wild Montana Skies." It's about Time.

RCA, AFL1-4683, 1983.

He was born in the Bitterroot Valley in the early
morning rain

Wild geese over the water headin' north and home again

Bringin' a warm wind from the south

Bringin' the first taste of the spring

5 His mother took him to her breast and softly she
did sing

Oh Montana, give this child a home
Give him the love of a good family and a woman of
his own
Give him a fire in his heart, give him a light in
his eyes
Give him the wild wind for a brother and the wild
Montana skies

10 His mother died that summer and he never learned to cry
He never knew his father and he never did ask why
He never knew the answers that would make an easy way
But he learned to know the wilderness and to be a man
that way

His mother's brother took him in to his family and his
home

15 Gave him a hand that he could lean on and a strength to
call his own
And he learned to be a farmer and he learned to love
the land
And he learned to read the seasons and he
Learned to make a stand

Oh Montana, give this child a home

20 Give him the love of a good family and a woman of
his own

Give him a fire in his heart, give him a light in
his eyes

Give him the wild wind for a brother and the wild
Montana skies

On the eve of his 21st birthday he set out on his own

He was 30 years and runnin' when he found his way
back home

25 Ridin' a storm across the mountains and an aching
in his heart

Said he came to turn the pages and to make a brand new
start

Now he never told a story of the time that he was gone

Some say he was a lawyer, some say he was a John

There was somethin' in the city that he said he couldn't
breathe

30 And there was somethin' in the country that he said he
couldn't leave

Oh Montana, give this child a home

Give him the love of a good family and a woman of
his own

Give him a fire in his heart, give him a light in
his eyes

Give him the wild wind for a brother and the wild
Montana skies

35 Now some say he was crazy and they're glad that he
is gone
But some of us will miss him and we'll try to carry on
Giving a voice to the forest, giving a voice to the dawn
Giving a voice to the wilderness and the land that he
lived on

Oh Montana, give this child a home

40 Give him the love of a good family and a woman of
his own

Give him a fire in his heart, give him a light in
his eyes

Give him the wild wind for a brother and the wild
Montana skies

Oh Montana, give this child a home

Give him the love of a good family and a woman of
his own

45 Give him a fire in his heart, give him a light in
his eyes

Give him the wild wind for a brother and the wild
Montana skies

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"Dreamland Express"

Hardly the extended narrative of "Wild Montana Skies," the 1985 "Dreamland Express" does depict a character's journey, albeit in a dream as well as the real world. The tune is off the Dreamland Express album, suggesting that perhaps it reflects Denver's emotional recovery from the personal difficulties of the previous years. At the time of the album's release, Denver called it "more upbeat and positive" than the previous Seasons of the Heart and One World ones (Bell 37), which respectively included songs about his marital break-up and father's death. The song reached number nine on the Billboard country chart (Whitburn, 1944-1988 81) and is about falling in love.

The song begins with a first-person, male narrator who has "caught a ride on the Dreamland Express last night" (1). His recollection of a dream involving a boat ride has him "tossin' and turnin'" (18) because he cannot forget the woman who has answered his come-on with "hey there sweet daddy . . . Just come and be mine" (7, 10). The woman in his dream seems to be someone he knows, for he thinks when he awakens, "I'd like to send you a ticket on the Dreamland Express" (19). In his dream, she fulfills his wish that he "see the very heart" of her (5) when she tells him, "Let me be the one that you dream of, baby / Let me be the one that you love, oh oh / Let me be the one that you love" (13-15). Evidently her presence has been unexpected because he acknowledges his "surprise" at her being with him (3). She lifts his spirits

and faith in love. At the time he "was sailing on an ocean of blue" (2) and "couldn't believe it, or conceive that my dream would come true" (6). Apparently loneliness, even if only temporarily, has him seeking company. She comforts him, which she realizes because she immediately responds, "everything is all right" (7). She eagerly reciprocates his approach, noting that "You know for miles there's not a telephone line / There's not a soul to disturb us" (8-9). Actually, she is quite accommodating and confident in that she tells him, "don't be nervous" (9). He has reason to be nervous, though, because she says all the right lines, appropriate considering that she is in his dream. She says she wants to be the prize at the end of his rainbow (11), but her acquiescence leads him to wonder about her sincerity (6). The dream journey ends without it being clear that the two take advantage of their privacy or remain together.

The woman in the dream represents the partner the man wants in his life. She has such an effect on him that her presence interferes with his real world. He cannot forget her (17) and therefore cannot sleep (16). In fact, he has "got a vision of heaven, you livin' there with me" (21) and apparently is in love with this woman because he wants her to himself. Because she is his dream come true (6), he assumes the position she held during his dream. "Let me be the one that you love," he thinks (26), indicating that he wants a real-life relationship such as the one in his dream. Nonetheless, he seems to be alone in his wish for permanency.

He thinks, "I'd like to send you a ticket on the Dreamland Express" (19), suggesting that his real-life woman can benefit from a dream like the one he had. He wants reality to mirror his dream so that she wants him the way her dream double does, the way that he desires her in real life. The man resembles his dream counterpart because he seeks love.

In the dream and real worlds, love is associated with a euphoria that is both material and spiritual. Initially the dream woman mentions, "let me be the end of your rainbow / Let me be the stars up above" (11-12). The references to natural elements, the rainbow and stars, again show Denver's tendency to associate love with nature. She claims that she wants to be the one for him, his wish upon the stars. Yet the rainbow and stars are located in the sky, close to heaven, especially his "vision of heaven" (21). So just as the sunshine and meteor shower in "Sunshine on My Shoulders" and "Rocky Mountain High," respectively, are linked to euphoria, the rainbow and stars have that meaning to the male narrator. And like in "Sunshine," the speaker wants to share himself and his happiness because he thinks, "Let me be the one that you love" (26). Nature relates to enlightenment too because he "yearn[s] for the sun to shine" (18) to relieve him of his "tossin' and turnin'" (18). Certainly, daylight represents the end to night, which has caused him discomfort. Immediately after hoping for the dawn, nevertheless, he acknowledges, "I'd like to send you a ticket on the Dreamland Express" (19). The implication is that the

natural world is a source of individual awakening or understanding.

Perhaps because its form--the dream within reality--is different from Denver's usual story song, "Dreamland Express" contains fewer style conventions than those in earlier material. The prominent standard, though, remains repetition. Anaphora exists throughout the chorus to stress the characters' desire to please the other and themselves, even though he appears more sincere because of his preoccupation with her during and after the dream. However, the repetition of "Let me be the one" also shows their interest in being the only one for the other. The chorus features metaphor in "Let me be the end of your rainbow / Let me be the stars up above" (11-12). As in his 1970s material, the metaphor has people aspiring to be natural objects.

Denver, John. "Dreamland Express." Dreamland Express.

RCA, AFL1-5458, 1985.

