

4 “All Romantics Meet the Same Fate Someday”

Joni Mitchell, *Blue*, and Romanticism

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Joni Mitchell’s stature and accomplishments in the artistic realm of music are immense. As an iconic “woman of rock,”¹ she has garnered accolades from critics in virtually every musical-disciplinary area. Her fourth album, *Blue* (1971), was proclaimed nothing less than the “greatest album made by a woman” in a National Public Radio review² in 2017, while some critics have gone so far as to claim that *Blue* is “arguably the best album of all time” by any artist, male or female.³ The songs of *Blue* treat issues of relationship, identity, women’s roles, and others in an intensely intimate and profound manner, couching their sophisticated lyrics in musical settings of similar erudition and beauty. They have been called “popular music” but are scarcely comparable to other examples of popular “hits” from the time, exuding a sparsity of mechanical production and arrangement, but at the same time evincing great intricacy and virtuosity in composition and performance.

While critics have debated the degree to which features of Romanticism have reappeared in various twentieth-century art forms, current research has been disclosing numerous parallels and similarities between principles of Romanticism and the aesthetics of rock and roll.⁴ Affinities between Mitchell’s music and elements of European and North American Romanticism are apparent, but the specific legacy of Romantic art in her artistic productions has scarcely moved beyond identifying general tendencies and thematic trends or outrightly denying them.⁵ Critics have regularly mined Mitchell’s biography for facts about her life that seem to explain aspects of her songs, but as a result they have often missed much of the artistic significance abundant in her work.⁶

Among Mitchell’s albums, *Blue* reveals these connections perhaps most clearly. In this chapter, I would like to examine three songs from Mitchell’s highly regarded 1971 album (“The Last Time I Saw Richard,” “A Case of You,” and “Blue”) through a “Romantic” critical perspective to illustrate the extent to which Mitchell’s music at the time is informed by principles and concerns that run parallel to those discussed by Romantic artists and philosophers, particularly the early German Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schlegel. The project of German Romanticism, for which Schlegel’s contributions were key, included literary and aesthetic features

which have never, in fact, completely disappeared from western cultures, even during times when science and realism were primarily informing artistic disciplines.⁷ It is not my intent to map paths of influence, since such attempts rely on biographical “facts” that demonstrate connections which may or may not have taken place in reality. Rather, I wish to ascertain the extent to which Joni Mitchell’s music and lyrics fit Romantic paradigms (particularly of German Romanticism) and how her compositions, as unique and defiant of categorization as they may be, nevertheless hearken back to aesthetic principles of some two centuries past.

“The Last Time I Saw Richard”: Emotional Vulnerability and Subjectivity

As the vast majority of her biographers and critics have pointed out, again and again, much of *Blue* was produced during a period of Mitchell’s life when she was facing several personal crises while battling deep psychological depression. Within a brief period, she had become an unwed mother but had chosen to give her baby up for adoption; she had married and then divorced her musical partner, Chuck Mitchell, with whom she had proved incompatible both personally and musically; and she had fallen deeply in love with a musician, Graham Nash, with whom she was very compatible both personally and musically, but felt far from prepared, willing, or able to carry through with their commitment, and so she left him. One is tempted to hear *Blue* through the filter of Joni Mitchell’s biography, as a confession in song by a very sensitive and eloquent woman who has lived through some extreme hardships. Perhaps it is even more tempting to draw parallels between Mitchell’s tumultuous relationships at that time and those of the women and men of early German Romanticism, for whom love was crucially important but whose relationships, especially their marriages, were also turbulent and certainly far from monogamous.⁸ However, this approach sells short the profound aesthetic value of this remarkable album: because her lyrics, compositions, performance techniques, and visual images on the *Blue* album confront the listener with a challenging aesthetic experience, the songs earn consideration as multi-faceted works of art that belong to serious artistic traditions beyond that of most popular music. Especially since these songs present such a high degree of aesthetic richness and complexity, they seem to shift the focus away from the artist and fix it rather on the work itself, and from there onto the listener’s own interpretation, universalizing the listener’s experience of it. As her biographer David Yaffe writes, Mitchell would not consider a purely biographical interpretation of her songs very productive: “Joni has often said that if you listen and are thinking of her, you’re doing it wrong. You should listen, she insists, and find yourself. ‘Otherwise,’ she said in 2013, ‘you’re just rubbernecking a car accident.’”⁹

“The Last Time I Saw Richard,” the final song on the album, relates an acrimonious meeting between the artist and her former lover, whom she calls “Richard,” at the point of their relationship when they are about to split up and go their separate ways or have already done so. Although the song appears last on *Blue*, it nevertheless provides an excellent point of embarkation for discussing the aesthetic qualities of the whole album and for illustrating how these compositions evince principles and features of Romanticism. The story told in the song is simple: it is 1968, and the songwriter and her lover are holding their conversation in a bar in Detroit. In the give-and-take, each expresses frustration at the other’s delusions in life and lack of self-knowledge; in the final section of the song, describing their respective situations after they have finally separated, the artist reports that they both have ended up depressed and, apparently, no wiser about their illusions. In the course of their bar conversation, each refers to the other as “Romantic” in two senses of the word: first, Richard claims that people like her, with the Romantic faults he cites, wind up in bars like the one they are in; they become cynics and grow tiresome. He sees that the artist’s eyes contain “moon,” a common Romantic trope, as she stubbornly clings to the illusions of life, and naively believes men who flatter her with “pretty lies,” a phrase which he repeats with slight variations five times in succession. Second, the artist considers Richard’s existential pain to be a romanticizing of something that doesn’t exist and claims that, although he seems to have death in his eyes (she’s not pulling any punches!), his selections from the jukebox also indicate a degree of romanticization, and asserts (four times) that love is (or can be) sweet. In the final section of the song, from a far later point in time, the artist summarizes their subsequent situations in just eight musical bars devoted to each person: Richard marries and settles down to a life of middle-class consumerism but feels he must keep the lights in his home brightly lit while he sits drinking alone. The artist, on the other hand, while she drinks alone in the darkened bar, wants to engage in no conversation whatsoever—thus, she has fulfilled Richard’s prediction, having become something of an inebriated cynic. She sits in the dark, but at least she has eluded the prophecy that she would be boring someone. She claims that, although she may be caught now in a web of such dark experience, lingering alone in the shadows of the café, she declares that this is merely a stage in a metamorphosis—she fully expects that after she moves past this period of her life she will rise like a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis.

