

‘A prisoner of the white lines on the freeway’; Joni Mitchell’s

Body of Work as a Female *Künstlerroman*

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Statement of U.S. Resources:

During my time studying at San Diego State University I was able to choose from a selection of courses and resources that I would not otherwise have been able to access. Having the freedom to select courses from alternative subjects has provided me with invaluable intertextual knowledge that has contributed to the process of researching and writing this study.

The opportunity to choose subjects outside of English and American Studies aided my approach to my dissertation in sometimes unexpected ways. In my first semester I chose an anthropological module titled 'The History of Sexuality' in which I gained a perspective into the history of enforced gender binaries. This particular module, and the insight I have gained from it, has supported me in writing the final chapter of my study which reflects on the gendered polarisation of time as linear and cyclic. The construction of gender through the opposed binaries of linear and cyclic, hot and cold, wet and dry was first introduced to me on this course and has informed my understanding of the cultural preconceptions that shape the literary narrative.

Moreover, whilst studying in America I had the chance to choose a selection of women's studies classes. These modules have given me greater insight into the multi-layered, intertextuality of women's writing. One of the most influential modules that I studied called 'Women in Literature', focussed on the analysis of

female narratives that intersected with considerations of sexuality, race, disability and age. The insight I have gained from this inclusive approach has aided my ability to interpret Joni Mitchell's body of work as a female narrative in the context of patriarchal American society.

Before studying in America, I had already decided that the focus of my dissertation would be Joni Mitchell's work as a musician. My initial thoughts were to perceive her 1970s albums as a reflection and critique of American society. The convenor of the 'Women in Literature' module, Professor Ann Hua, agreed to be my special studies supervisor. The inspiration taken from this women's studies module directed my focus onto Mitchell's narrative as a woman's narrative. Thus, my initial instalment considered the feminist voice of Mitchell's music in the context of 1970s America. With supervision from Professor Hua I constructed a close analysis of Mitchell's lyrics as reflective of her experience as a woman in 1970s America and as an embodiment of the sentiment of the Women's Liberation Movement. In this way the special studies module was directly beneficial to the trajectory of my dissertation as it focussed my attention to Mitchell's literary voice and inherently female. Moreover, it began the process of thinking about Mitchell's work in a critical way rather than as a source of enjoyment. Overall the special studies module and the access I gained to a wider range of modules, focussed my understanding and perception of Mitchell's work as female and literary. Lastly, the luxury of being able to listen to Mitchell's 'California', whilst in the State that her narrative considers as home, fuelled my interest in, passion for and drive to write about her work even further.

Abstract:

By reflecting upon Joni Mitchell's confessional lyrics and fluid perception of genre this study will attempt to establish her work as an artist's narrative of discovery. The *Künstlerroman* depicts a journey to artistic awakening. The adventurous departure of the protagonist often results in inward reflection and realisation of the self as artist. Although female *Künstlerromane* exist they are often defined by sacrifice and limitations. The purpose of this study is to frame Mitchell's lyrical narrative as a female *Künstlerroman*.

This study will begin by considering the trajectory of Mitchell's artistic career in 'Both Sides of Mitchell: Musical Evolution and Reflection'. This chapter will align the chronological evolution of Mitchell's music to the voyage of the *Künstlerroman*. In 'A Defector from the Petty Wars: The Divided-Self and Sacrificed Self' Maurice Beebe's theory of the artist as a 'divided self' will be explained, along with Susan J. Rosowski's contention that female *Künstlerromane* are defined by limitations.<sup>1</sup> These theories will be paralleled with Mitchell's portrayal of journeys and consider how her narrative is shaped by womanhood. The final chapter, 'The Circle Game':

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Beebe, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce* (New York: New York University Press, 1964). And, Susan J. Rosowski, 'The Novel of Awakening' in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (Dartmouth College, University Press of New England, 1983), pp. 49-68.

Cyclical and Linear Time' will consider cultural conceptions of time and how Mitchell challenges the patriarchal linearity of the *Künstlerroman*, viewing cyclic time as more symbiotic. This study will ultimately reveal how Mitchell's artistic awakening to the whole is formed by an understanding of womanhood and thus of human limitations.

## Introduction

A lonely painter, a prisoner of the white lines on the freeway, a black crow flying, a defector, selfish, sad and crazy: these are some of the ways that Joni Mitchell has described herself through her music. Spanning over half a century Mitchell's body of work is vast and diverse in style, tone and genre. She has released over twenty albums since 1968 and is widely considered as one of the most influential artists of the late twentieth Century. Known for her soaring vocals, lyrical prowess, and an ability to evoke images with her words, Mitchell's legacy is unwavering. She has won eight Grammy's including a Life Time Achievement Award and is considered as a pioneer for women in the music industry.

Mitchell's career began anchored in folk roots, with *Song to a Seagull* (1968) and *Clouds* (1969). In these albums her clear, high vocals and use of acoustic guitar exemplify the spirit of the American folk revival. The 1960s folk revival was fueled by the youth of America, specifically college students who were interested in inciting change through their music. Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement and the events of the Vietnam War many artists of the revival, like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez wrote protest songs. Mitchell's style was inspired by this movement as Kip Lornell explains: 'countless others felt it their duty to comment upon topical issues of the day [...]and established clear precedents for the careers of popular

singers/songwriters such as Joni Mitchell, Tom Rush, Cat Stevens, and Neil Young.<sup>2</sup> This reflects how the folk revival inspired many musicians even if they were not part of the central movement. Although a thread of folk runs through much of Mitchell's later work, her album *Blue* (1971) marks her transition out of the genre, as the album focuses more on self-reflection and is emotionally revealing. Her confessional albums *Blue*, *Court and Spark* (1974) and *Hejira* (1976) are some of her most successful and most introspective works. Although they range slightly in style, the albums offer an insight into Mitchell's experiences and realisations in the industry, in love and in her own personal and artistic journeys. In-between these albums and in later work Mitchell became more experimental. As her legacy and fame increased, she was allowed to explore alternative genres and sounds. This period began with *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (1975) and *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* (1977) where Mitchell offers more social commentary with music influenced by African and Latin rhythms. From the late 1970s to early 1990s Mitchell experimented with bass and jazz releasing the poorly received *Mingus* (1979), a collaboration with jazz composer Charles Mingus. As Mitchell entered into her mid-life she began to reflect even more upon aging and the passage of time in *Wild Things Run Fast* (1982) and, later, with *Night Ride Home* (1991). The albums look back to the lost youth of the sixties and seventies and examine the self as an ever-evolving entity. When considering Mitchell's artistic voyage, it is important to consider the timeline of her music through the late twentieth century and early

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<sup>2</sup> Kip Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music : Ethnic, Grassroots, and Regional Traditions in the United States* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012) ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leicester/detail.action?docID=932777>, [accessed 04/04/2019], p.267.



twenty-first in order to grasp the changing contextual influences that factor into the fabric of her narrative. In order to fully comprehend Mitchell's artistic evolution, I must consider the context of the periods in which her albums were released as well as regarding each album or song as patches in the quilt of an immense body of work. Although I will not be able to consider every album Mitchell has produced, I will be sampling some key examples of work from different eras to reflect upon her musical, emotional and artistic transitions. In this way I will be able to fully consider her development as an artist by looking at each album or song as instalments, entries into or chapters of her lifetime body of work, interpreted as her *Künstlerroman*.