I caught a ride on the Dreamland Express last night
 I was sailing on an ocean of blue
 And right there by my side, much to my surprise, was you
 I said, come on over baby, let me look in your eyes
 5 Let me see the very heart of you
 And I couldn't believe it, or conceive that my dream
 would come true
 Cause you said, hey there sweet daddy, everything

is all right
You know for miles there's not a telephone line
There's not a soul to disturb us, don't be nervous
10 Just come and be mine
 You said, let me be the end of your rainbow
 Let me be the stars up above
 Let me be the one that you dream of, baby
 Let me be the one that you love, oh oh
15 Let me be the one that you love
But now it's four in the mornin', honey I can't sleep
I can't get you out of my mind
I keep tossin' and turnin', I'm yearnin' for the
 sun to shine
I'd like to send you a ticket on the Dreamland Express
20 And take you far away with me
I've got a vision of heaven, you livin' there with me
 Let me be the end of your rainbow
 Let me be the stars up above
 Let me be the one that you dream of, baby
25 Let me be the one that you love, oh oh
 Let me be the one that you love

 Let me be the end of your rainbow
 Let me be the stars up above
 Let me be the one that you dream of, baby
30 Let me be the one that you love, oh oh

Let me be the one that you love

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"Let Us Begin (What Are We Making Weapons For?)"

During the latter half of the 1980s, Denver's lyrics tended to be either about love or about the environment. He rarely had recordings that clearly resemble the former story song, a change noticeable in "Dreamland Express," and the few that do are written by others. Quite different from the typical story song because of its political commentary, "Let Us Begin (What Are We Making Weapons For?)" does contain narrative elements in that the speaker's family history and his realizations are chronicled. "It's so much more political in a sense than anything I've ever done," Denver states about the single. "It's certainly more pointed than a love song" (Mitchell 7). The 1986 One World liner notes indicate that Denver dedicates the song to the people in America and the Soviet Union. Denver performed in the Soviet Union during 1984 ("Denver Will") and 1985 (Mann) and used the tours to promote better relations between the United States and Soviet Union. After the former tour, he said the Russians and Americans

have so much in common that I think
 [President Ronald] Reagan and [Konstantin U.]
 Chernenko can sit down tomorrow. All great
 presidents are known for what they did in
 foreign relations and Reagan wants better

relations with the Russians. Sure, I'd ask him to go to Moscow. Will he do it?

Anything is possible. ("Denver Will")

Denver's efforts attracted the attention of Reagan because "Secretary of State George Shultz summoned him to ask him his impressions of the Soviet Union" (Nash 65). While in the Soviet Union, Denver recorded "Let Us Begin" with Alexander Gradsky, "a recognised [sic] and entirely respectable performer" (Troitsky 22) who "spans three decades of Soviet rock" (Troitsky). At the time Denver cited Gradsky as "the top male singer-song writer of the Soviet [sic]" (Campbell). The duet was a historic event because it "marked the first time a Soviet artist was permitted to record with an American singer" (Jaeger, "Struggling" 10) and because "never before had singers of such stature from the two nations collaborated" (Lustig 20). During his fall 1993 tour, Denver included the song in his repertoire, along with a video documenting the destruction and death caused by weaponry displays (A Christmas Together). He prefaced the song by saying, "It's one of the best things I've ever done" (A Christmas Together).

The song recounts the family history of the narrator, "the son of a grassland farmer" (1). The family background has several generations of males, excluding the speaker, who have served in the armed forces. With a father and a brother who have served in South Korea and Vietnam, respectively, the narrator has grown up knowing the military's effect on

people's lives, mainly because of his experiences. He does not appreciate their commitment "to a battle that just can't be won" (19) and sees how much war has cost him. For instance, he acknowledges losing "The mind of my brother to Vietnam" (5) and his soldier son's "future to revolution" (18). The loss he describes is primarily individual, especially his own. He feels helpless and alone because his father, brother, and son have committed to a life that he views "is not living" (20). He naturally cannot relate to the relatives' war experiences, for he is not a soldier. However, his isolation also results because as he notes, "For the first time in my life I feel like a prisoner / A slave to the ways of the powers that be" (29-30). Instead of feeling that the people have control of their lives, he sees them as foolishly "feeding the war machine" (11). And he seems to feel alone in that he is the one questioning war: "Tell me, what are we making weapons for" (14). Peace is his vision, even though he appears uncertain about that of others. "If peace is our vision / Let us begin," he states (46-47), as if in wonder why more citizens and leaders are not actively seeking peace.

The suffering is his own, yet he sees it as others' too. The narrator's possession of the land, in which "There are four generations of blood" (7), is at stake because "Now there's a banker who says I must give up my land" (6). He already has been deprived of a sense of family when his relatives join the armed forces, and now he risks losing the

very foundation of the family--the land. He claims that he "would gladly give up my right arm" (9) rather than sacrifice "Four generations of love on this farm" (8) to a cause that he does not support. The land notwithstanding, the well-being of future generations is a concern. "And I fear for my children, as I fear for the future I see," he comments (31), adding, "If our song is not sung as a chorus, we surely will burn" (34). He urges people to think about everyone's welfare, "All the lives that were given" (41) during past wars. And his plea has a sense of urgency, for he remarks, "This could be the last time" (45).

According to David Dunaway, political music tries to "describe a social problem, in emotional terms" and to "solicit or arouse support for a movement" (39), in this case a movement away from war. The song symbolizes Denver's "aspiration toward a better life" (Dunaway 39), for he does not want a repeat of the "nine hundred days of Leningrad / The sound of the dying, the cut of the cold" (21-22). To show the need for change, Denver relies on logical and pathetic appeals when he uses history as an authority. Denver indicates in a 1986 Windstar Journal article that "one of the most moving experiences of my life was to visit" the cemetery honoring the Soviets who died during World War II ("Let Us Begin" 4). His compassion for those he does not know and desire to share that feeling exemplify the type of character that classical rhetoricians encourage in people who wish to be effective orators. Listeners "are friends to

those who show kindness equally to the absent and to the present; hence all men like those who are thus true to the dead," Aristotle notes (Benson 152).

Although Denver realizes the cost of war, he is unsure about others when he wonders, "What does it take for a people to learn" (33). So he hopes that sharing his thoughts about war will prompt others to reconsider it. Denver relies on pathetic appeals as well by pointing out suffering and deprivation when he says, "We take it right out of the mouths of our babies / Take it away from the hands of the poor" (12-13). He proposes that the weak or underprivileged are unwilling victims of "the war machine" (11). Denver requests the help of those who are more capable than the young or poor. His technique demonstrates Aristotle's contention that "We like those who, we think, wish to do us good. . . . Also, we like those who are apt to benefit us pecuniarily, or in regard to the protection of life; hence we honour the generous and brave, and the just" (Benson 151). Denver steps forward to voice his position, making him appear to be "generous and brave" (Benson 151), but he encourages others to join him:

Now for the first time

This could be the last time

If peace is our vision

Let us begin, let us begin. (52-55)

He knows that he cannot stop the war process by himself because he acknowledges, "If our song is not sung as a

chorus, we surely will burn" (34).