The song is a Romantic *tour-de-force* with respect to lyrics, composition, and performance. In the folk song tradition, Mitchell sings to her own musical accompaniment and there is no other instrument playing in the recording; yet, the melodic and harmonic complexity of the song makes for a performance far more sophisticated than usually expected within the folk song tradition. The long piano introduction to the song

extends over twenty-six bars as transcribed in her songbook¹⁰ and exhibits the complexity and dynamism of the harmonic structure, with its intricate chord voicings and alternations between major and minor key swings woven together with suspended chords and other alternative harmonies, unusual characteristics for popular musical compositions around 1970, but certainly calculated in this piece to accentuate the longing and disappointment associated with inconstant love, a *leitmotiv* that runs throughout the album. Furthermore, in this song, Mitchell makes extensive use of the long poetic line, some with as many as sixteen or eighteen syllables. Such lines accelerate the cadence of the song, and Mitchell delivers some of them breathlessly, as if the information they convey is most important to these estranged lovers and must be communicated, entirely, on this evening, the last time they see each other. The conversation begins with Richard's statement, which is followed in the give-and-take by the artist's words and is completed with the artist's narrative summary. Thus, in one lyrical package, we have the three core genres of the lyric (the performed song, rhyme, etc.), the dramatic (the conversation, directly quoted), and the epic (the artist's narrative), thereby aligning with Friedrich Schlegel's observation that Romantic literature, as progressive-universal literature, should blend, coalesce, and juxtapose literary forms as a means to establish Romantic perspectives and affects.¹¹

Romantic tropes and formulations in the song recur often. Richard presents his opinion of his lover's supposed future, and thereby reveals his own tendency to project onto her precisely those faults that he contains—the fate that he forecasts for her, how she supposedly will wind up, is suggested later in her report on his subsequent life, that he now lives with a figure-skater spouse, but that he mostly spends his nights in front of a television in a brightly lit room, alone and drinking. In the bar, his repetition of the phrase “pretty lies” presents an oxymoron¹² but is also a negative take on one of the essentials of a Romantic sensibility: art does not render to our senses the “thing-in-itself,” and so remains an illusion; but in the illusion there may be beauty, and contemplating its aesthetic qualities educates us, according to Friedrich Schiller,¹³ to moral disposition and action. Richard's formulation is, of course, sarcastic. For him, “pretty” implies that the lies are pleasant-sounding but superficial. He is merely ridiculing what he considers her gullibility and her inclination to believe that which is not evident to him. Is not love a pretty lie? Both he and she seem utterly miserable, yet she repeats five times her belief that love can be sweet. It is certainly *not* sweet love that we encounter in the darkened bar in Detroit in 1968, and he belittles her inclination to think the opposite.

She, too, projects onto him qualities that may also be illusory, e.g., that his choice in music reflects dreaminess, and that the pain he feels is nothing more than a romanticized illusion. She dismisses it as a mere

phantom of his idiosyncratic perspective and, in her opinion, reveals his highly questionable judgment, which has led him to his current, unhappy state of mind. Both Richard and the artist judge one another from very subjective viewpoints that are informed by the sources of their own discontent. As their later fates seem to suggest, both retreat into their subjective, intractable positions, and it seems impossible that they could ever emerge again and meet in the middle. Instead, they project onto one another many of the qualities they may find in themselves. Perhaps it is their relationship, now ensconced in opposition, which has become the actual oxymoron.

Richard and the artist each imply that the other's eyes serve as "windows to the soul," giving each what they believe is privileged evidence of what the other is truly feeling. In their statements each uses metaphorical language (according to him, her eyes reflect the moon, and in his eyes she sees tombs) that connects the song to one of the seminal works of German Romanticism, E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann" ("The Sandman," 1814), possibly his best-known tale. In it, the protagonist, Nathanael, a young student suffering from a psychosis brought on by childhood trauma, becomes obsessed with eyes. He defines his "reality" through his projections, creating in him a subjective perspective that no one and nothing can affect. He projects his inner torments upon his fiancée Clara, for whom he writes a dreadful poem, ending with a macabre verse: "He looked into Clara's eyes; but it was Death gazing welcomingly back at him."¹⁴ Later, at the university he attends, Nathanael looks through a special, small telescope at what he thinks is a young woman, Olimpia, sitting in an apartment across from his own. Her eyes appear "oddly fixed and lifeless. But as he looked more and more keenly through the glass, it seemed as if damp moonbeams rose from Olimpia's eyes."¹⁵ Of course, Olimpia is a very sophisticated automaton, an experiment conducted by a physics professor and an evil lawyer named Coppelius, Nathanael's nemesis. The death he believes he sees in Clara's eyes, and the moonbeams he thinks he detects in Olimpia's, are nothing more than what he has projected onto them. Tragically, the unwitting student falls deeply in love with the automaton and clings to his narcissistic delusions and to the veracity of his uncanny projections to the bitter end, when he commits suicide. In Mitchell's song, the tropes seem less menacing physically, but certainly foretell the demise of the relationship between the artist and Richard. In Hoffmann's tale, we also receive news of what will happen to Clara after Nathanael's death—Hoffmann reports that her life will be far happier than it might have been with Nathanael:

After several years it was said that Clara was seen in a distant region, as she sat holding hands with an amiable husband on the porch of a beautiful country house, and before her two animated boys were

playing. One might conclude that, after all, Clara found the quiet, domestic bliss that agreed with her bright, vivacious disposition and which Nathanael, with his deeply shattered soul, could never have provided her.¹⁶

Thus, Clara enjoys her bourgeois happiness with her husband and without the subjective Nathanael, while Richard remains unhappy, having embraced his bourgeois trappings, but also living without his Romantic artist. In typically Romantic fashion, Hoffmann's description of Clara's future existence can easily be read ironically: there are very few idyllic scenes of bourgeois bliss in Hoffmann's *oeuvre*, or for that matter in the works of any other German Romantic, and the brief description the "Sandmann" narrator gives reminds one more of an offhand, clichéd *ekphrasis* of a saccharine, bucolic painting. Mitchell's irony is also palpable in her description of the artist's current status, anticipating her future happiness but currently enduring a dark period of her life. The beautiful butterfly wings for which she hopes seem to be far from a sure thing, and one feels that any metamorphosis is wishful thinking, at least as long as she retains her misanthropic attitude. Mitchell's ironic touch is well-grounded earlier in the song, in the voice of the barmaid; her prophetic exhortation, "Drink up now it's gettin' on time to close,"¹⁷ forecasts more than the end of the conversation. Her formulaic notice about the café closing for the evening ironically applies as well to the doomed relationship between Richard and the artist, which, as they finish their drinks, will soon be ending, if it has not already done so.¹⁸

The final image of the metamorphosis from the cocoon of her dark period to the beautiful butterfly provides just one example of a profusion of natural metaphors that Mitchell regularly employs in her songs. On *Blue* her tropes reflect a new ecological consciousness in early 1970s singer-songwriters; among them, Mitchell was one of but a few pioneers, and the spaces and objects of nature that she celebrates in her songs are carefully integrated into a variety of Romantic themes. In "Carrie," the source of her restlessness and longing is the wind blowing northward across the Mediterranean Sea from Africa; her feelings of regret at losing a lover make her desire the oblivion and release that travel might afford her in "River," where she hopes to disappear, skating off on a wintry, frozen river; her infant baby, to whom she devotes the song "Little Green," is compared to spring flowers and to northern lights; in "Blue" (as we will see later), she presents her lover with the gift of a seashell in which he can believe that he hears the waves at the seashore; etc. The profusion of such imagery in her work aligns her songs with nature lyrics of the Romantics, whose metaphorical utilization of natural scenes and objects has profoundly affected how the modern world looks at nature.¹⁹

Romantic Intoxication: "A Case of You."