The *Künstlerroman* is a narrative in which the protagonist reflects spiritually and emotionally and develops as an artist. Extended from the *Bildungsroman*, the *Künstlerroman* follows a protagonist's journey of self-discovery and artistic epiphany. In her analysis Marianne Hirsch explains the artist-novel as: 'the young artist's withdrawal into the inner life, which leads to a discovery of his vocation'.<sup>3</sup> This outlines the narrative as an emotional progression through which the artist comes to a revelation about their art and their role as artist. Rebekah Galbraith expands on this, explaining that 'the *Künstlerroman* claims to interrogate the very origins of artistic integrity'.<sup>4</sup> In her thesis Galbraith critiques the literary tradition as male centred, burdening the artist with the moral obligation to critique their world

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<sup>3</sup> Marianne Hirsch, 'Spiritual *Bildung*: The Beautiful Soul as Paradigm' in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland (Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 1983), pp.25-48 (p.46).

<sup>4</sup> Rebekah Galbraith, *The Female Künstlerroman in the Writing of Virginia Woolf* (Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, 2016), [https://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10063/6254/thesis\\_access.pdf?sequence=1](https://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10063/6254/thesis_access.pdf?sequence=1) [accessed 05/04/19], p. ix.

and remove themselves from it.<sup>5</sup> This is an idea originated by Maurice Beebe in *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce* (1964) in which he points out that, “‘the artist’ established in fiction is always a literary man’.<sup>6</sup> Beebe establishes the reality of the literary tradition that is reserved for male protagonists. Although female *Künstlerromane* exist, the male vernacular still dominates. Beebe also highlights three defining aspects of the *Künstlerroman*: ‘The concept of the artist as a divided self, the equation of art with experience, and the conflicting ideal of detachment’.<sup>7</sup> Thus the narrative can be understood as a process through which an artist gains a perception of the whole. In the *Künstlerroman*, a perception of the whole refers to an encompassing comprehension of existence, philosophy, society and of the self. The whole may also refer to the understanding of one’s self and role as an artist. The course of self-reflection and realisation via a detachment from the outer life is intrinsic to the production and understanding of the artist’s work. As a literary tradition the artist is always positioned as male: Beebe, Galbraith and Hirsch, among others all acknowledge this. The male artist historically has been given the space to retreat into in his inner life and woman is positioned as the muse but ‘never creator; a woman does not express herself in art, but lives to inspire generations of male artists’.<sup>8</sup> Women in male *Künstlerromane* are passive, domestic and no more than appendage in the trajectory of the protagonists narrative. However, many authors have subverted the male standard. Roberta S. Trites notes how in many female

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<sup>5</sup> Rebekah Galbraith, *The Female Künstlerroman...* p. ix.

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Beebe, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts...* p. v.

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Beebe, *Ivory Towers...* p. vi.

<sup>8</sup> Rebekah Galbraith, *The Female Künstlerroman...* p. xi.

*Künstlerromane*, 'the heroine's self-identification as an artist is either balanced or negated by a love relationship.'<sup>9</sup> This shows how many nineteenth century female protagonists sacrifice their art for a relationship, whereas in a feminist *Künstlerroman* the artist's self is 'consistently formed by her desire to be a writer.'<sup>10</sup> Consequently a female *Künstlerroman* remains entrenched in patriarchal rhetoric whereas a feminist *Künstlerroman* attempts to dismantle this rhetoric and places the protagonists art as her sole priority. These interpretations of the *Künstlerroman* offer an outline for the way in which I will evaluate Mitchell's body of work. Although, as a literary tradition, the artist's novel is built upon the assumption that the artist is male, the contemporary and changing reality of literature makes it possible to contemplate a female artist and narrative. In considering Mitchell's work I will also reflect upon how she conforms to and subverts the tradition, often adopting female and male rhetoric.

In examining Mitchell's work as a female artist's narrative, it is important to establish the context of the era in which she was most prolific to give a sense of the limitations her artistic voice was confronted with. The sexism of the music industry and of the position of women in America when Mitchell began her career shapes one's perception of it as a *Künstlerroman*. The nature of the *Künstlerroman* is entrenched in patriarchal preconceptions which parallels the phallocentric state of America and the music industry in the late twentieth century. Throughout and beyond Mitchell's career the music industry has been 'heavily dominated by

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<sup>9</sup> Roberta S. Trites, *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1997), p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> Roberta S. Trites, *Waking Sleeping Beauty...* p.64.

men'.<sup>11</sup> The machismo nature of the environment that Mitchell inhabited meant she had to work against the status-quo to get her music heard, recognised and respected. This can be noted when reading selected reviews and biographies, for example in 1970 Caroline Bucher continuously refers to Mitchell in relation to only other female folk artists describing her as 'one of America's top three female folk-singers – along with Joan Baez and Judy Collins'.<sup>12</sup> The inference here is that Mitchell, Baez and Collins would never be considered as of the same calibre as male folk singers at the time. By lumping the women together Bucher's biography reflects the rhetoric that women's art was separate and sub-standard to men's art. Mitchell's work as a *Künstlerroman* often reflects the phallocentricity that dominates the art world and shows an understanding of the difficulty female artists have always endured.

Moreover, during the most prolific and successful era of Mitchell's career, second wave feminism was in full swing. The influence of the movement, along with the Civil Rights and Anti-War Movement incited a sense of change and possibility among the younger generation of Americans. Although Mitchell has always resisted the label of 'feminist', the sense of liberation that runs through her work can be read as evocative of these movements and the culture of change that permeated America. The era and its effect on the liberty of women and girls is explained by Marilyn Adler Papayanis: 'the 1960s had radically altered the rules of sexual conduct. [Girls could] construct narratives about having sex that were not

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<sup>11</sup> Sam de Boise, *Men, Masculinity, Music and Emotions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.70.

<sup>12</sup> Caroline Bucher, "'My Personal Life is in a Shambles'" in *Reckless Daughter: A Joni Mitchell Anthology* ed. By Barney Hoskyns (London: Constable, 2016), pp.41-46 (p.41).

threatening or tinged with shame or guilt'.<sup>13</sup> The culture of sexual liberation went hand in hand with the folk and rock and roll cultures. Mitchell interacted with these changing attitudes in songs like 'My Old Man' and 'Harry's House-Centrepiece' by challenging the status-quo of marriage and gender roles within marriage. Although I will not be examining the movement of second wave feminism heavily, I will be considering how it permeates Mitchell's rhetoric and her position as a female artist at the time.