Unlike some of Denver's other songs, "Let Us Begin" does not have extensive use of style conventions. Repetition is most present in the last two stanzas, the latter of which is the same as the former except for two lines. Even the chorus does not feature the repetition that is typical in the Denver song, though he does include "what are we making weapons for" in the first (35) and last (39) lines to emphasize his position. Denver primarily uses a narrative form up until the end of the song in order to establish his perspective on the basis of family background. He incorporates the repetition in the final stanzas to emphasize his message--his desire for world peace. Some of the lines that have anaphora also introduce parallelism and antithesis, such as "All the lives that were given / All the vows that were taken" (41-42). The multiple conventions contribute to the "smartness" that Aristotle attributes as a strength (Benson 249). Antithesis is evident in "Now for the first time / This could be the last time" (44-45). While Denver recommends finally having a united front against war, he recognizes that such a movement might be the last because of the ever dangerous "war machine" (11). Denver uses simile when he says, "For the first time in my life I feel like a prisoner" (29). Consequently, the song's message takes such precedence that the distinctive style conventions, such as "feel like a prisoner" (29), function to support his contention that war is destructive.

Denver, John. "Let Us Begin (What Are We Making Weapons For?)" One World. RCA, AFL1-5811, 1986.

I am the son of a grassland farmer
Western Oklahoma nineteen forty three
I always felt grateful to live in the land of the free
I gave up my father to South Korea
5 The mind of my brother to Vietnam
Now there's a banker who says I must give up my land
There are four generations of blood in this topsoil
Four generations of love on this farm
Before I give up I would gladly give up my right arm

10 What are we making weapons for
Why keep on feeding the war machine
We take it right out of the mouths of our babies
Take it away from the hands of the poor
Tell me, what are we making weapons for

15 I had a son and my son was a soldier
He was so like my father, he was so much like me
To be a good comrade was the best that he dreamed he
could be
He gave up his future to revolution
His life to a battle that just can't be won
20 For this is not living, to live at the point of a gun
I remember the nine hundred days of Leningrad
The sound of the dying, the cut of the cold

I remember the moments I prayed I would never grow old

What are we making weapons for

25 Why keep on feeding the war machine

We take it right out of the mouths of our babies

Take it away from the hands of the poor

Tell me, what are we making weapons for

For the first time in my life I feel like a prisoner

30 A slave to the ways of the powers that be

And I fear for my children, as I fear for the future

I see

Tell me how can it be we're still fighting each other

What does it take for a people to learn

If our song is not sung as a chorus, we surely will burn

35 What are we making weapons for

Why keep on feeding the war machine

We take it right out of the mouths of our babies

Take it away from the hands of the poor

Tell me, what are we making weapons for

40 Have we forgotten

All the lives that were given

All the vows that were taken

Saying never again

Now for the first time

45 This could be the last time
If peace is our vision
Let us begin

Have we forgotten
All the lives that were given

50 All the vows that were taken
Saying never again, never again
Now for the first time
This could be the last time
If peace is our vision

55 Let us begin, let us begin

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Denver's lyrics during the 1980s are consistent with those of the 1970s in that they convey his experiences and reflections in a "universal language" ("Vietnam" 3A). Yet as this sample of songs indicates, the subjects he addresses become less commonplace than those in his earlier material. For instance, simple celebrations of love, family, and nature are replaced by appeals for peace, unity, and space exploration. Even though Denver has no regrets about being true to his humanitarian self, for he still sings about social and political concerns, he cost himself mainstream popularity by choosing to have the courage to recognize causes and issues in his 1980s music.

Chapter V

Significance of the Study

Denver has never reclaimed the mainstream music popularity that helped him become the biggest selling artist in 1975, but he is secure in his role as one of the most significant worldwide entertainers of all time. Although his television, film, and humanitarian efforts have garnered him national and international acclaim, he is still most recognized for his musical career. His musical success is evident in his longevity and crossover appeal, both of which have made him an industry rarity. During his four-decade career, he has had chart singles on the country, pop, easy listening, and adult contemporary charts in the United States. His music also has become popular in various foreign countries, notably China, Russia, and Australia.

In this study eighteen of Denver's songs during the 1970s and 1980s have been examined for their thematic and stylistic conventions. The lyrics are representative because they are indicative of his original recordings, longtime songwriting, and song types. The songs appear on twelve of the thirty-five albums Denver released as a solo artist during the two decades. Of those thirty-five, seventeen are radio promotion, greatest hits, Christmas, foreign, or live albums. They contain mostly rerecordings or live performances of Denver songs and versions of traditional Christmas tunes. For example, just one song on seven solo

radio albums during the 1970s and 1980s is new (Pinto 11-23). The lyrics in this project, however, appear on twelve of his eighteen other solo efforts, which feature primarily new songs. The twelve albums therefore represent sixty-seven percent of his original material during the time. The lyrics in the sample also reflect his development as a songwriter in that they are songs he wrote during the 1960s to 1980s. Furthermore, they represent the major types of songs he composed and recorded during the decades of his greatest and least mainstream popularity, respectively. Included are his most popular recordings and less known singles, all of which represent his love, story, and nature songs of the 1970s and love, story, and environment songs of the 1980s.

Clearly, Denver's lyrics are worthy of consideration by literary scholars because they are cultural barometers, similar to those of traditional literary works such as novels and short stories. His lyrics show that he has remained committed to writing mainly about matters that come out of his experiences, even if that has meant he has been the exception among mainstream entertainers during the 1980s in singing about worldwide peace, space exploration, and refugees. His songs are a historical reference in that they reflect lifestyles, events, and issues during each decade. For instance, his "Sunshine on My Shoulders" and "Rocky Mountain High" promote the benefits of a relationship between humans and nature at a time when people were still relishing the natural, peaceful lifestyle advocated by the

Woodstock generation of the late 1960s. Denver wrote "Let Us Begin (What Are We Making Weapons For?)" at a time when President Ronald Reagan was trying to improve America's relationship with the former Soviet Union and to promote peace among all nations.

The style conventions in Denver's lyrics warrant study by English scholars as well. Actually, his songs contain numerous rhetorical standards initially promoted by the classical orators Aristotle, Quintilian, and Cicero. Though Denver says his use of conventions such as repetition, simile, and metaphor is not intentional (Interview, Klemt), the standards enhance his message and image, both of which rhetoricians say are necessary for effective oratory. But his lyrics feature other literary traits too. One example is his reliance on the narrative technique, especially in his 1970s material such as "Matthew" and "Rocky Mountain High." He also has tended to link love and nature, which is in the tradition of English romanticist William Wordsworth.

Certainly, the lyrics Denver has written or co-written and recorded during the 1970s and 1980s are significant because of their thematic and stylistic qualities. Even though the eighteen songs are only a sample of the material he has composed and performed, they are a record of his development as a songwriter, singer, and citizen during a solo career that spans three decades. At the same time, nonetheless, they are a cultural and literary history worthy of being considered as part of the formal canon.

Appendix A

Transcript of John Denver Telephone Interview

Barbara Klemt: From the late 1970s until now [1993], your lyrics seem to be wider in scope than your songs in the early 1970s because they are about current matters such as hunger, peace, nuclear weapons, space exploration, and the environment. Do you see your music as a recorder or speaker of present-day cultural happenings and concerns?