Mitchell provides one of the most strikingly beautiful musical performances on the album in her song "A Case of You," although she famously has told her biographer that it "is just a doormat song."²⁰ Her choice of a dulcimer for this and several other works on her album lends them something of an American-folk flavor since the dulcimer is possibly "America's oldest folk instrument,"²¹ and she exploits its rhythmic qualities, slapping out a kind of Calypso beat²² while fingering austere but bright melody lines. In fact, in the first song on the album, "All I Want," the dulcimer's joyous "twang" is the first sound heard on *Blue*. Such interest in the "folk" (including songs, stories, instruments, customs, and other aspects of culture) became a significant part of 1960s' and early 1970s' American counter culture; similarly, the interest in *Volkslied* and *Volkskunde* (folk-culture) comprised a core principle of the German Romantics, many of whom found German folk art and culture instrumental for recovering a lost, historicized essence of what it meant to be truly "German."²³

However, in "A Case of You," the voice of the dulcimer inspires nothing like joy and giddiness but rather conveys a seriousness not in the previous tune, a gravity that reverberates through one of the most visceral songs on the album, particularly in the chorus, in which she claims that her love, the "you" of the song, is "in my blood like holy wine./You taste so bitter and so sweet."²⁴ Accompanying her on acoustic guitar is James Taylor, with Russ Kunkel on percussion, but they are in a hopeless competition with the steady cadence of the dulcimer.²⁵ Her instrument, her voice, and her performance all blend solemnly as she reveals something of great importance about basic human reality. Mitchell seems to be on a mission of both joy and sorrow, and the listener discovers that the message is nothing less than how one experiences authentic love.

The literary problem of how one can love authentically has a long tradition, extending back to classical times, but achieving a literary pinnacle during the High Middle Ages.²⁶ In literature from the ancient world through the fifteenth century, eloquent and significant discussions of authentic love came in a variety of literary forms, from Ovid's *Ars amatoria* to Gottfried von Straßburg's early thirteenth-century epic poem, *Tristan und Isolde*. The medieval-obsessed Romantics delighted in the latter, a tale of love beyond all measure between the nephew and the wife of King Mark in Cornwall. The German version, an epic of almost twenty thousand lines composed by Gottfried, was particularly noted for its underlying thesis that love is the affirmation of life, and therefore true love is not just joy (as many courtiers would have had it), but rather a joy *and* sorrow in equal measure.²⁷ Those who understand and accept authentic love were identified by Gottfried as *edele herzen*, "noble hearts," for whom the author composed his work, employing the rhetoric

of the oxymoron and the language of the Eucharist in his prologue to foster an almost mystical appreciation of love's enigmatic essence.

The act of reading about the love of Tristan and Isolde thereby becomes a meditation on the mystery of authentic love itself. Gottfried expresses it thus: "This is bread to all noble hearts. With this their death lives on. We read their life, we read their death, and to us it is sweet as bread."²⁸ The onset of love between the lovers occurs on the sea in a boat sailing to Cornwall from Ireland, on which King Mark's nephew accompanies Isolde, the Princess of Ireland, whom he has successfully wooed to marry his uncle. Tristan, finding onboard the ship what he thinks is wine—actually it is a powerful love potion—drinks it and offers it to Isolde, who also imbibes it. As if it were sacramental (i.e., the outward sign of an inward change of disposition), the potion enters their blood, and they become hopelessly enamored with one another. Unable to contain their feelings, they consummate their relationship on board the skiff, and numerous times thereafter, even after Isolde becomes a queen in Cornwall. Later in the story, Tristan pays a stealthy, nocturnal visit to Isolde in their sleeping quarters, amidst the slumbering courtly retinue, by leaping from his bed to hers, unwittingly thereby opening a wound he had received earlier in the day and soiling her bed with his blood. The blood-soaked sheets and Tristan's bleeding wound serve as evidence of the adulterous couple's lovemaking that night; the king and his court discover this in the morning, and it nearly leads to the lovers' execution. Thus, in *Tristan und Isolde*, blood becomes proof of love: a mad, extreme, and undeniable variety of loving that becomes as destructive as it is delightful and as dangerous as it is exquisite. The image that each is in the other's blood is thus a most striking and appropriate metaphor for love, which functions like the titillation one feels by drinking wine, and like life itself it is fraught with bitterness and sweetness.

Critics and biographers have often noted that the person to whom Mitchell most likely addresses her song is the late, fellow-Canadian singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen, and the facts about their relationship have become the source material for a standard "reading" of it, beyond which most have not dared to venture.²⁹ Unfortunately, such readings omit many of the song's more significant levels of meaning. Establishing the identity of the "other" in the poem as Cohen, however, does provide an access point to these meanings, because Cohen was renowned as a poet/songwriter for whom mythology occupies an important place in art. Mitchell engages the "you" of the text with a deconstruction of his mythic language, when, for example, she cites his allusion to Shakespeare's quotation concerning the constancy of the Northern Star, which, while it doesn't change its position, certainly and unfalteringly resides in the most obscure darkness, the dead of night. She thereby appropriates and bends the metaphor toward a new meaning, which includes the aspects of distance, gloom, and murkiness.

The problem with the kind of academic “literary-quotation” and consciously mythicizing statement produced by the “you” of the song is that it becomes a way of *not* loving, by keeping the experience too much within one’s rational faculties, thereby holding one’s emotions back and aloof; a way of not coming to terms with the reality of love. The “you” lives very much in an intellectual universe, quoting literary sources such as Shakespeare (*Julius Caesar*)³⁰ and Rilke (“Liebes-Lied” [Love Song]).³¹ Such love as the “you” speaks of here is not heartfelt but is rather a discussed love that resides safely in the intellect. Emotionally speaking, this love is indeed the darkness. When the “you” summarizes Rilke’s “Liebeslied,” an intensely evocative and intimate poem, reducing it to a short cliché about souls that touch, the utter absence of any trace of humanity (even pronouns with human antecedents are missing from his text) in the intellectual formulation is chilling. Mitchell responds by expanding and personalizing the metaphor, thus reclaiming some of the power and intimacy of Rilke’s verse.³² She goes on to assert that from her perspective authentic love cannot consist only of the pleasures of the intellect expressed through literary quotation. To love truly is *to bleed*, as she is reminded by the woman who knows the “you” well. When one loves this intensely, it feels metaphorically as if the other has entered one’s blood, and so, when Mitchell creates lyrics about her love, the lines communicate things from deep inside her: sometimes a part of that other bleeds out of her and onto the page.