Throughout my analysis of Mitchell's work as a female *Künstlerroman* I will be informing my argument with inter-contextual considerations. In my first chapter 'Both Sides of Mitchell: Musical Evolution and Reflection' I will be examining the chronological evolution of Mitchell's music from her folk beginnings, through to her confessional albums and her wide range of experimental and jazz work. I will consider Mitchell's musical development and artistic journey through genres and styles as well as her reconceptualization of her early work in age. After studying her musical evolution, I will then reflect upon Mitchell's role as the artist and as a female artist in my second chapter: 'A Defector from the Petty Wars: The Divided Self and Sacrificed Self'. This chapter will consider how Mitchell's narrative follows the tradition of the artist as divided between the internal and external world. Expanding from this will be a contemplation of how Mitchell's narratives often represent an awakening to the limitations of the self, which is a common motif in female *Künstlerromane*. In my final chapter 'The Circle Game: Transcending Time, Linear and Cyclic' I will consider cultural and historical perceptions of time. By

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<sup>13</sup> Marilyn Adler Papayanis, 'Feeling Free and Female Sexuality: The Aesthetics of Joni Mitchell' in *Popular Music and Society*, vol. 33, no. 5 (2010), pp. 641–655 (p. 645).

referencing linear time as European, historical time, exemplified by the trajectory of *Künstlerroman*, and cyclic time as feminine and foreign, I will uncover how Mitchell seeks to challenge dominant linear attitudes and dismantle binary oppositions altogether. By considering key examples of Mitchell's work, as well as considering the trajectory of her artistic evolution, I will argue that Mitchell's body of work constitutes as a modern female *Künstlerroman*.

### Both Sides of Mitchell; Musical Evolution and Reflection

Growth and artistic evolution form the basis of the *Künstlerroman*. In order for the narrative to progress the artist must too in their artistic, social, emotional and philosophical consciousness. Joni Mitchell's diverse and vast span of work is an example of this kind of evolution. Not only does Mitchell progress through genres, her perception of the world around her also becomes more acute and society-centred. In Catherine R. Stimpson's essay *Doris Lessing and Parables of Growth* she discusses one of the key aspects of the *Bildung* as 'the necessity of growth, particularly of consciousness'.<sup>14</sup> In this way, it is important to not only look at individual albums and songs that Mitchell has produced, but the entire body of work in order to analyse Mitchell's developing artistic style and growing perception of the whole. Throughout this chapter I will firstly consider Mitchell's folk and pop beginnings and how she reflects upon love and life in a confessional manner. I will then reflect upon Mitchell's development into pop, rock and jazz and her maturing consideration of social and political issues. As Mitchell moves into experimental and classical work toward the end of her creative career, I will discuss her reflection upon life, the passage of time and existence. Moreover, I will show how Mitchell

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<sup>14</sup> Catherine R. Stimpson, 'Doris Lessing and the Parables of Growth' in in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (Dartmouth College, University Press of New England, 1983), pp.186-205 (p. 190).

revisits and reconceptualises certain songs later in her life, examining how her aging voice and developed musical ability illustrates an evolved understanding of her past self and art. Mitchell's narrative is distinctly female, I will point out, because she does not polarise the internal and the external. The two states throughout her career, become increasingly intertwined reflecting a sense of wholeness. I hope to expose how Mitchell's musical advancement and reflection follows the narrative of the *Künstlerroman*.

The folk beginnings of Mitchell's career focussed on the internal and the imaginary. *Song to a Seagull* (1968) and *Clouds* (1969) marked the beginning of Mitchell's career in the late 1960s and feature her young soprano, accompanied almost exclusively with acoustic guitar. The folk genre allows Mitchell to weave her lyrics with fairy-tale imagery. For example, in 'I Had a King' Mitchell explains, 'I had a King in a salt-rusted carriage/ Who carried me off to his country for marriage to soon'.<sup>15</sup> Instead of the King rescuing the protagonist, as is the custom of traditional fairy stories, he takes her away too soon, in a rusted carriage, to confinement. Mitchell may be reflecting upon her marriage to Chuck Mitchell here and the sense of captivity and stagnation she felt as a result of a premature marriage, or of marriage at all.<sup>16</sup> This follows the traditional role of the female heroine, as Marianne Hirsh points out: "In song and story," woman's role is to wait: her life is static; ahistorical, the course it enacts is the antithesis of *Bildung*.<sup>17</sup> The sense of discontent in marriage that Mitchell presents in her early work leads to a desire for

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<sup>15</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'I Had a King' in *Song to a Seagull* (Reprise Records, 1968).

<sup>16</sup> Karl Dallas, 'Joni, The Seagull from Saskatoon' in *Reckless Daughter: A Joni Mitchell Anthology* (London: Backpages Ltd., 2016), pp. 26-28 (p. 27-28).

<sup>17</sup> Marianne Hirsh, in *The Voyage In...* p.23.



departure physically and musically. Mitchell highlights the problematic role of passivity allotted to female trajectories of 'progressive withdrawal' and her narrative voice embarks on 'adventurous departure' into the 1970s.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly to the trajectory of a *Künstlerroman*, Mitchell's artistic journey began with a consideration of her own experiences through the medium of folk music. As her artistic narrative developed through the 1970s, she depicts journeys of discovery and examines societal issues, philosophical questions and looks more deeply into her personal experiences as symptomatic of the human condition. From *Blue* (1971) to *Mingus* (1979), from *Court and Spark* (1974) to *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (1975) Mitchell consider the world as a removed artist and broadens her musical and compositional horizons. One of her most successful albums *Blue* acts as a *Künstlerroman* in-and-of itself as the narrative sets off on a lonely road, it tells a story of love, heartbreak, loss, melancholy and returns to a cocoon of reflection. Mitchell initially follows the trajectory of an active male narrative as the album begins: 'I am on a lonely road and I am travelling'.<sup>19</sup> The juxtaposition of freedom and loneliness reflects how one can be free but remain confined by emotional isolation. 'All I Want' is a song about everything one cannot have: the love one wants to set them free only brings out 'the jealousy, the greed is the unravelling' undoing 'all the joy that could be'.<sup>20</sup> The narrative voice has to sacrifice love for freedom because the pain that comes with love entraps with jealousy and bitterness. This is inherent to the female narrative of artistic discovery according to Hirsch, who notes how women's voyages of emotionality, spirituality

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid...