John Denver: Well, I don't know if that [sic] I would say it's that broadly. You know, I've always tried to include in my music, in my performances, songs about things that are going on in the world, that have an affect on me, that have affected me, or issues that I have an opinion about. You know, it was with the Mitchell Trio that I first became socially and politically aware, and I learned through that time in folk music and just through the Mitchell Trio especially that you could do songs . . . you know, we did a lot of social and political satire, which were wonderful, hilarious songs, pointing fun at people and things that were going on. We also did songs that were very serious in nature. And I realized that you could express your deepest feelings and quite often reflect the feelings of your audience through music and that music could be a lot more than just about love songs and like that. I think of country and western music, you know, country and western music, it's

very rare that you find a song about something . . . in country music it's a rare thing. I think a few years ago, not k. d. lang, but somebody had a song from the point of view of a housewife. . . . I think Garth Brooks has done a couple of things. . . . Mary Chapin Carpenter, but that's very, very recent. So if the scope has increased, it's out of my own experiences. You know, they've broadened considerably with the opportunities that have been presented to me through my success. And all of these things are issues that matter, and they're all connected to the environment in my opinion. And I think the environment was always the focus of it. I think that one of the things that I'm starting to learn about myself is that they're all . . . it's all spiritual in nature. You know, it's not so much that it's about the environment. It's about our sense of ourselves and who we are and our connection to each other and to all of life. Anyway, that's how it feels now.

Klemt: You have dared to be different in your musical career because not even singers such as Joan Baez have taken up so many world issues and causes (Windstar, NASA, est, Hunger Project, Cousteau Society, Alaska Coalition etc.) as you have. Has being true to yourself given you more than enough personal reward to offset comments from industry people and listeners who do not know about your larger purpose and have wanted you to stay mainstream?

Denver: I think there's the music business, and I think that that's where it's been most frustrating and especially over these last few years. I think I've earned the right to do what I want to do--to record the songs that I want to record. And that's where I had enormous success. I was the biggest selling record artist in the world for a while. I think that how I've sustained . . . an audience over all of these years is because I've been involved in all these issues and not just singing about them but giving time and energy to them also. And it doesn't matter about the comments. You know, it's frustrating where I can obviously see that it has cost me. You know, people think I'm not serious about my career because I give so much other time to these other things. And then they misread that in ways that I can't comprehend, quite frankly. So that's how it goes. You know, I'm gonna do what I'm gonna do, and it doesn't matter.

Klemt: You've mentioned in speeches and interviews that when you sing, you know "there are spiritual experiences happening for people, and that changes happen in people's lives" (Windstar Journal Fall 1986 77). If you intend for your music to move and change people, what writing techniques do you try to use to influence listeners?

Denver: Well, I don't know if, first of all, I think that music is the universal language. And I know that in the shared experience of listening to a song is that people do go

through profound changes. And I get letters every day from people saying that my music, you know, has had a big influence on their lives or has changed their lives and saved their lives in some cases. And so I know that happens to a lot of people, and I'm not the only artist for whom that happens. Music is not the only art, but it certainly does happen there. And so I'm aware of that, and I always felt from back when I first started with RCA--I think that the thing that I said in my autobiography for them or the bio for them was that I wanted to do more than entertain people, that I wanted to touch people. And that has been the source of everything that I've done musically or the foundation of everything that I've done musically. And it's not that I try to use any specific technique other than to the degree I think I use images from nature in my music. And I think that that is part of the reason my music works the way that it does for people.

Klemt: Many of your songs have prose style conventions, mainly repetition, simile, metaphor, and personification. For example, thirteen of the twenty lines in "Windsong" begin with "The wind," and you often portray nature in human terms, such as in "For the children and the flowers / Are my sisters and my brothers" ("Rhymes and Reasons" 15-16). Do you consciously incorporate those literary conventions, or do you just write what you feel, what comes to mind?

Denver: So, . . . when they come up that way, it's not that I'm trying to find those . . . tools and then to write a song. But when you're writing the song, some of them just, you know, they lend themselves to that. And you know a great example is "Windsong." When you're talking about the wind, then it makes sense to say "The wind is this" and "The wind is that," and "The wind is this other thing." So, you know, it's very easy to do it then. And in another song, I think of "For You." The technique was "Just to look in your eyes again," "Just to do this," "Just to do that," "Just to feel this way," and so that's a similar kind of thing. And it's how the song, it just came that way. Once you get started, there's very little I can do about it. To use a simile, you know, it's, again, it's not that I take any particular tool. As you're writing, as the song progresses and the lines come out, sometimes there's the opportunity to use a certain tool in writing. But it's not--it comes with the song. It's not that I start beforehand saying okay I'm going to write this song and I'm going to use this tool. Well, you know, I don't know. You understand? Good.

Klemt: How do you hope people will remember John Denver, the singer?

Denver: Well, you know, I don't know. I think I care more that people remember the songs than that they remember me. If they remember me, I hope it's more than just as a

singer, you know, the man that I am and the songwriter. And as a singer, you know, that I have been--in all of this, you know, I hope that people remember or know to some degree that I have always tried to be true to myself, first of all, and true to the gift that I have, true to the songs that come through me. I remember a poster in Milt Okun's office when I first met him that said the song has rights. And I believe that the song does have rights. I can't cut my songs. If somebody wants to do a song on a television show and cut part of it, I can't do that. I can't let somebody change a few lyrics to serve or meet their own purposes. A song has rights. As a singer, as an artist, you know, I've always continued working to develop my gift and to be a better and better singer. And I think now that I'm much better than I ever have been before. My voice has matured, and I've learned a lot more about how to use it and how to work with it.

Klemt: Do you think you're writing better than before?

Denver: I don't know that I'm writing better, but I certainly think I'm writing as good as I ever have. I think some of the songs over the last four or five years on albums and cassettes that people haven't heard, I think there are very, very good songs. You know, I've noticed here that all the songs you've got listed are pretty much from the RCA albums.

Klent: Do you have any other comments about the way you write songs or about their content?

Denver: So let's see . . . what I try to do, which is out of my own experiences, out of my own emotions, out of my own observations or opinions, out of my own reflections of myself and the life around me. I try to take my experiences, and I try to share them in as universal a way as possible. So that even a song like "Rocky Mountain High," which is so much about Colorado, can have meaning to somebody someplace else in the world. A song like "Country Roads" is the most, you know, popular western song in China. Everybody knows "Country Roads." And "Annie's Song" is so popular all over the world, "Sunshine on My Shoulders." And all of these are trying to take, you know, whatever my feelings are and to articulate them in as universal a way as possible. And as I said earlier, to do more than entertain people, to touch people, to somehow be a vehicle that puts them a little bit more in touch with themselves. And . . . I think that's the real value of art and most specifically music. And that is, it's a window into your own soul. That when you see a work of art, whether it's a painting or a dance or a piece of music, or a movie or a poem, whatever it is, and how it speaks to you, you learn something about yourself. You see something about yourself. You know, that's really what it's for, I guess. And so on my end, it's very, very consciously, you know, what I'm trying to do with my music.

Klemt: Are there any songs that are easier for you to write?