Mitchell’s numerous artistic activities (her interests extend to dance as well as the plastic and musical arts) include her high accomplishments as a painter. She has repeatedly asserted that, as an artist, she thinks of herself primarily as a painter and secondarily as a musician.³³ That she is highly accomplished as a painter has been made amply clear on many of her album covers, including the artwork on *Song to a Seagull*,³⁴ *Court and Spark*,³⁵ *Night Ride Home*,³⁶ *Turbulent Indigo*,³⁷ and others. In “A Case of You” she affirms her identity as a plastic artist. The Romantics, too, often exhibit genius in several artistic areas of endeavor, both as fictional characters and as flesh-and-blood creative artists. Perhaps the earliest German Romantic literary work (1796) came in the form of a collection of fictitious “essays” (perhaps more correctly panegyrics for the paintings of past masters, Raphael and Albrecht Dürer), entitled *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* (1796; “Heartfelt Outpourings of an Art-Loving Friar”), which championed painting as the highest form of Romantic art. Ludwig Tieck’s early Romantic novel, *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* (*Franz Sternbald’s Journeyman Years*, 2 vols., 1798) firmly established the German *Künstlerroman* (artist novel) among the early Romantics as a form dealing with the education of a painter to true artistry. A decade later, music would vie with painting for status as the primary Romantic *Kunstform*, most emphatically in the essays and works of E.T.A. Hoffmann,³⁸ who was a musical

composer and performer, and also a sketch artist and caricaturist of some talent, all in addition to his career as jurist and renown for his most memorable artistic endeavors, as perhaps the finest storyteller among the German Romantics. Such a multiplicity of artistic talents is certainly not the provenance solely of Romantics, but Romanticism's programmatic elevation of various artistic *genres* and their practitioners and the intentional incorporation of diverse aesthetic categories by other literary types are essential to their agenda, as Friedrich Schlegel's "116th Athenäums-Fragment" declares: "[die romantische Poesie] umfasst alles, was nur poetisch ist, vom größten wieder mehrere Systeme in sich enthaltenden Systeme der Kunst bis zu dem Seufzer, dem Kuss, den das dichtende Kind aushaucht in kunstlosen Gesang" ("[Romantic literature] includes all that is poetic, from the greatest systems of art that contain systems of art within themselves, to the sigh and kiss that the poeticizing child breathes forth in artless song").³⁹ The ideal Romantic aesthetic situation produces art within art, in which the art work becomes a commentary about other works, not only in describing other works (as in *ekphrasis*) but also as the artist claiming an identity in another realm of art, as Mitchell does in "A Case of You."

"Blue": Romantic Seascape and a Life of Longing

The German novelist and philosopher known as "Novalis" (the pen name of Friedrich von Hardenberg) introduced the "*Blaue Blume*" (Blue Flower) of Romanticism in his incomplete novel, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (*Henry von Ofterdingen*, 1800). The first chapter of the novel describes young Heinrich's dream one night: as the boy is bathing in a gentle spring within an underground grotto, he finds himself at the edge of the water, where he spots a beautiful, pale blue flower. The petals of the blossom spread apart, revealing the image of a young girl, whom he suddenly intuitively feels to be his future beloved. He soon awakens, but the vision has kindled an intimation of deepest longing in his heart that carries on into his waking hours and so catalyzes the rest of the novel's plot as it sends him on an extended journey toward his ancestral home in Augsburg and, filled with Romantic yearning from the dream of the "*Blaue Blume*," on the quest to find his love.⁴⁰

While the tonal palette of German Romantic authors and painters is extremely varied, describing and rendering objects, landscapes, and even ideas in vivid colors as well as in dark and obscure images, one of the most significant colors of the Romantic movement is the blue of Novalis's "*die Blaue Blume*." Blue is the color of the sky and the sea, two of Romanticism's favorite, visually inspiring spaces. In the German language, a "*Fahrt ins Blaue*" is the equivalent of a journey "into the wild blue yonder," a trip that has no specific goal, where the reason for the trip is less important than the trip itself.⁴¹ Motivating the travel are

longing and melancholy, the sources of which are often not specific, or which are completely unknown and merely intuited.⁴² The concept that the act of journeying is more significant than achieving the destination permeates German Romantic literature, from Ludwig Tieck through E.T.A. Hoffmann, Joseph von Eichendorff, and even to the very end of Romanticism in the *Reisebilder* (“travel narratives”) and lyric poetry of Heinrich Heine.⁴³ Thus, experience through travel and the color blue, taken together, are significant ingredients in German Romantic literature and painting.

Mitchell’s album *Blue* was largely born of her own travels, images of which permeate nearly every song on the album. Mitchell wrote several of the songs during and directly after a trip she had just taken, spending some five weeks in Matala on the island of Crete as well as a short time in a village in Spain and in Paris. There is a palpable restlessness about the songs, a recurring sense of unfulfilled longing, which particularly the music and the performances in several instances underscore. In the previously discussed “The Last Time I Saw Richard,” the impatience felt by the two former lovers is accentuated by the repeated delays in resolution of chord progressions, particularly of suspended chords, by the long, breathless lyrical lines, and by the barmaid’s interruption, urging the couple to finish their drinks and leave because the bar is closing. In “River” Mitchell paints a Christmas card image of the holiday season and even samples modified lines from “Jingle Bells” at the beginning and the very end of the song,⁴⁴ but she surprisingly destroys the mood created by the Christmas music with her wish to escape it all by skating away on a frozen river. At the very end of the vocal performance (and just prior to sounding the altered “Jingle Bells” chords on the piano) Mitchell’s voice turns gloomy and leaden for the final “I wish I had a river I could skate away on,”⁴⁵ which prepares the listener for the musical surprise that follows. In the last few bars, she returns to a transformed “Jingle Bells” progression, but the scene turns bleaker, even uncanny, when the familiar major chords of the common Christmas carol are delivered in syncopated rhythm, carried through a minor series of modified chords to end on an unresolved Dm7—clearly, she is very impatient to get far away from the happy people enjoying the holiday, since the contrast of their joy with her sorrow, articulated unmistakably in the minor seventh, is torturous for her. In at least one song on *Blue*, “This Flight Tonight,” even when she is traveling she feels unnerved and wishes she were elsewhere, doing something, anything else: her guitar delivers chords that dart from one variation of a G chord to the next (including G, G11, Gm7, G5, Gmaj7, etc.) as it is searching the acoustic environment for a place to settle but can find none, while her worried voice soars above all else in the chorus, lamenting having departed from her lover and regretting ever having “got on this flight tonight.”⁴⁶