<sup>19</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'All I Want' in *Blue* (Reprise Records, 1971).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid...

and morality often occur 'at the expense of other aspects of selfhood'.<sup>21</sup> In this way, quests for freedom in Mitchell's narrative often occur through the sacrifice of love and a sense of home. By the end of *Blue* the protagonist is enclosed in a 'dark cocoon' waiting for her gorgeous wings to develop and fly her away.<sup>22</sup> It seems that the quest for freedom has 'thrown her back on herself', her initially outward voyage thus becoming an internal one.<sup>23</sup>

Mitchell continues confessional folk/pop into *For the Roses* (1972) and *Court and Spark* (1974) as she explores the related state of human emotions and responses. Themes of freedom and love run throughout both albums and Mitchell divulges the insecurities and difficulties inherent to navigating life and relationships. In 'Down to You' the voice depicts the emptiness and fleeting hedonism of a one-night-stand as a reflection upon consumerist attitudes and the finite nature of life, melancholy and pleasure.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in *Court and Spark* Mitchell reflects the want for freedom: 'We love our lovin' but not like we love our freedom'<sup>25</sup>, in constant opposition with a need for human connection: 'In the morning there are lovers in the street/ They look so high/ You brush against a stranger/ And you both apologise'.<sup>26</sup> In this way Mitchell depicts love and freedom as conflicting states: independence preventing true connection and romantic dependence preventing freedom. Many of Mitchell's albums from the 1970s reflect the bitter and the sweet, the freedom and the confinement that is inherent to the

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<sup>21</sup> Marianne Hirsh, in *The Voyage in...* p.24.

<sup>22</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'The Last Time I Saw Richard' in *Blue...*

<sup>23</sup> Marianne Hirsch, in *The Voyage In...* p.23.

<sup>24</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'Down to You' in *Court and Spark* (Asylum Records, 1974).

<sup>25</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'Help Me' in *Court and Spark...*

<sup>26</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'Down to You'...

human condition. Mitchell's artistic voice developed monumentally during this period and paved the way for a new phase of her career that would bring an increased focus on social concerns as well as musical experimentation.

The departure from folk in the 1970s is another aspect of Mitchell's artistic narrative as she refused to be bound to and defined by a genre. Mitchell explains in an interview with friend and fellow musician Malka Marom that, 'Freedom is necessary for me in order to create'.<sup>27</sup> This reflects the dynamic nature of Mitchell's career, never settling for too long in musical genre avoiding stagnation or restriction. Along with stylistic changes Mitchell turned her focus to philosophical, social and political themes. *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (1975) marks a significant stylistic jump in Mitchell's career. The album strays from the more personal sentiments of Mitchell's previous releases and critiques the state of right-wing America. Mitchell uses the allegory of the garden of Eden as a backbone for the album and presents the image of a corrupt and sick nation with hostage smiling presidents and snakes at every turn in the concrete jungle.<sup>28</sup> The usual themes of love and relationships appear but are reflected as symptomatic of social decline: 'paper wives/ And paper kids/ Paper the walls to keep their gut reactions hid'.<sup>29</sup> Mitchell's commentary on the repressed, conservatism of American patriarchal society is more sophisticated than ever in this album with religious, artistic and philosophical allusions throughout.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the incorporation of African drums

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<sup>27</sup> Malka Marom, *Joni Mitchell: In Her Own Words* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2014), p.89.

<sup>28</sup> Joni Mitchell, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (Asylum Records, 1975).

<sup>29</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'The Hissing of Summer Lawns' in *The Hissing of Summer Lawns...*

<sup>30</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'The Jungle Line' in *The Hissing of Summer Lawns...*

and jazz influences reflects artistic departure from the familiar. Elvis Costello is quoted in *Joni The Creative Odyssey of Joni Mitchell* explaining:

*The influence of jazz upon her writing and arranging became more pronounced, and the dense, third person lyrical portraits of damaged and unsympathetic characters in songs such as 'Edith and the Kingpin' and 'Shades of Scarlet Conquering' did not sit well with some of her more starry-eyed listeners*<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, Mitchell's artistic voyage was not always supported by her following but the refusal to conform to social expectations reflects loyalty to her artistic vision and individuality. *Hejira* (1976) brings another stylistic change with an undefinable but seductive, funk inspired quality according to Rolling Stone.<sup>32</sup> This artistic boldness continues with *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* (1978) rich with African rhythms and *Mingus* (1979). These stylistic variations made Mitchell one of the first of her league to experiment with 'world' music, jazz and blues in order to challenge the hegemony of white, western music and composition.<sup>33</sup> Although Mitchell's musical audacity has been critiqued as 'distracting', ultimately the risks taken resulted in a challenge to the accepted artistic canon at the time.<sup>34</sup> The lyrical complexities paired with wider musical considerations, beyond her Anglo folk roots, reflect a subversive challenge to traditional narratives and thus shows a consideration of the whole.

Releasing *Both Sides Now* (2000) and *Travelogue* (2002), which rework some of her most iconic and resonant songs, can be interpreted as artistically conservative

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<sup>31</sup> Katherine Monk, *Joni: The Creative Odyssey of Joni Mitchell* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2012), p.239.

<sup>32</sup> Ariel Swartly, *Hejira*, in Rolling Stone, 1977, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-album-reviews/hejira-205150/>, [accessed 20/04/2019].

<sup>33</sup> Karen O'Brien, *Joni Mitchell: Shadows and Light* (London: Virgin Books, 2002), p. 166.

<sup>34</sup> Karen O'Brien, *Joni Mitchell: Shadows and Light*...p. 167

or subversive. The return to past could be supposed as a return to the proverbial domestic. By revisiting old work Mitchell completes the *Bildung* template by returning to her beginnings: the known, the domestic, the womb.<sup>35</sup> The album's, however, do not approach the songs in an expected manner and were even deemed too risky to release by her usual label, Reprise Records.<sup>36</sup> Mitchell's aged, cheroot worn, and jazz influenced voice is accompanied by a symphony which recontextualises the well-known music. By adding the sum of her increased wisdom to the albums, Mitchell reveals her maturity and experience as an artist. Covering her older works parallels the *Künstlerroman* through her return and reconsideration of her past work. However, the work remains free and nomadic in its refusal to deliver the light hearted, youthful sense that it once did. Emily Baker describes *Travelogue* as 'part of her [Mitchell's] continuing artistic journey', when it has often been critiqued as vein or grandiose and inherently not Mitchell.<sup>37</sup> It seems that Mitchell's aging, female voice has often been discredited as unnecessary and unwanted. By continuing to create and rework songs using her aged voice Mitchell presents the self as an essential but ever-changing artist and being. In this way Mitchell transcends the traditional limits of the female *Künstlerroman* that Hirsch presents, as although the narrative is cyclic in its return to the familiar, it also suggests a reimagining of the art. Furthermore, producing work into seniority and presenting an aging female voice is subversive as many aging female artists are expected to recede, leaving only their youthful past work and voice.

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<sup>35</sup> Giulianna Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002), p. 80.

<sup>36</sup> Emily Baker, "'Oh Borderline': Joni Mitchell's Aging Voice as a Site of Queer Resistance' in *Joni Mitchell: New Critical Readings...* pp. 43-63, (p. 43).

<sup>37</sup> Emily Baker, "'Oh Borderline...' (p. 44).

Mitchell's body of work and musical evolution can be viewed as a *Künstlerroman* in its journey from imaginative folk, through musical experimentation, transcendence of genre and lyrical reflection upon society and the whole. Finally, Mitchell's return in age to work she produced in youth, shows a conception of her artistic vocation and comprehension of the sum of her cultural contribution as an artist. Pertaining an overall perspective of Mitchell's stylistic and thematic evolution enables a more focussed consideration of her narrative voice in alignment with the *Künstlerroman*.