Denver: Oh, I don't think so. Some of them come very quickly, and some of them are a real struggle. But it's not that any of them are . . . I don't think of it as easier. And I guess there's another thing, though, that goes along with that. It's like, you know, "Annie's Song" came in about ten and a half minutes one day. And other songs, "Rocky Mountain High" took several months to write. And so when . . . some of them you're struggling with, but even then, there is this sense of something that wants to be written and I was the lucky one to tap into it. And sometimes it comes in a flood like "Annie's Song" did. Paul Stookey of Peter, Paul and Mary . . . Paul Stookey once said that sometimes he doesn't feel so much as the writer of a song as the instrument of that which wants to be written. And I have that experience. So, you know, it's a wonderful thing. It's really, really exciting when a song is happening and especially when, you know, it kind of takes over . . . over your life. I remember writing "Shanghai Breezes" in Shanghai. This day I was out getting a tour by the people I was staying with, a very special tour. I was meeting people and seeing things that people don't usually get to see, and I don't remember a thing about it. I do not remember a thing about that day because I had this song happening, and I was lost in the song. It's, so that, it's a wonderful, wonderful

feeling, and there's a part of you, you know, when you're struggling with a song, you can't wait to hear the finished song, you know.

Appendix B

Discography of John Denver's Solo Albums¹

John Denver Sings, John Denver, HJD 66, 1966.²

Here, There and Everywhere (John Lennon and Paul
McCartney)

Ann (Billy Edd Wheeler)

Babe, I Hate to Go (John Denver)

When I Was a Cowboy (Huddie Ledbetter)

Yesterday (Lennon and McCartney)

Blue Is My Naughty (Carey Morgan)

What's That I Hear? (Phil Ochs)

And I Love Her (Lennon and McCartney)

When Will I Be Loved (Phil Everly)

Darcy Farrow (Steve Gillette and Tom Campbell)

Minor Swing (Django Reinhardt)

In My Life (Lennon and McCartney)

Farewell Party (Bob Gibson and Bob Connelley)

Rhymes and Reasons, RCA, LSP-4207, 1969.

The Love of the Common People (John Hurley and
Ronnie Wilkins)

Catch Another Butterfly (Michael Williams)

Daydream (Denver)

The Ballad of Spiro Agnew (Tom Paxton)

Circus (Michael Johnson, Laurie Kuehn, and Denver)

When I'm Sixty Four (Lennon and McCartney)

The Ballad of Richard Nixon
 Rhymes and Reasons (John Denver)
 Yellow Cat (Steve Fromholz)
 Leaving, on a Jet Plane (Denver)
 (You Dun Stomped) My Heart (Mason Williams)
 My Old Man (Jerry Jeff Walker)
 I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free (William E.
 Taylor and Dick Dallas)
 Today Is the First Day of the Rest of My Life (Sugacity)
 (Pat Garvey and Victoria Garvey)

Take Me to Tomorrow, RCA, LSP-4278, 1970.

Take Me to Tomorrow (Denver)
 Isabel--Follow Me (Denver)
 Follow Me (Denver)
 Forest Lawn (Paxton)
 Aspenglow (Denver)
 Amsterdam (Mort Shuman and Eric Blau)
 Anthem-Revelation (Denver)
 Sticky Summer Weather (Denver)
 Carolina in My Mind (James Taylor)
 Jimmy Newman (Paxton)
 Molly (Biff Rose)

Whose Garden Was This, RCA, LSP-4414, 1970.

Tremble If You Must (Paul Potash)
 Sail Away Home (Denver)

The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down (Jaime Robbie
Robertson)

Mr. Bojangles (Walker)

I Wish I Could Have Been There (Woodstock) (Denver)

Whose Garden Was This (Paxton)

The Game Is Over (Denver, Jean-Pierre Bourtayre, and
Jean Bouchety)

Eleanor Rigby (Lennon and McCartney)

Old Folks (Blau and Shuman)

Golden Slumbers (Lennon and McCartney)

Sweet Sweet Life (Denver)

Tremble If You Must (Version II) (Potash)

Jingle Bells (J. S. Pierpont and adapted by Denver)

Aerie, RCA, AFL1-4607, 1971.

Starwood in Aspen (Denver)

Everyday (Charles Hardin and Norman Petty)

Casey's Last Ride (Kris Kristofferson)

City of New Orleans (Steve Goodman and Denver)

Friends with You (Bill Danoff and Taffy Nivert)

60 Second Song for a Bank, with the Phrase "May We Help
You Today?" (Denver)

Blow up Your TV (Spanish Pipe Dream) (John Prine)

All of My Memories (Denver)

She Won't Let Me Fly Away (Danoff)

Readjustment Blues (Danoff)

The Eagle and the Hawk (Denver)

Tools (Denver)

Poems, Prayers and Promises, RCA, AFL1-4499, 1971.

Poems, Prayers and Promises (Denver)

Let It Be (Lennon and McCartney)

My Sweet Lady (Denver)

Wooden Indian (Denver)

Junk (McCartney)

Gospel Changes (Jack Williams)

Take Me Home, Country Roads (Danoff, Nivert, and Denver)

I Guess He'd Rather Be in Colorado (Danoff and Nivert)

Sunshine on My Shoulders (Denver)

Around and Around (Denver)

Fire and Rain (James Taylor)

The Box (Kendrew Lascelles)

Rocky Mountain High, RCA, AQL1-4731, 1972.

Rocky Mountain High (Denver)

Mother Nature's Son (Lennon and McCartney)

Paradise (Prine)

For Baby (For Bobbie) (Denver)

Darcy Farrow (Gillette and Campbell)

Prisoners (Denver)

Goodbye Again (Denver)

Season Suite

 Summer (Denver, Taylor, and Dick Kniss)

 Fall (Denver, Taylor, and Kniss)

Winter (Denver, Taylor, and Kniss)
Late Winter, Early Spring (When Everybody Goes to
Mexico) (Denver, Taylor, and Kniss)
Spring (Denver, Taylor, and Kniss)

Farewell Andromeda, RCA, APL1-0101, 1973.

I'd Rather Be a Cowboy (Lady's Chains) (Denver)
Berkeley Woman (Bryan Bowers)
Please, Daddy (Danoff and Nivert)
Angels from Montgomery (Prine)
River of Love (John Sommers)
Rocky Mountain Suite (Cold Nights in Canada) (Denver)
Whiskey Basin Blues (Denver)
Sweet Misery (Hoyt Axton)
Zachary and Jennifer (Denver)
We Don't Live Here No More (Danoff)
Farewell Andromeda (Welcome to My Morning) (Denver)

John Denver's Greatest Hits, RCA, AQL1-0374, 1973.

Take Me Home, Country Roads (Danoff, Nivert, and Denver)
Follow Me (Denver)
Starwood in Aspen (Denver)
For Baby (For Bobbie) (Denver)
Rhymes and Reasons (Denver)
Leaving, on a Jet Plane (Denver)
The Eagle and the Hawk (Denver)
Sunshine on My Shoulders (Denver)

Goodbye Again (Denver)

Poems, Prayers and Promises (Denver)

Rocky Mountain High (Denver)

The John Denver Radio Show, RCA, DJL1-0075, 1974.³

Take Me Home, Country Roads (Danoff, Nivert, and Denver)

Leaving, on a Jet Plane (Denver)

Forest Lawn (Paxton)

Rocky Mountain High (Denver)

The Eagle and the Hawk (Denver)

Grizzly Bear Song (Denver)

Amsterdam (Shuman and Blau)

Sunshine on My Shoulders (Denver)

Take Me Home, Country Roads (Danoff, Nivert, and Denver)

The Eagle and the Hawk (Denver)

Back Home Again, RCA, AQL1-0548, 1974.