In the song “Blue,” the travel is to sea, where Mitchell claims to have been before, while she paints a metaphorical marine landscape as background to possibly the finest work on the album. While the album brings the listener on an intensely emotional journey through personal disappointments of a time of great public discontent (the expansion of the Vietnam conflict as well as the realization that the ideals of the “Age of Aquarius” were unachievable), the song “Blue” deals with some of the most difficult emotional adversity and ruinous paraphernalia of life at the end of the 1960s. This includes the tattoo, or more specifically, the process of tattooing, which, by penetrating the skin and filling up the space (the emptiness of contemporary life?) there, points directly at the drug culture that would provide the images of alcohol, drug abuse, and marijuana later in the song. Furthermore, the tattoo is a tradition of those who spend time at sea: sailors, pirates, merchant mariners, and others. For them, the image of a crown or an anchor, emblazoned on their skin, are symbols that indicate that the sea is their life; not an easy one, and not for everyone, but one that demands commitment and know-how. For Mitchell, her imperative, directed at the “you” (whom she has named “Blue”) of the song to “crown and anchor me/or let me sail away,”⁴⁷ expands the metaphor from the marine environment to include the ecology of relationship and asks “Blue” to make up his mind, to accept her in this relationship or to set her free. The crown and anchor tattoos in this context imply the richness and the permanence of what one would hope for in an authentic, loving relationship, but letting her sail away—ending the relationship and saying goodbye—is also possible. The condition of being “in-between” is clearly torturous. It is important to note that this and other metaphors of “Blue” operate on several layers and present a personal dilemma (the unclarity of the artist’s path through life, love, addiction, etc.) in a musical and verbal structure that echoes one of the main aesthetic principles of Romanticism: art becoming the aestheticization of life itself.⁴⁸

Another of the most significant metaphors of the song, as well as the title of the album and the image on its cover, is the color “blue.” The album cover’s photograph, shot by Tim Considine while Mitchell was performing at a concert (Monk 11), shows her face “possibly in ecstasy, possibly in sorrow, probably in both, and she is sinking into the color blue.”⁴⁹ Again, the prologue to the medieval epic *Tristan und Isolde* comes to mind, wherein love consists of both bliss and agony; here, the ambivalence of the image accurately renders the uncertainty apparent everywhere in the album, where the artist seems to be perched on a razor’s edge between the two poles, and where each emotion with its raw intensity can flip at any moment to its opposite. The color blue represents a space between extremes, for example, of the sea and the land, of commitment and abandonment, or of joy and sorrow; blue is the color of

the ambient light that accompanies the prototypical Romantic condition of in-betweenness, becoming, and change, of longing without hope of satisfaction. In the song "Blue," the artist occupies such a liminal state, as some of the lines suggest either/or choices: between acceptance and commitment or breaking up, between knowing what will do harm to oneself but being curious about it anyhow, and ultimately between the emptiness inside and the problematic, short-term easing of pain through drug use.⁵⁰

A third Romantic metaphor is the seashell elucidated in the final verse. In the human psyche, the seashell invokes its origins like few other objects: it operates as a mnemonic device that jolts one's memory, both visually and tactilely, to thoughts of the seashore. Conch shells particularly generate such associations, since they possess an added feature to those of the more common, flat seashells: they also enclose an empty space. However, it is a popular folk custom to hold such a hollow shell up to one's ear; then one supposedly can hear what folk wisdom asserts is the sound of the ocean. Of course, science can explain the phenomenon as the echoes of the listener's own blood pumping through the arteries in the neck, which the shell, held against the ear, picks up and amplifies in its hollow spaces, then returns to the ear of the listener, who then supposedly believes she or he has heard the breaking of the waves at the beach where the conch shell was found. But for an imaginative person, it is perhaps more "Romantic" to identify the sound with the song of the sea.

In "Blue," Mitchell appropriates the seashell's "music": she claims that the song is her gift to Blue, labeling it as an ambiguous sighing that may express longing or impatience, or as a musical sedative, an image recalling the seashore's fogginess that dampens sound and the soporific genre of song (the lullaby) that tranquilizes the listener to ease her or his pain and perhaps finally to put the listener to sleep. Again, the metaphor supports several layers of meaning. While the tattoo of the first verse signifies permanence, a kind of branding, the gift given in exchange in the final verse, the shell's music is both permanent (in the sense that the lullaby is constantly available, merely by lifting the shell to one's ear) and fleeting (since a sigh is but a single breath, and since the acoustic effects of the shell disappear as soon as one lowers it from one's ear). In one sense it is precious since it represents the gift of a lover who is also a musician; on the other hand, it is common, an object merely found at the seashore (and not won through arduous effort). Finally, it offers an object from nature, a reminder of the healing that is possible in the "natural world" for one who perhaps has been worn down by the object-traps of the "civilized world."⁵¹ Mitchell is keenly aware of the Rousseauian mandate, expressed in some of her best-known works (e.g., "pave paradise, put up a parking lot," or "we've got to get ourselves back to the garden").⁵²

Perhaps the greatest psychological danger threatening the Romantic personality is unfulfilled longing. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774; *The Sorrows of Young Werther*) fictionalized the depression and despair that Romantic artists and philosophers doubtlessly felt later. The casualty list of late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century artists who could not endure is tragically long, and it includes the names of some of the finest contemporary Romantic artists. Heinrich von Kleist and Karoline von Günderode committed suicide, as Werther had done; a number of other German, British, and American Romantic and post-Romantic artists, authors, and philosophers died at an extremely young age (Wackenroder, Novalis, Büchner, P.B. Shelley, Byron), suffered from debilitating neuroses (Lenz, Hölderlin, Schumann), drank alcohol in excess (E.T.A. Hoffmann, Poe), or composed works with a strongly nihilistic message (Klingemann). Mitchell may seem to be on a dangerous path toward oblivion by the end of "Blue." However, as Whitesell points out, her final piano progression offers a ray of hope by ending in a major mode: "as the piano postlude winds down. . . it comes to rest on a *major* tonic sonority—yet another unexpected, extraneous flight of fancy, a symbol of hope not quite deferred."⁵³ Despite the deep and almost relentless depression implicit in most of the songs on *Blue*, at this crucial moment there is still a message of hope built into the music. Mitchell will not give up nor give herself over to despair. For her it is essential that the artist resist these tendencies—she can endure. While "Blue" may be a "devastating love song,"⁵⁴ it offers at least a final spark, a glimmer of light to illuminate her way out of the depressing and cynical times and toward personal redemption in contrast to her minor tones at the end of "River," described above.