'A Defector from the Petty Wars': Joni's Divided-Self and Sacrificed Self

The *Künstlerroman* follows a protagonist's journey of artistic discovery. However, there are more specific traditions that constitute the narrative than this basic trajectory. The tradition of the divided-self is noted in Maurice Beebe's *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce* (1964) in which he presents the three main themes of the conventionally male centred *Künstlerroman*. Beebe outlines the theme of the 'Divided-Self' along with: 'Art as Experience', which reflects the artists need for adventure in order to create and 'Art as Religion', explaining the artists need for emotional and mental reflection in order to gain a sense of perspective over society.<sup>38</sup> The 'Divided-Self' is a symbiosis of these themes as the artist finds the balance between the external life and internal reflection resulting in an understanding of the self as 'man' and as artist. Mitchell's body of work and lyrical narrative often aims to embody a balance between, 'self and society, spirit and matter, art and life.'<sup>39</sup> By analysing a selection of Mitchell's music I will discuss how she reflects a comprehension of the whole through the interplay of external discovery and internal contemplation. Moreover, Susan J. Rosowski's analysis of the female *Bildung* presents an alternative view. In her essay 'The Novel of Awakening' (1983) Rosowski agrees that a division of self is a key

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<sup>38</sup> Maurice Beebe, *Ivory Towers...* p. vi.

<sup>39</sup> Maurice Beebe, *Ivory Towers...* p. 27

component of the *Künstlerroman* but contends that a reoccurring facet of the female *Bildung* is the protagonist's eventual awakening to limitations.<sup>40</sup> These limitations are also present in Mitchell's work as she depicts the sacrifices forced upon herself and other women as a consequence of their sex. Overall, I hope to uncover how Mitchell's body of work depicts the self as both a divided and limited entity, resulting in a comprehensive perception of the whole.

Beebe refers almost exclusively to the male experience of the divided self. Whereas, Susan J. Rosowski looks at how female narratives fit the mould of the *Künstlerroman* but are often restricted by patriarchal grand narratives. In Beebe's analysis the divided self is explained as, 'the interplay between the internal and external forces which find unity in the oneness of the form-giving genius.'<sup>41</sup> In this way the protagonist must be both detached from and tethered to the external world. Thus, the artist can philosophize upon the wholeness of the self and exist in isolation, as well as being able to realize the full physicality of the world which sets a standard for their art.<sup>42</sup> Rosowski explains the conflict of the divided self as, 'largely internal, between two selves: an inner, imaginative self of private value is at odds with an outer, conventional self of social value.'<sup>43</sup> Indeed both analysis agree that the artists journey is characterized through the conflict and interchange between the withdrawn inner self and the outer social self. However, Rosowski extends Beebe's analysis by considering how women's *Künstlerromane* are often stunted by the hegemony of the phallocentric canon.

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<sup>40</sup> Susan J. Rosowski, in *The Voyage In...* pp. 49-68.

<sup>41</sup> Maurice Beebe, *Ivory Towers...* p. 38.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid...p. 38.

<sup>43</sup> Susan J. Rosowski, in *The Voyage In...* p.49.



Mitchell's work often engages with the conflict of the inner and outer self.

*Hejira* (1976) is an album most comparable to the traditional *Bildung* as the narrative embarks on a physical journey stating, 'I'm travelling in some vehicle'.<sup>44</sup> Through this outward voyage the narrative is propelled into inward reflection. In the song 'Hejira' Mitchell philosophizes: 'We're only particles of change, I know, I know/ Orbiting around the sun/ But how can I have that point of view/ When I'm always bound and tied to someone'.<sup>45</sup> Here Mitchell expresses the duality of the self, recognizing the insignificance of the material world, as well as feeling so innately tethered to those around her. Similarly, in 'Coyote' Mitchell reflects upon this duality, singing, 'Just how close to the bone and the skin and the eyes/ And the lips you can get/ And still feel so alone/ And still feel related'.<sup>46</sup> This relates the conflict between a physical need for affection, touch and connection with a lover, and the integral isolation of the human condition. Feeling 'related' may allude to the commonality that all humans live within the confines of their own mind and are thus connected in their mutual disconnection. The sense of isolation is reinforced throughout *Hejira* as Mitchell travels through the barren 'burning desert'; she has no destination and thus the physical landscape symbolizes her transitional and divided state. This is discussed by Anne Hilker who explains, 'the figure of the journey represents an undefined, liminal space of uncertainty; frequently, her [Mitchell's] travelers never arrive'.<sup>47</sup> In this way Mitchell's narrative of the journey

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<sup>44</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'Hejira' in *Hejira* (Crazy Crow Records, 1976).

<sup>45</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'Hejira'...

<sup>46</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'Coyote' in *Hejira*...

<sup>47</sup> Anne Hilker, "'Dreams and False Alarms': Melancholy in the Work of Joni Mitchell' in *Joni Mitchell: New Critical Readings*, ed. By Ruth Charnock (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), pp. 83-99 (p.89)

mirrors the divided self as the voyage of introspection is necessary to artistic and personal understanding of the whole. However, the yearning for a connection to others and to society remains vital in solidifying a sense of self. The album reflects Mitchell's understanding of her exterior and interior self which co-operate and conflict. *Hejira's* narrative of the self as divided and contradictory, as artist and human, exemplifies an understanding of the whole.

The use of light and dark imagery in Mitchell's music follows Beebe's theory of the artist and self as divided. According to Beebe when an artist comprehends the whole their work becomes a 'lamp projecting outward upon reality'.<sup>48</sup> Therefore the craftsman transcends their role becoming visionary and philosopher. Because the exiled artist is removed, their view of existence is clearer enabling them to philosophize and commentate upon it. This is further exemplified and explored by Mitchell through her repetitious use of light and dark imagery. Most notably in her 1975 track 'Shadows and Light' Mitchell parallels art and life: 'Every picture has its shadows/ And it has some source of light' and 'Hostage smiles on presidents/ Freedom scribbled in the subway/ It's like night night and day'.<sup>49</sup> The lyrics are from an omniscient perspective viewing existence as one might a piece of art. By framing life as a picture Mitchell perceives it as a harmonious blending of the binaries: good and evil, light and dark, day and night. The darkness of a corrupt president's smile and the light of resistant graffiti in a dim subway, challenges traditional perceptions of the world. Mitchell acknowledges the symbiotic relationship between light and dark and how the construction of them as binaries prevents an understanding of

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<sup>48</sup> Maurice Beebe, *Ivory Towers...*p. 26

<sup>49</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'Shadows and Light' in *The Hissing of Summer Lawns...*

the whole. The light and dark of society parallel the internal and external of the mind, one must at times retreat into the darkness in order to achieve enlightenment. The song and album mount American society as a painting to be perceived and scrutinized in its entirety. Thus, Mitchell as the artist sheds light upon the whole: her removed view feeds into an understanding of the world she exists within.