Back Home Again (Denver)

On the Road (Carl Franzen)

Grandma's Feather Bed (Jim Connor)

Matthew (Denver)

Thank God I'm a Country Boy (Sommers)

The Music Is You (Denver)

Annie's Song (Denver)

It's up to You (Steven Weisberg)

Cool an' Green an' Shady (Denver and Joe Henry)

Eclipse (Denver)

Sweet Surrender (Denver)

This Old Guitar (Denver)

The Second John Denver Radio Show, RCA, DJL1-0683, 1974.³

Back Home Again (Denver)

Grandma's Feather Bed (Connor)

Annie's Song (Denver)

Thank God I'm a Country Boy (Sommers)

Matthew (Denver)

Eclipse (Denver)

It's up to You (Weisberg)

On the Road (Franzen)

Cool an' Green an' Shady (Denver and Henry)

Sweet Surrender (Denver)

The Music Is You (Denver)

This Old Guitar (Denver)

An Evening with John Denver, RCA, CPL2-0764, 1975.

The Music Is You (Denver)

Farewell Andromeda (Welcome to My Morning) (Denver)

Mother Nature's Son (Lennon and McCartney)

Summer (Denver)

Today (Randy Sparks)

Saturday Night in Toledo, Ohio (Sparks)

Matthew (Denver)

Rocky Mountain Suite (Cold Nights in Canada) (Denver)

Sweet Surrender (Denver)

Grandma's Feather Bed (Connor)
Annie's Song (Denver)
The Eagle and the Hawk (Denver)
My Sweet Lady (Denver)
Annie's Other Song (Denver)
Boy from the Country (Michael Murphey and Owens
B. Castleman)
Rhymes and Reasons (Denver)
Forest Lawn (Paxton)
Pickin' the Sun Down (Weisberg and Sommers)
Thank God I'm a Country Boy (Sommers)
Take Me Home, Country Roads (Danoff, Nivert, and Denver)
Poems, Prayers and Promises (Denver)
Rocky Mountain High (Denver)
This Old Guitar (Denver)

Windsong, RCA, APL1-1183, 1975.

Windsong (Denver and Henry)
Cowboy's Delight (Bob Carpenter and David Holster)
Spirit (Denver and Henry)
Looking for Space (Denver)
Shipmates and Cheyenne (Denver)
Late Nite Radio (Bill and Taffy Danoff)
Love Is Everywhere (Denver, Henry, Sommers, and
Weisberg)
Two Shots (Denver)
I'm Sorry (Denver)

Fly Away (Denver)
Calypso (Denver)
Song of Wyoming (Kent Lewis)

Rocky Mountain Christmas, RCA, APK1-1201, 1975.

Aspenglow (Denver)
The Christmas Song (Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire)
(Robert Wells)
Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer (Johnny Marks)
Oh Holy Night (John Sullivan Dwight)
Please, Daddy (Don't Get Drunk This Christmas) (Danoff
and Nivert)
Christmas for Cowboys (Weisberg)
Away in a Manger (Traditional)
What Child Is This (Traditional)
Coventry Carol (Traditional)
Silver Bells (Jay Livingston and Ray Evans)
Silent Night, Holy Night (Joseph Mohr)
A Baby Just Like You (Denver and Henry)

Live in London, RCA, 1050, 1976.

Starwood in Aspen (Denver)
Sunshine on My Shoulders (Denver)
Back Home Again (Denver)
Grandma's Feather Bed (Connor)
Pickin' the Sun Down (Weisberg and Sommers)
Thank God I'm a Country Boy (Sommers)

The Eagle and the Hawk (Denver)
Spirit (Denver and Henry)
Calypso (Denver)
Amsterdam (Shuman and Blau)
Annie's Song (Denver)
Take Me Home, Country Roads (Danoff, Nivert, and Denver)
Leaving, on a Jet Plane (Denver)

Spirit, RCA, APL1-1694, 1976.

Come and Let Me Look in Your Eyes (Denver and Henry)
Eli's Song (Jack Williams)
Wrangle Mountain Song (Denver)
Hitchhiker (Weisberg and Denver)
In the Grand Way (Sommers)
Polka Dots and Moonbeams (Johnny Burke)
It Makes Me Giggle (Denver)
Baby, You Look Good to Me Tonight (Bill Danoff)
Like a Sad Song (Denver)
San Antonio Rose (Bob Wills)
Pegasus (Henry)
The Wings That Fly Us Home (Henry)

John Denver's Greatest Hits Volume 2, RCA, AQL1-2195, 1977.

Annie's Song (Denver)
Welcome to My Morning (Farewell Andromeda) (Denver)
Fly Away (Denver)
Like a Sad Song (Denver)

Looking for Space (Denver)
Thank God I'm a Country Boy (Sommers)
Grandma's Feather Bed (Connor)
Back Home Again (Denver)
I'm Sorry (Denver)
My Sweet Lady (Denver)
Calypso (Denver)
This Old Guitar (Denver)

I Want to Live, RCA, AFL1-2521, 1977.

How Can I Leave You Again (Denver)
Tradewinds (Denver)
Bet on the Blues (Paxton)
It Amazes Me (Denver)
To the Wild Country (Denver)
Ripplin' Waters (Jimmy Ibbotson)
Thirsty Boots (Eric Anderson)
Dearest Esmeralda (Bill Danoff)
Singing Skies and Dancing Waters (Denver)
I Want to Live (Denver)
Druthers (Denver)

John Denver Live, RCA, VPL1-7167, 1978.⁴

Rocky Mountain High (Denver)
Back Home Again (Denver)
Fly Away (Denver)
Looking for Space (Denver)

I Want to Live (Denver)
It's a Sin to Tell a Lie (Billy Mayhew)
Moreton Bay (Traditional and adapted by Denver)
Grandma's Feather Bed (Connor)
Thank God I'm a Country Boy (Sommers)
Take Me Home, Country Roads (Danoff, Nivert, and Denver)
The Eagle and the Hawk (Denver)
Annie's Song (Denver)

John Denver, RCA, AQL1-3075, 1978.

Downhill Stuff (Denver)
Sweet Melinda (Gillette and David MacKechnie)
What's on Your Mind (Denver)
Joseph and Joe (Denver)
Life Is So Good (Denver)
Berkeley Woman (Bowers)
Johnny B. Goode (Chuck Berry)
You're So Beautiful (Denver)
Southwind (Herb Pedersen)
Garden Song (Dave Mallett)
Songs of . . . (Denver)

John Denver and The Muppets: A Christmas Together, RCA,

AQL1-3451, 1979.