Conclusion: Joni Mitchell and Romanticism, Abiding and Enduring

In a previous, similar collection, the editor, James Rovira, explains that "all essays [in that collection] assume that Romanticism continues into the present as an essential feature of modern culture and takes on a specific, musical transformation in the period following World War II" (xiv).⁵⁵ From Mitchell's interest in environmental issues, through her use of borders and space, her appeal to mythic and medieval topoi, her incorporation of folk culture and instruments in her songs, and her focus on various Romantic themes to her use of alternative, exotic, and experimental forms and structures (including jazz, folk, rock, and others), she evinces many aspects of Romantic art, language, and life in most of her works and throughout her career.

However, *Blue* holds a unique place in her many nods to Romanticism, primarily because the album and its songs arise from a period of

more turmoil and upheaval than perhaps any other in her life and thus contain more raw emotional content than the vast majority of her other eighteen albums. Yet, her stark emotions and vulnerability become the material of high art since each song is contained within a carefully crafted poetic and musical form, and each is given a nuanced performance on the album. Despite the affective intensity expressed in *Blue*, there is no sense of maudlin sentimentality, except where it is called out and criticized as such (e.g., in the aforementioned self-critical passages in “The Last Time I Saw Richard”). However, where sadness and sorrow are deep and cutting, or where joy occasionally bubbles to the surface of a song, such emotions are given the dignity of serious aesthetic expression, recalling what Friedrich Schlegel wrote in his definition of Romanticism, that Romantic art’s duty is to “make life and society poetic” (37).

Mitchell thinks of herself primarily as a painter, and the brush with which she paints this album brings blue paint into the picture. That “blue” is the color of German Romanticism’s most identifiable characteristic, “*die Blaue Blume*,” is vitally important as context for the ten songs of *Blue*, and dominates the symbolic color palette. It is the principal color in five of the songs: in “All I Want” she and her lover hurt each other and “blue” describes their sorrow; in “My Old Man,” a “blue” mood characterizes her loneliness when he’s gone; when she’s not in “California,” the news from her distant home gives her “the blues”; in “A Case of You,” the artist as painter draws a map of Canada with two superimposed sketches of her lover’s face, all accomplished by the light of a television screen that provides a blue ambiance. The album’s title song goes so far as to personify the color—not as an apostrophe, but rather as a flesh-and-blood lover who seems to be sinking through the hell of contemporary culture, and the ambient light of his downfall is decidedly blue. Blue is the illuminating medium through which each song conveys its visual images. There are no rose-colored glasses here: they are definitely a shade of blue.

Thus, the “blue” leitmotif is ubiquitous on the album, both acoustically in the songs and graphically on the cover. It remains the clearest, most visual, and most defining characteristic of this work of art, and links it especially to the “*Blaue Blume*” of the German Romantics, thereby setting up a paradigm of musical/lyric and aesthetic values with roots that have endured well over two hundred years.

Notes

- 1 It is not possible to categorize Mitchell’s music purely as “rock” or, for that matter, as any other strictly defined musical genre. Her earliest works, as well as her later compositions, contain elements of folk, rock, blues, classical, and jazz music as well as other forms, and thus I maintain that one may properly speak of affinities, tendencies, and trends in describing her music rather than of generic absolutes.

- 2 “Turning the Tables: The 150 Greatest Albums Made by Women,” <https://www.npr.org/2017/07/20/538307314/turning-the-tables-150-greatest-albums-made-by-women-page-15> (accessed 24 June 2019).
- 3 See Katherine Monk, *Joni: The Creative Odyssey of Joni Mitchell* (Vancouver and Berkeley, CA: Greystone, 2012), 129; John Corbett, *Pick Up the Pieces: Excursions in Seventies Music* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 59–60.
- 4 Significant critical works that have attempted to establish the connections between rock music and Romanticism include Robert Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgarity: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism* (New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 1987); Perry Meisel, *The Cowboy and the Dandy: Crossing Over from Romanticism to Rock and Roll* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1999); and the predecessors of this collection, *Rock and Romanticism: Blake, Wordsworth, and Rock from Dylan to U2*, ed. and intro. by James Rovira (Lanham, Boulder, et al.: Lexington Books, 2018), and *Rock and Romanticism: Post-Punk, Goth, and Metal as Dark Romanticisms*, ed. and intro. by James Rovira (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
- 5 See, for example, the scathing and extreme review of the late 1975 album, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, by Perry Meisel for *Village Voice*, who, in criticizing Mitchell’s earlier works as well, states,

The question of literary prototypes also raises the question of Mitchell’s relation to real Romanticism [!]. The High Romantics themselves were by no means the pantheists our high schools like to teach, nor were they the source of Mitchell’s naive assumptions about the status of nature. Shelley, for example, begins his famous poem in awe of Mont Blanc, and ends by asserting that he has imagined it. Not only is there not [a] way back to the garden that Mitchell’s “Woodstock” once demanded—nature itself may not even exist. There is no state of innocence down “underneath,” where she expects it to be.

<http://jonimitchell.com/library/view.cfm?id=412> (consulted 24 June 2019).

- 6 A case in point: before Mitchell revealed that the song “Little Green” concerned her baby whom she had given up for adoption, some critics dismissed it as too obscure to take seriously, but since she publicly established the song’s connection to the biographical incident, “Little Green” has received high acclamation. See David Yaffe, *Reckless Daughter: A Portrait of Joni Mitchell* (New York: Sarah Crichton, 2017), 40–41.
- 7 For example, with respect to literary art, during the last decades of the nineteenth century the extreme, realism-oriented, “photographic” duplication of nature in such artistic movements as “Naturalism” (represented by authors such as Emile Zola in France or Gerhard Hauptmann in Germany), which was based on new scientific discoveries by Charles Darwin or Gregor Mendel, grew alongside imagination-driven, contemporaneous artistic movements such as Symbolism in France or Neo-Romanticism in Germany, epitomized by such authors as Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Stefan George, and the young Rainer Maria Rilke. See Ernst Grabovszk, “Literary Movements of the 1890s: Symbolism, Impressionism, and *fin-de-siècle* Austria,” *German Literature of the Nineteenth Century, 1832–1899*, ed. Clayton Koelb and Eric Downing, Camden House History of German Literature 9 (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), 139–154.
- 8 See Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press,