Rosowski notes that female and male *Künstlerromane* differ because the obstacles enforced upon women's existence by patriarchal society limits their possibilities. According to Rosowski, in female narratives 'The protagonist's growth results typically not with "an art of living," as for her male counterpart, but instead with a realization that for a woman such an art of living is difficult or impossible: it is an awakening to limitations'.<sup>50</sup> Female artist's novels are often marked by the sacrifice of one aspect of her divided self. Mitchell explores this in biographical songs like 'Cherokee Louise' and 'The Magdalene Laundries' which reflect upon women who have faced phallogentric brutality, limiting or silencing their narratives. In these songs Mitchell depicts the oppression faced by women at the hands of structural misogyny. 'The Magdalene Laundries' refers explicitly to the institutionalized abuse of women by the Catholic church in Ireland under the pretense of 'rescue work'.<sup>51</sup> Mitchell's voice adopts the perspective of a woman at the laundries who has been 'branded as a jezebel' and 'cast in shame'.<sup>52</sup> Mitchell shows how women are reduced to the sum of their sex and thus punished for the

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<sup>50</sup> Susan J. Rosowski, in *The Voyage In...*p. 49.

<sup>51</sup> Jennifer O'Mahoney, 'Advocacy and the Magdalene Laundries: towards a psychology of change', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 15, no. 4 (2018), pp. 456-471 (p. 456).

<sup>52</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'The Magdalene Laundries' in *Turbulent Indigo* (Reprise Records, 1994).

response their bodies receive as a result of this. The women are pregnant by 'their own fathers' or priests which shows Mitchell's understanding of the way women's narratives are silenced by misogyny and brutality. Equally, in 'Cherokee Louise' Mitchell depicts an account of her childhood friend who is sexually assaulted by her step-father who 'yanks her to her knees'.<sup>53</sup> As Mitchell looks back to the treatment of her native American, fostered friend she considers how gender, race and class can intersect producing differing degrees of oppression.<sup>54</sup> This exposes the oppression faced by women and minorities reflecting how their narratives and existence is infringed upon.

Another way Mitchell awakens to limitations is through her own narrative. The theme of unfulfilled motherhood is explored in 'Little Green' and 'Chinese Café/Unchained Melody'. In 1965 Mitchell, 'destitute' and alone, gave birth to a baby girl whom, after a circumstantial marriage and months of deliberation, Mitchell finally decided to give up for adoption.<sup>55</sup> The songs refer to Mitchell's own experiences describing a 'Child with a child pretending' and more explicitly in 'Chinese Café': 'And my child's a stranger/ I bore her/ But I could not raise her'.<sup>56</sup> This theme is another example of Mitchell's awakening to the limitations of womanhood as she expresses her own sense of loss. The necessity of giving up her child reflects the way in which her life was dictated by her sex in a way a man's life never would be. Mitchell's early decisions are characterized by womanhood and

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<sup>53</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'Cherokee Louise' in *Night Ride Home* (Geffen Records, 1991).

<sup>54</sup> David Yaff, *Reckless Daughter: A Portrait of Joni Mitchell* (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2017), p. 341.

<sup>55</sup> David Yaff, *Reckless Daughter...* p. 35

<sup>56</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'Little Green' in *Blue...* and Joni Mitchell, 'Chinese Café/Unchained Melody' in *Wild Things Run Fast* (Los Angeles: Geffen Records, 1982).

her lyrical depiction of her personal pain mirrors the sacrifice that shapes the female *Künstlerroman*. Rosowski explains that a female narrative often ‘presents an awakening to limitations. Each presents a resolution only at great cost to the protagonist: she must deny one element of herself’.<sup>57</sup> As Mitchell refers to her own sacrifices of marriage and giving up her daughter, she echoes this ‘awakening to limitations’. Although she did not give up her child in order to pursue her career, the resulting outcome is that Mitchell’s career has been immensely successful and would likely not have been if she had kept her baby. These sacrifices have often fueled Mitchell’s art and the realization that she could not be both artist and unwed mother. Thus, as Mitchell explores themes of unfulfilled motherhood and the violence that women face as a consequence of their sex within patriarchal society, she shows how women’s narratives often reflect an awakening to the boundaries enforced upon them.

Mitchell’s lyrical narrative reflects many aspects of Beebe’s ‘Divided self’ as her artistic voice is able to show the importance of the internal and external in order to comprehend the whole. The philosophical rhetoric that runs through Mitchell’s catalogue of work reflects an embodiment of the self as human and the self as artist. However, Mitchell’s voice also considers the idea that female narratives are often defined by limitations in a male centered world. The ability to conceive the limitations faced by other women, and by herself ultimately enhances Mitchell’s perspective as artist and philosopher as she is able to fully comprehend the light and dark of the existential canvas.

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<sup>57</sup> Susan J. Rosowski, in *The Voyage In...* p.68

### 'The Circle Game': Cyclical and Linear Time

The *Künstlerroman*, as a European literary tradition, is heavily influenced by the white, western, patriarchal perception of time as linear. This narrative linearity is a product of the western framing and construction of history. As I have previously discussed, the *Künstlerroman* often follows a path of outward discovery, especially for male protagonists who are allowed to depart from the domestic. However, the female narratives often depict a passive journey of inward reflection. The traditions of these narratives echo the societal perceptions of linear versus cyclic: male versus female: historical versus natural time. In *Cyclic and Linear Time in Early India* (2002) Romila Thapar explains the historical and cultural assumptions about time. Thapar explains how the traditional Indian concept of time is cyclic compared to the 'essentially linear time of European civilisation.'<sup>58</sup> This explains how nineteenth century historians viewed 'endlessly repeating' time as precluding their own linear perceptions. Moreover, it minimized the importance of human acts, there was no 'goal of progress' and the lines between myth and history were blurred.<sup>59</sup> As such

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<sup>58</sup> Romila Thapar, 'Cyclic and Linear Time in Early India' in *Time*, Ed. By Katinka Ridderbos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 27-45, (p. 27)

<sup>59</sup> Romila Thapar, 'Cyclic and Linear Time... p.28

the hegemonic European canon has framed Asia and India as the 'Other' and in opposition with reasonable, lineated history. Cyclic time is othered further through its connotations of femininity. Time as a rotational, mirrors the nature of the menstrual cycle and thus has been aligned with femininity, motherhood and birth. Claire Colebrook explains how 'Women would figure as the lost pre-linguistic origin, an origin that can only be fantasized, *ex post facto*, as that which must have been abandoned in order for man to enter a communal, rational history'.<sup>60</sup> In this way, the phallogentric construction of linear history, has placed cyclic time, with its connotations of femininity, fantasy as the domestic Other which must be departed from. In Colebrook's assertion of how the western canon abandons woman in order for man to progress we are presented also with the basis of the *Bildung*. As the male protagonist embarks on a linear narrative of discovery and growth, he must leave the familiarity of the domestic behind. Female narratives, however, are often defined by their reflection into the imaginary realm of the mind. I will discuss how Mitchell translates cyclic time through the theme of unfulfilled motherhood, which extends to a sense of interrelatedness and connection to the world. Then I will explain Mitchell's critique of colonialist expansion and capitalist greed as she reflects a concern for the state of the earth. Finally, through a consideration of Mitchell's narrative as female within a patriarchal system, I will discuss how she adopts both cyclic and linear views, resulting in a nomadic and androgynous voice.