Twelve Days of Christmas (Traditional)
Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas (Hugh Martin and
Ralph Blane)

The Peace Carol (Robert Harlan Beers)
Christmas Is Coming (Round) (Traditional)
A Baby Just Like You (Denver and Henry)
Deck the Halls (Traditional)
When the River Meets the Sea (Paul H. Williams)
Little Saint Nick (Brian Wilson)
Noel: Christmas Eve, 1913 (Robert Bridges)
The Christmas Wish (Danny Wheetman)
Medley: Alfie, The Christmas Tree (Denver)
 Carol for a Christmas Tree (Lee Holdridge)
 It's in Everyone of Us (David Pomeranz)
Silent Night, Holy Night (Mohr)
We Wish You a Merry Christmas (Traditional)

Autograph, RCA, AQL1-3449, 1980.

Dancing with the Mountains (Denver)
The Mountain Song (Tracey Wickland)
How Mountain Girls Can Love (Ruby Rakes)
Song for the Life (Rodney Crowell)
The Ballad of St. Anne's Reel (Mallett)
In My Heart (Denver)
Wrangell Mountain Song (Denver)
Whalebones and Crosses (Henry)
American Child (Henry)
You Say That the Battle Is Over (Mallett)
Autograph (Denver)

Some Days Are Diamonds, RCA, AFL1-4055, 1981.

Some Days Are Diamonds (Some Days Are Stone) (Dick Feller)
Gravel on the Ground (Debbie Hupp and Bob Morrison)
San Francisco Mabel Joy (Mickey Newbury)
Sleepin' Alone (Denver)
Easy, on Easy Street (Johnny Slate and Larry Keith)
The Cowboy and the Lady (Bobby Goldsboro)
Country Love (Denver)
Till You Opened My Eyes (Alan Rush, Randy Cullers, and Dennis Linde)
Wild Flowers in a Mason Jar (The Farm) (Linde)
Boy from the Country (Murphey and Castleman)

Seasons of the Heart, RCA, AFL1-4256, 1982.

Seasons of the Heart (Denver)
Opposite Tables (Denver)
Relatively Speaking (Arthur Hancock)
Dreams (Stephen Geyer)
Nothing But a Breeze (Jesse Winchester)
What One Man Can Do (Denver)
Shanghai Breezes (Denver)
Islands (Denver)
Heart to Heart (Denver)
Perhaps Love (Denver)
Children of the Universe (Denver and Henry)

It's about Time, RCA, AFL1-4683, 1983.

Hold on Tightly (Denver)
Thought of You (Denver)
Somethin' About (Denver)
On the Wings of a Dream (Denver)
Flight (The Higher We Fly) (John Gillespie Magee, Jr.,
Denver, and Henry)
Falling out of Love (Denver)
I Remember Romance (Denver)
Wild Montana Skies (Denver)
World Game (Denver)
It's about Time (Denver)

John Denver and The Muppets: Rocky Mountain Holiday, RCA,
AFL1-4721, 1983.

Hey Old Pal (Denver)
Grandma's Feather Bed (Connor)
She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain (Traditional and new
lyrics by Denver)
Catch Another Butterfly (Mike Williams)
Down by the Old Mill Stream (Earl K. Smith and Tell Taylor)
Durango Mountain Caballero (Denver)
Gone Fishin' (Nick Kenny and Charles Kenny)
Tumbling Tumbleweeds (Bob Nolan)
Happy Trails (Dale Evans)
Poems, Prayers and Promises (Denver)
Take 'Em Away (Phil Balsam and Dennis Lee)

Going Camping (Ray Charles)

Home on the Range (Brewster Higley and adapted by
Charles)

No One Like You (Andra Willis Muhoberac)

John Denver Greatest Hits Volume 3, RCA, AJL1-5313, 1984.

How Can I Leave You Again (Denver)

Some Days Are Diamonds (Some Days Are Stone) (Feller)

Shanghai Breezes (Denver)

Seasons of the Heart (Denver)

Perhaps Love (Denver)

Love Again (Denver)

Dancing with the Mountains (Denver)

Wild Montana Skies (Denver)

I Want to Live (Denver)

The Gold and Beyond (Denver)

Autograph (Denver)

The John Denver Holiday Radio Show, RCA, DJL1-5398, 1984.³

Leaving, on a Jet Plane (Denver)

Perhaps Love (Denver)

Love Again (Denver)

The Gold and Beyond (Denver)

How Can I Leave You Again (Denver)

Shanghai Breezes (Denver)

Seasons of the Heart (Denver)

Rocky Mountain High (Denver)

Dancing with the Mountains (Denver)
 Wild Montana Skies (Denver)
 Some Days Are Diamonds (Some Days Are Stone) (Feller)
 I Want to Live (Denver)
 Silver Bells (Livingston and Evans)

Dreamland Express, RCA, AFL1-5458, 1985.

Dreamland Express (Denver)
 Claudette (Roy Orbison)
 Gimme Your Love (Jack Conrad and Frank Musker)
 Got My Heart Set on You (Dobie Gray and Bud Reneau)
 If Ever (Stevie Wonder)
 The Harder They Fall (Denver)
 Don't Close Your Eyes Tonight (Richard Kerr and Musker)
 A Wild Heart Looking for Home (Denver and Henry)
 I'm in the Mood To Be Desired (Andre Martel and Katrina
 Walker)
 Trail of Tears (Randy Handley)
 African Sunrise (Denver)

Startrack Profile: John Denver, Westwood One, PC85-26, 1985.³

Take Me Home, Country Roads (Danoff, Nivert, and Denver)
 Rocky Mountain High (Denver)
 Sunshine on My Shoulders (Denver)
 Annie's Song (Denver)
 Back Home Again (Denver)
 I'm Sorry (Denver)

Fly Away (Denver)

Dreamland Express (Denver)

Don't Close Your Eyes Tonight (Kerr and Musker)

One World, RCA, AFL1-5811, 1986.

Love Is the Master (Denver)

Love Again (Denver)

I Remember You (Johnny Mercer)

Hey There, Mr. Lonely Heart (Denver)

Let Us Begin (What are We Making Weapons For?) (Denver)

Flying for Me (Denver)

Along for the Ride ('56 T-Bird) (Danny O'Keefe and Bill
Braun)

I Can't Escape (Denver)

True Love Takes Time (Dik Darnell and Denver)

One World (Denver)

It's a Possibility (Denver)

Country Closeup, Narwood Productions Programs, 508/509, 1986.³

Rocky Mountain High (Denver)

Annie's Song (Denver)

Back Home Again (Denver)

Some Days Are Diamonds (Some Days Are Stone) (Feller)

Take Me Home, Country Roads (Danoff, Nivert, and Denver)

Wild Montana Skies (Denver)

Thank God I'm a Country Boy (Sommers)

Leaving, on a Jet Plane (Denver)

Dreamland Express (Denver)
Calypso (Denver)
Fly Away (Denver)
Shanghai Breezes (Denver)
I'm Sorry (Denver)
Follow Me (Denver)
Perhaps Love (Denver)
Sunshine on My Shoulders (Denver)
Don't Close Your Eyes Tonight (Kerr and Musker)
The Harder They Fall (Denver)
Dreamland Express (Denver)
If Ever (Wonder)