- 2002), 40–45, 91–93, and 166–176; Richards weaves the cultural, political, philosophical, and literary aspects of the early Romantics together with their personal histories and illustrates how such talented women as Caroline Schlegel Schelling and Dorothea Veit Schlegel participated in the intellectual and social lives at that time. Indeed, the parallels between their experiences as described by Richards and those Yaffe recounts of Joni Mitchell at the time she was composing and recording *Blue* are remarkable.
- 9 Yaffe, *Reckless Daughter*, 143.
 - 10 See Joni Mitchell, *Joni Mitchell: Complete So Far* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Music, 2014), 129–133.
 - 11 Schlegel developed a definition, of sorts, for Romantic literature in the 116th “Athenäums-Fragment,” published in 1799 in the aesthetic journal *Athenäum*: “Die romantische Poesie ist eine progressive Universal-Poesie” (“Romantic literature is a progressive and universal literature”), thus emphasizing its aesthetic tendencies for expansion and resistance to closure and completion; see Friedrich Schlegel, “116th *Athenäums-Fragment*,” *Friedrich Schlegel, Kritische Schriften*, ed. Wolfdietrich Rasch (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1958), 37.
 - 12 Such oxymora describing love provide another Romantic rhetorical device; perhaps the most famous of these is Karoline von Günderode’s take on love, consisting of nothing but a series of antithetical statements; see “Liebe,” <http://www.wortblume.de/dichterrinnen/liebegue.htm> (consulted 17 June 2019).
 - 13 This concept is fully developed by Schiller in the time just prior to the blossoming of the Romantic movement in Germany, see Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Keith Tribe, intro. Alexander Schmidt (New York, London, etc.: Penguin, 2016).
 - 14 “Nathanael blickt in Claras Augen; aber es ist der Tod, der mit Claras Augen ihn freundlich anschaut” (E.T.A. Hoffmann, “Der Sandmann,” 11–49 in E. T. A. Hoffmann *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 3, *Nachtstücke, Klein Zaches, Prinzessin Brambilla: Werke 1816–1820*, ed. Hartmut Steinecke with collab. of Gerhard Allroggen (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985 [2009]); my translation.
 - 15 “Nur die Augen schienen ihm gar seltsam starr und tot. Doch wie er immer schärfer und schärfer durch das Glas hinschaute, war es, als gingen in Olimpia’s Augen feuchte Mondesstrahlen auf.” Hoffmann, “Der Sandmann,” 36; my translation.
 - 16 “Nach mehreren Jahren will man in einer entfernten Gegend Clara gesehen haben, wie sie mit einem freundlichen Mann, Hand in Hand vor der Türe eines schönen Landhauses saß und vor ihr zwei muntre Knaben spielten. Es wäre daraus zu schließen, daß Clara das ruhige häusliche Glück noch fand, das ihrem heitern lebenslustigen Sinn zusagte und das ihr der im Innern zerrissene Nathanael niemals hätte gewähren können.” Hoffmann, “Der Sandmann,” 49; my translation.
 - 17 Joni Mitchell, “The Last Time I Saw Richard,” on *Blue*, Reprise MS 2038, 44128 (1971) 33 1/3 rpm.
 - 18 In Mitchell’s performance of this song on her album *Miles of Aisles*, Asylum AB 202 (1974) 33 1/3 rpm, recorded live with Tom Scott and the L.A. Express in the Universal Amphitheatre in August 1974, she underscores her ironic treatment of this line; there, she interrupts the flow of the performance with a single, loudly voiced root note on the piano, and mundanely delivers the line, spoken rigidly, in a voice modulated to seem bossy and impatient.

- 19 The number of ecocritical studies of German *Goethezeit* and Romantic literature is enormous and interest in them shows no sign of diminishing; some examples from recent years include the essays in the special environmental section, edited by Luke Fischer and Dalia Nassar, of the *Goethe Yearbook* 22.1 (2015); Heather I. Sullivan, "Nature in a Box: Ecocriticism, Goethe's Ironic Werther, and Unbalanced Nature," *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* 2.2 (2011): 228–244; Seth Peabody, "Goethe and (Um)Weltliteratur: Environment and Power in Goethe's Literary Worlds," *Seminar* 54.2 (May 2018): 215–230; the volume edited by Gabriele Dürbeck, Urte Stobbe, Hubert Zapf, and Evi Zemanek, *Ecological Thought in German Literature and Culture*, Ecocritical Theory and Practice (Lanham, MD, Boulder, New York, etc.: Lexington Books, 2017); Catrin Gersdorf and Juliane Braun, ed., *America after Nature: Democracy, Culture, Environment* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016; and Ronald D. Morrison, "Wordsworth's 'Michael,' the Georgic, and Blackberry Smoke," 127–139 in *Rock and Romanticism: Blake, Wordsworth, and Rock from Dylan to U2*, ed. James Rovira, For the Record: Lexicon Studies in Rock and Popular Music (Lanham, MD, Boulder, New York, etc.: Lexington Books, 2018); aside from Mitchell's appearance at the Amchitka concert to launch Greenpeace in 1970, her credentials as an environmental activist/artist include a number of her earlier songs, such as "Song to a Seagull," "Cactus Tree," "Big Yellow Taxi," "Woodstock" (all written before most of the songs on *Blue*), a vast number of songs from the fifteen studio albums she has produced since 1971, as well as public appearances in support of environmental initiatives and organizations of various kinds.
- 20 Yaffe, *Reckless Daughter*, 148.
- 21 See the website for Appalachian History at <http://www.appalachianhistory.net/2007/01/americas-oldest-folk-instrument.html> (accessed 17 June 2019); Mercer refers to the dulcimer as Mitchell's "standout hippie prop" during her trip to Crete around the time *Blue's* songs were being written:

A few months earlier, she had commissioned a mountain dulcimer from a local Los Angeles artisan, Joellen Lapidus, and she took her new instrument on the road. The dulcimer's soft but bright drone served Mitchell well in the nightly cave music circles, where she held it across her lap, strumming melodies with a flat pick and sliding depressions of the strings to create her own accompaniment while she sang.

(20)

- 22 See Michelle Mercer, *Will You Take Me As I Am: Joni Mitchell's Blue Period* (Milwaukee: Backbeat Books/Hal Leonard, 2012), 23.
- 23 Fabian Lampart, "The Turn to History and the Volk: Brentano, Arnim, and the Grimm Brothers," 171–189 in *The Literature of German Romanticism*, ed. Dennis F. Mahoney. Camden House History of German Literature 8 (Rochester, NY and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2004); it was indeed a bizarre perversion of the German Romantic interest in the Volk that devolved into the pseudo-mythological abomination of Teutonic racial superiority that eventually led to the obscenity of twentieth-century Nazism; still the most helpful investigations of this history remain two volumes by George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), and *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: H. Fertig, 1975).