Time as a cycle of repeating events mirrors the nature of the menstrual cycle connoting femininity and motherhood. As such, a cyclic perception constitutes as

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<sup>60</sup> Claire Colebrook, 'Difference, Time and Organic Extinction' in *Sex, Gender and Time in Fiction and Culture*, Ed. By Ben Davies and Jana Funke (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 195-204 (p. 196).

matriarchal against the patriarchal linear. Mitchell often considers time through the theme of unfulfilled motherhood in her music. Her song 'Little Green' reflects directly upon the loss of her child and utilises imagery of nature and motherhood to reflect their intrinsic connection. By depicting a 'Child with a child pretending'<sup>61</sup> Mitchell parallels herself and her baby in their youth and innocence. As the song progresses it travels through the seasons from when 'spring is born' to wintery 'nights when the northern lights perform'.<sup>62</sup> Here Mitchell uses the cyclic nature of the seasons to represent the connection that her and her child share despite their physical separation. As mother and child experience the seasons they are encompassed by the earth and nature. Moreover, the song opens with a reference to the lunar cycle: 'Born with the moon in cancer'<sup>63</sup>, which reiterates a sense of cyclic time and feminine time. Mitchell's relationship to her child is bound up in more than their physical closeness. They share a maternal link to each other and to the earth as origin. Mitchell is quoted later in her life reflecting upon this sense of connection: 'I mothered the world and looked at the world in which my child was roaming from the point of view of a sociologist'.<sup>64</sup> In this sense, Mitchell finds comfort in the idea that she and her child are 'roaming' through and bound by the same cycle of life. Mitchell also reflects a sense of comfort that the birth of her child continues the cyclicity of life.

As Mitchell ages, her music shows a matured ability to be a mother to the earth. In 'Chinese Café/Unchained Melody' Mitchell refers more explicitly to her lost child:

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<sup>61</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'Little Green' in *Blue...*

<sup>62</sup> Ibid...

<sup>63</sup> Ibid...

<sup>64</sup> David Yaff, *Reckless Daughter...* p. 356



‘And my child’s a stranger/ I bore her/ But I could not raise her’.<sup>65</sup> The confessional style reflects a sense of loss and estrangement, whilst recognising the link shared in pregnancy and birth. Moreover, the second verse of the song diverges from literal motherhood to Mitchell’s maternal concern for the state of the world, as she exclaims: ‘Ripping off Indian land again/ How long how long/ Short sighted business men’.<sup>66</sup> Here Mitchell criticises the greed of corporate America’s linear narrative that strives for progress and production. The reference to western colonialist claim over Native American land also refers to linear and cyclic time. A Native American understanding is predominantly that, ‘circles and cycles are central to the world and that all things are related within the universe.’<sup>67</sup> Thus the ‘short sighted’ expansion of European colonialism into Indian land shows the penetrative nature of linear time that destroys the natural and original cyclic. The song itself is cyclical, as Mitchell returns to the domestic of her friends’ home in the final verse, referring to kids who are, ‘grown and gone/ Grown so fast/ Like the turn of a page/ We look like our mothers did now’.<sup>68</sup> Here Mitchell combines cyclic and linear time: ‘the turn of a page’ suggests the linear progression of the literary narrative which she associates with her own sense of age and loss. However, by depicting progression into age: ‘We look like out mothers did now’ the passage of time is shown as a series of reoccurring events; Mitchell’s child too will age as she has and so on. The idea of looking like her mother connects Mitchell to the women that have come before her and the generation that will follow on. Ultimately Mitchell delineates traditional

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<sup>65</sup> Joni Mitchell, ‘Chinese Café’ in *Wild Things Run Fast...*

<sup>66</sup> Ibid...

<sup>67</sup> Donald L. Fixico, *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World: American Indian Studies and Traditional Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> Joni Mitchell, ‘Chinese Café/Unchained Melody’ ...

narratives and perceptions in order to engage with other cultural outlooks and as a way of coping with the loss of her child. The theme of maternity that crops up in her work often attempts to reinforce a sense of commonality between her and her child and more widely between the earth and its inhabitants.

Mitchell critiques the abuse that linear, capitalist attitudes have inflicted upon the natural world. In her essay Colebrook states 'If 'we' wish to live on, we need to become aware of a time – ecological, geological – beyond our own, paying our due to an existence that we failed to recognize as our own.'<sup>69</sup> This highlights the relationship between man-centred perceptions of time and the ecological decay of the earth. Currently, the fragile state of the environment is being focussed on increasingly by the media, but Mitchell was writing about these issues as far back as the 1960s and it is a topic that is prevalent in her later work. Albums such as *Dog Eat Dog* (1985) and *Turbulent Indigo* (1994) highlight environmental abuse as symptomatic of the West's lineated perception of the world. The doom infused beat accompanied by Mitchell's increasingly enraged voice in 'Sex Kills' reflects increasing concern for the state of society: 'The ulcerated ozone/ These tumors of the skin/ This hostile sun beating down on/ The massive mess we're in!/ And the gas leaks/ And the oil spills/ And sex sells everything/ And sex kills'.<sup>70</sup> The unrelenting, list-like structure of the song reflects a sense of urgency along with the juxtaposition of sex selling and killing. Mitchell's reference to sex shows how the natural act, that is vital to the reproduction of life, is exploited by consumerist society in order to sell products and engrain social ideals. The song refers to the

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<sup>69</sup> Claire Colebrook, 'Difference, Time and... p. 196

<sup>70</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'Sex Kills' in *Turbulent Indigo*...

AID's epidemic of the 1980s and sex literally killing, which seemed far from the sexual liberation of the 1960s. Moreover, the expression 'sex sells', commonly used in advertising as a technique to sell products, connotes the sexualisation of women's bodies. The systematic objectification of women's bodies in the media reduces them to the sum of their sex. Thus, the linearity of patriarchy has created a structure where 'female sexuality and subjectivity' have been invented as constraints of femininity.<sup>71</sup> By referring to the media's structural capitalisation on sex Mitchell shows how diminished images of women's bodies are used to reinforce patriarchal fears of the womb and encourage a linear rhetoric away from the natural origin. The transition from 'sex sells' to 'sex kills' indicates that a linear inclination away from the womb ultimately destroys the natural balance of the world. Therefore, Mitchell highlights the disharmony between cyclic and linear narratives and how patriarchal fears of the origin/womb have resulted in the destruction of the natural world. Mitchell ultimately reveals the danger of binary oppositions which reflects an attempt to create a more harmonious perception of time.