Higher Ground, Windstar Records, WR-53336-2, 1988.⁵

Higher Ground (Denver and Henry)
Home Grown Tomatoes (Guy Clark)
Whispering Jesse (Denver)
Never a Doubt (Denver)
Deal with the Ladies (Denver)
Sing Australia (Denver)
A Country Girl in Paris (Denver)
For You (Denver)
All This Joy (Denver)
Falling Leaves (The Refugees) (Denver)
Bread and Roses (James Oppenheim)
Alaska and Me (Denver)

"John Denver Birthday Salute," Solid Gold Country,

United Stations Programming Network, 1988.³

Sunshine on My Shoulders (Denver)

Sweet Surrender (Denver)

Wild Montana Skies (Denver)

Back Home Again (Denver)

Rocky Mountain High (Denver)

I'm Sorry (Denver)

Some Days Are Diamonds (Some Days Are Stone) (Feller)

Annie's Song (Denver)

Dreamland Express (Denver)

Fly Away (Denver)

Thank God I'm a Country Boy (Sommers)

"John Denver: 15 Years of #1 Hits," Solid Gold Country,

Unistar Radio Programming, 1989.³

Back Home Again (Denver)

Some Days Are Diamonds (Some Days Are Stone) (Feller)

Take Me Home, Country Roads (Danoff, Nivert, and Denver)

Dreamland Express (Denver)

Fly Away (Denver)

Annie's Song (Denver)

Wild Montana Skies (Denver)

Sunshine on My Shoulders (Denver)

Thank God I'm a Country Boy (Sommers)

Calypso (Denver)

Sweet Surrender (Denver)

I'm Sorry (Denver)

Christmas Like a Lullaby, Windstar, RCA, and BMG,
VPLP1-0817, 1989.⁵

Christmas Like a Lullaby (Denver)

The First Noel (Traditional)

Away in a Manger (Traditional)

The Children of Bethlehem (Paxton)

Jingle Bells (Pierpont and adapted by Paxton)

White Christmas (Irving Berlin)

The Marvelous Toy (Paxton)

Blue Christmas (Bill Hayes and Jay Johnson)

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer (Marks)

Little Drummer Boy (Henry Onorati and Harry Simeone)

Mary's Boy Child (Jester Hairston)

The Christmas Song (Wells)

Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas (Martin and
Blane)

"Salute to John Denver," Solid Gold Country, Unistar Radio
Networks, 1990.³

Thank God I'm a Country Boy (Sommers)

Rocky Mountain High (Denver)

My Sweet Lady (Denver)

Wild Montana Skies (Denver)

Fly Away (Denver)

Dreamland Express (Denver)

Annie's Song (Denver)
 Sweet Surrender (Denver)
 Back Home Again (Denver)
 Sunshine on My Shoulders (Denver)
 Some Days Are Diamonds (Some Days Are Stone) (Feller)

Earth Songs, Windstar, WR-53333-2, 1990.

Windsong (Denver and Henry)
 Rocky Mountain Suite (Cold Nights in Canada) (Denver)
 Rocky Mountain High (Denver)
 Sunshine on My Shoulders (Denver)
 The Eagle and the Hawk (Denver)
 Eclipse (Denver)
 The Flower That Shattered the Stone (Henry and John
 Jarvis)
 Raven's Child (Denver and Henry)
 Children of the Universe (Denver and Henry)
 To the Wild Country (Denver)
 American Child (Denver and Henry)
 Calypso (Denver)
 Islands (Denver)
 Earth Day, Every Day (Celebrate) (Denver)

Stonehaven Sunrise, Windstar, BMG, and RCA, VPL1-0816, 1990.⁴

High, Wide, and Handsome (Chuck Pyle)
 Thanks to You (John L. Christopher, Denver, Conrad
 Reeder, and Sam Hogin)

You're Still the One for Me (Richard Riesser and Robert
Alsterberg)

And So It Goes (with Everything but Love) (Paul
Overstreet and Don Schlitz)

Wish You Were Here (Postcard du Paris) (Jimmy Webb)

A Little Further North Each Year (Graeme Connors)

Ancient Rhymes (Denver and Bob Samples)

The Gift You Are (Denver)

I Watch You Sleeping (Mike Batt)

Eagles and Horses (I'm Flying Again) (Denver and Henry)

Stonehaven Sunset (Denver)

The Flower That Shattered the Stone, Windstar, WR-5-3334-4,
1990.

The Flower That Shattered the Stone (Henry and Jarvis)

Thanks to You (Christopher, Denver, Reeder, and Hogin)

Wish You Were Here (Postcard Du Paris) (Webb)

High, Wide and Handsome (Pyle)

Eagles and Horses (I'm Flying Again) (Denver and Henry)

A Little Further North Each Year (Connors)

Raven's Child (Denver and Henry)

Ancient Rhymes (Denver and Samples)

The Gift You Are (Denver)

I Watch You Sleeping (Batt)

Stonehaven Sunset (Denver)

The Flower That Shattered the Stone (Reprise) (Henry and
Jarvis)

Christmas Like a Lullaby, Windstar, WR-5-3335-4, 1990.

Christmas Like a Lullaby (Denver)
The First Noel (Traditional)
Away in a Manger (Traditional)
The Children of Bethlehem (Paxton)
Jingle Bells (Pierpont and adapted by Paxton)
White Christmas (Berlin)
The Marvelous Toy (Paxton)
Blue Christmas (Hayes and Johnson)
Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer (Adapted by Denver)
Little Drummer Boy (Onorati and Simeone)
Mary's Little [sic] Boy Child (Hairston)
The Christmas Song (Wells)
Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas (Martin and
Blane)

Different Directions, Windstar, WR-58888-4, 1991.

Potter's Wheel (Bill Danoff)
Ponies (Jeffrey Bullock)
The Foxfire Suite
 Spring Is Alive (Denver)
 You Are (Denver)
 Whisper the Wind (Denver)
 Spring Is Alive (Reprise) (Denver)
Chained to the Wheel (Nick Smith)
Two Different Directions (Denver)
Hold on to Me (Smith)

The Chosen Ones (Smith)

Amazon (Let This Be a Voice) (Denver)

Tenderly Calling (Jan Garrett)

"John Denver Birthday Salute," Solid Gold Country, Unistar
Radio Networks, 1991.³

Take Me Home, Country Roads (Danoff, Nivert, and Denver)

I'm Sorry (Denver)

Back Home Again (Denver)

Wild Montana Skies (Denver)

Sunshine on My Shoulders (Denver)

Dreamland Express (Denver)

Rocky Mountain High (Denver)

Sweet Surrender (Denver)

Thank God I'm a Country Boy (Sommers)

Annie's Song (Denver)

Some Days Are Diamonds (Some Days Are Stone) Feller

Notes

¹The discography features the solo albums the researcher knew about as of June 1994. The list contains commercial releases as well as demonstration, radio promotion, and foreign.

²The album is of a demonstration tape.

³The album is of a radio promotion show.

⁴The album was released in Australia only.

⁵The album was released in Australia and then in the United States.

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