- 24 Joni Mitchell, "A Case of You," on *Blue*, Reprise MS 2038, 44128 (1971) 33 1/3 rpm.
- 25 Yaffe notes that "her open-tuned dulcimer bangs out percussive, rough-and-tumble chords while James Taylor's standard-tuning acoustic guitar tries to bring resolution but is drowned out" (147).
- 26 Although the critical literature on literary works concerning love in medieval times is vast, two studies are especially helpful for finding one's way through it, especially James Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), and Albrecht Classen, ed., *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 347 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008).
- 27 See my essay, "'Good Lovin': The Language of Erotic Desire and Fulfillment in Gottfried's *Tristan*," *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: New Approaches to a Fundamental Cultural-Historical and Literary-Anthropological Theme*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 257–278.
- 28 Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan: With the Tristan of Thomas*, trans. and intro. A. T. Hatto (London, New York, et al.: Penguin, 1960), 44.
- 29 See, for example, Yaffe, *Reckless Daughter*, 147–148.
- 30 The passage in *Julius Caesar* stems from Caesar himself and is spoken not with reference to love, but rather as an egotistical, self-congratulatory statement of the emperor's immovability when it comes to firm decision-making:

"I am constant as the northern star,
Of whose true-fix'd and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament."

(III, i, 60–62)

- 31 Rainer Maria Rilke, in his "Liebes-Lied," presents one of the most personal, heartfelt, and emotional statements of love, in which the reader is certain of the relationship between the lyric "I" and the receptive "you" (Rilke, *Neue Gedichte* [Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1907], 3; all translations are my own)
- 32 Thus, when Rilke asks (questioning rhetorically in the negative), "How can I ever hold my soul so that / it doesn't touch yours?" ("Wie soll ich meine Seele halten, daß / sie nicht an deine rührt?"), we cannot imagine that the relationship between the poet and his beloved is anything but intimate, and as much as the "you" voice in "A Case of You" seems to depersonalize Rilke's poetic lines, Mitchell rescues them for the emotionally engaged lyric "I" of the song and returns to the image its dignity as a high poetic trope.
- 33 Mercer, *Will You Take Me As I Am*, 71.
- 34 Joni Mitchell, *Song to a Seagull*, Reprise RS 6293 (1968), 33 1/3 rpm.
- 35 Joni Mitchell, *Court and Spark*, Asylum 1001-2 (1974), 33 1/3 rpm.
- 36 Joni Mitchell, *Night Ride Home*, Geffen Records GEFD 24388 (1991), compact disc.
- 37 Joni Mitchell, *Turbulent Indigo*, Reprise 9 45768-2 (1994), compact disc.
- 38 For Hoffmann's perspective on music as the most Romantic of the arts, see Kristina Muxfeldt, "The Romantic Preoccupation with Musical Meaning," 251–271 in *The Literature of German Romanticism* (q.v.), here 254.
- 39 See Friedrich Schlegel, "116th *Athenäums*-Fragment," 38.
- 40 See Novalis, *Henry von Ofterdingen*, trans. Palmer Hilty (Prospect Hgts, IL: Waveland, 1990 [1964]), 15–17.

- 41 The *Duden Rechtschreibung-Wörterbuch* online (<https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/blau#bedeutungen>) defines “ins Blaue” as: “umgangssprachlich: ohne Zweck und festes Ziel, ins Ungewisse hinein: ins Blaue fahren; zu: Blau als Farbe der unbestimmten Ferne” (“colloquial: without purpose and definite goal, into the unknown: *ins Blaue fahren*; derivation: blue, as the color of undetermined distance” [accessed 24 June 2019], my translation).
- 42 For example, in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s essay on Beethoven’s instrumental music, which for Hoffmann is the most sublime Romantic art form, he praises the composer whose musical treatment of fear, awe, horror, and suffering “erweckt eben jene unendliche Sehnsucht, welche das Wesen der Romantik ist” (“awakens just that infinite longing which is the essence of Romanticism” [Hoffmann, quoted in Muxfeldt, 254]).
- 43 Many of the German Romantic prose works, as well as much of the lyric poetry, are informed by travel; Tieck’s Franz Sternbald is a journeyman painter; Hoffmann’s novels are built upon characters (the Capuchin monk Medardus and the *Kapellmeister* Johannes Kreisler) for whom travel is essential; Eichendorff’s unwitting *Taugenichts* (good-for-nothing) treks from his German village southward to Rome and returns home again; and Heine’s travel sketches are among the best-loved humorous essays from the period, especially his satirical *Reisebild* “Die Harzreise.”
- 44 Yaffe, *Reckless Daughter*, 137.
- 45 Joni Mitchell, “River,” on *Blue*, Reprise MS 2038, 44128 (1971) 33 1/3 rpm.
- 46 Joni Mitchell, “This Flight Tonight,” on *Blue*, Reprise MS 2038, 44128 (1971) 33 1/3 rpm.
- 47 Joni Mitchell, “Blue,” on *Blue*, Reprise MS 2038, 44128 (1971) 33 1/3 rpm.
- 48 The German Romantics were particularly interested in poeticizing life and thus elevating it so that all aspects of it could rise to the level of art. In his 116th Athenäums-Fragment, Schlegel states, “[Die Romantische Poesie] will und soll. . . die Poesie lebendig und gesellig und das Leben und die Gesellschaft poetisch machen” (“[Romantic literature] is intended to and should. . . make literature alive and sociable, and make life and society poetic”; my translation); see Friedrich Schlegel, “116th Athenäums-Fragment,” 37.
- 49 Yaffe, *Reckless Daughter*, 130.
- 50 In an earlier album (Joni Mitchell, *Song to a Seagull*, Reprise RS 6293 [1968], 33 1/3 rpm) Mitchell employed a similar metaphor for the feeling of hollowness/emptiness within, the image of the desert cactus plant that carries water in its hollow interior, in the song “Cactus Tree”: “And her heart is full and hollow / Like a cactus tree.”]
- 51 The musical meter for most of this song is 4/4. However, as Whitesell notes, “when the poetic lines shift from around seven syllables (‘Well there’s so many sinking’) to five syllables (‘Acid, booze and ass’), the meter shrinks to 3/4, grinding to a halt after a few bars before being able to resume” (162).
- 52 The former quote from Joni Mitchell, “Big Yellow Taxi,” the latter from her “Woodstock,” both on the album *Ladies of the Canyon*, Reprise RS 6376 (1970), 33 1/3 rpm; it is interesting to note that, while the former song is upbeat and somewhat tongue-in-cheek, “Woodstock,” as it is performed in the album (and in contrast to the “hit” version by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, on *Déjà Vu*, Atlantic SD 7200 [1970]. 33 1/3 rpm) is very dark and ominous, perhaps foreboding the dashed hopes and innocence of the “Sixties Generation.”
- 53 Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell* (Oxford, New York, et al.: Oxford University Press, 2008), 137.
- 54 Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, 135.
- 55 Rovira, ed., *Rock and Romanticism: Blake, Wordsworth, and Rock from Dylan to U2*, xiv.

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