Mitchell's musical narrative shows a symbiotic relationship between linear and cyclic time in order to gain a balanced perspective of the whole. Colebrook explains how, in order to see past binary assumptions of time, society must look 'beyond the human reproductive cycle of time, towards a time of a broader organic and spiritual wholeness'.<sup>72</sup> This sentiment is reiterated through Mitchell's interwoven consideration of the linear and cyclic creating an attempt at androgyny. 'The Circle

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<sup>71</sup> Scott Lash, *Sociology and Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 76.

<sup>72</sup> Claire Colebrook, 'Difference, Time and... p.196

Game' depicts a seemingly cyclic observation as going, 'round and round and round' repeating a series of events.<sup>73</sup> However the linearity of the boy's life is also shown as he ages and departs from the home: 'Cartwheels turn to car wheels'.<sup>74</sup> The 'car wheels' highlight a linear/cyclic hybridity as the boy's outward departure is carried by the rotations of the wheels or the seasons. The relationship between linear and cyclic is exemplified in the chorus: 'We're captive on a carousel of time/ We can't return we can only look/ Behind from where we came'.<sup>75</sup> The imagery of the carousel infers the repetitious cycle of life, however the sense that we are only moving in one direction, unable to turn back to the past combines the two perspectives. Thus, the child is both moving away and towards his origin which creates a symbiotic dependency between linear and circular time rather than a binary opposition.

Moreover, philosophical awareness forms the basis of the song 'Hejira' which is rich in a consideration of the whole. Mitchell describes the futility of attempting to conceive time: 'Well I looked at the granite markers/ Those tributes to finality to eternity/ And then I looked at myself here/ Chicken scratching for my immortality'.<sup>76</sup> This depicts humanity as mere chickens scratching in the dirt for some sense of meaning against the eternal. Mitchell's use of imagery supposes the human inclination to mark time as futile, whilst recognising her own attempt to do so by achieving immortality through her art. Mitchell reflects upon human existence, connection and the construction of binaries as particles of change in the

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<sup>73</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'The Circle Game' in *Ladies of the Canyon* (Reprise Records, 1970)

<sup>74</sup> Ibid...

<sup>75</sup> Ibid...

<sup>76</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'Hejira' in *Hejira*...

vast expanse of timelessness. The song still recognises the human need to perceive time in order to feel purposeful in existence and thus shows an understanding of the construction of social binaries. However, Mitchell, as removed artist, is able to illuminate the reality of life as a mere brush stroke on the canvas of the whole. In this way Mitchell's voice acts as an omniscient and removed narrative which adopts androgyny in order to fully embody the role of artist, philosopher and at times the divine.

### Conclusion

Mitchell's body of work succeeds in presenting a subversive and transcendent consideration of her role as artist. The *Künstlerroman* as a literary narrative is bound by time, place and genre. It is a form conceived from the nineteenth century European, patriarchal vernacular that assumes the linear trajectory of the male artists journey. However, *The Voyage In* reflects upon the female *Bildung* of internal discovery as an outwardly limited but equally valid narrative. Mitchell's music as an artist's novel is able to transcend some of the limitations placed upon the female *Künstlerroman*, whilst subverting the patriarchal assumptions of the male. Because her catalogue of work spans over half a century, her narrative voice surpasses the limitations of time, place or genre. The self as divided is constantly discussed by Mitchell through the philosophical focuses of albums like *Hejira* and *Blue* which recount narratives of journey and reflection, echoing the duality of the internal and external self.

Moreover, in Mitchell's more political albums such as *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* she attempts to illuminate the broken state of American and western society. The album's allusions to religion, art and use of world rhythms throughout

enhances the effect of her removed artistic voice as it is able to perceive the light and dark of society more clearly. Moreover, her return to songs produced in youth reflects the completion of Mitchell's *Künstlerroman* as the narrative looks back on life with the insight of artistic maturity and wisdom. Mitchell's harsher, aged voice reclaims the songs she produced in her youth against the backdrop of a symphony in *Travelogue*. The effect of the symbioses between her craggy but breathy voice and the classical music epitomizes her ability to perceive the self. She is able to remain unsentimental and removed enough from her work to reimagine it, whilst acknowledging its continued veracity. Mitchell's artistic journey is thus completed with an epiphanic realization of the sum of her artistic career whilst diverging from the sound that is expected of her. Mitchell's *Künstlerroman* embodies a reflection upon the divided self as innately human and contradictory and looks beyond the binary oppositions that restrain society. Her reinterpretation of previous releases mirrors the narrative return to the domestic whilst continuing her artistic contribution. Mitchell's departure and reflection echoes the ebb and flow of life and existence, because after all, everything comes and goes.

The female aspect of Mitchell's work as a *Künstlerroman* comes from the consideration of the limitations placed upon women's narratives. The theme of unfulfilled motherhood that is explicit and implicit in her work reflects the sacrifice that is inherent to womanhood. Mitchell's personal experience of the loss of her child permeates certain songs and shapes her narrative voice as inherently female. This depicts an understanding of how women's narratives are often dictated by their gender whereas male voices remain unbound. The cyclicity that is alluded to through Mitchell's work also challenges the traditional linear narrative that aims to

move away from the origin. The natural repetition of the seasons against the decay of western civilization shows how the patrilineal canon has transgressed from the source and brought about the decline of the earth, society and wholeness.

Moreover, Mitchell frames the destruction and decay of society as a result of constructed binaries. The binaries of cyclical and linear, female and male, internal and external are often perceived as opposing states. Mitchell's narrative often seeks to present the interdependence of socially constructed binaries as inevitabilities and essential aspects of the whole. The song 'Shadows and Light' exemplifies this idea, as Mitchell parallels a view of the whole with a view of a painting. One must stand back and acknowledge the necessity of light and dark, of every stroke in order to comprehend the fullness of the image. This subversion of binaries is often epitomized and extended through the use of an androgynous artistic voice. Mitchell inhabits this androgyny as 'A hitcher/ A prisoner of the white lines on the freeway'<sup>77</sup> moving nomadically through genre, voice and at times, gender. This quote also epitomizes how Mitchell's narrative is bound by the white lines of a patriarchal society which ultimately shapes her understanding as a woman existing within it. However, the lived experience of limitations mirrors the intrinsic boundaries of human existence. Thus, Mitchell's voice reflects a fullness of understanding of existence and the self's role within it. Mitchell's work adopts aspects of androgyny then, in order to reflect a removed perspective of the whole and transcend the parameters of patriarchal society. However, the ability to recognize the boundaries and thus surpass them, comes from a female, lived

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<sup>77</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'Coyote' in *Hejira*...



experience of subjugation. As a prisoner on the freeway, Mitchell's narrative is of an artist and voyager that is ultimately penned in by the linear road of the phallocentric canon. Mitchell's body of work as a *Künstlerroman* is inherently female in its consideration of women's narratives as defined against the male vernacular.

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