

THE LONELY ROAD

Joni Mitchell, *Blue* and female subjectivity

By the late 1960s, folk singers Joan Baez, Buffy Sainte-Marie and Judy Collins had established solo careers, and in 1971 Carole King emerged as a performer on her highly successful album *Tapestry*. Its promotional single 'It's Too Late/I Feel the Earth Move' topped the charts, while 'You've Got a Friend' became a no. 1 hit for James Taylor, who also played on the album. It won four Grammy awards and remained in the charts for four years. Janis Ian ('Society's Child') and Carly Simon ('You're So Vain') were also enjoying success as solo artists, while Laura Nyro's 1969 album *New York Tendrberry* provided a brilliant example of jazz/rock fusions. It seemed, then, that the early 1970s was a propitious time for women to break into the solo market. Yet, as Joni Mitchell's album *Blue* reveals, being independent, creatively single minded and original continued to raise problems, not least those of grappling with a career while, at the same time, maintaining relationships.

Being a long, blond-haired guitar player was a positive asset during the latter years of the 1960s but it was her particular musicality and personal insights that made Mitchell significant in forging a new world of possibilities for women. Not least, she offered a model of female experience in coping with the realities of working in a male-dominated music industry. For many, however, it is her grasp of the idiom of the day, her playful references to astrology, magic, travel, of being on 'the lonely road', of confronting the problems of giving birth to a child and giving her up to adoption, of exploring relationships while pursuing her own creative pathway that give her a special relevance. These tensions are most prominent in the songs from her early albums, *Clouds* and *Blue*, recorded when Mitchell was evidently searching for her own identity. Indeed, *Blue*, more than any other album, offers a window into her subjective universe, marking the start of a recognition of the problems associated with the feminine mystique and, more especially, the effect when this realisation hit home. As Mary Routh observes,

This geographic memory is a hallmark of her imagery, and is firmly based in her desire to travel ... *Blue* is the description of a year or

two in her life, and she is telling us what she learned and what she experienced. She is the theme, and for the first time, she sets out to make her life her art.¹

In contrast to her earlier work, where she sings narrative songs about made-up people, *Blue* places her firmly at the centre of her story.

It was obvious from her first albums, *Songs to a Seagull*, *Clouds* and *Ladies of the Canyon* that Mitchell (born Roberta Joan Anderson, 7 November 1943) had an ability to draw on her personal experience and then translate this into a musical idiom. Her marriage to Chuck Mitchell is traced in 'I Had a King' from her debut album, and her subsequent affairs underpin the thematic content of her albums, in particular opening out the concept of freedom and the problems inherent in *not* becoming too involved with lovers. Of equal importance, she exemplifies the singer-songwriter who got there by her own efforts, and whose albums demonstrate an increasing level of artistic and technical control.

Joni Mitchell's musical career started in Calgary, where she trained as a commercial artist and sang traditional folk songs in local coffee bars. By 1964, after attending the Mariposa Folk Festival in Ontario, she started writing her own songs and performing in local clubs and coffee-houses in Toronto. In June 1965 she married Chuck Mitchell and moved to Detroit. The marriage lasted only two years and Mitchell then moved to New York, before settling in Laurel Canyon, outside Los Angeles, in 1968. At this point in time, she was already achieving success as a songwriter. Judy Collins recorded 'Both Sides Now' and 'Michael from the Mountains' for her album *Wildflowers* (1967), taking the former to no. 8 in the singles chart in 1968. Tom Rush recorded 'The Circle Game' and, in the UK Fairport Convention covered 'Eastern Rain'; Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young had a hit with 'Woodstock' in 1970 and shortly after it became a hit for Matthews Southern Comfort in both America and the UK. Stephen Stills had also played bass on Mitchell's debut album *Songs to a Seagull*, and since they were handled by the same management, she became part of the same social circle, moving out to California and acquiring a certain notoriety for her various romantic attachments. These included an affair with Graham Nash which is reflected in the songs 'Willy' (which describes his rejection of her) and 'Our House'. 'Other lovers are characterised by transience. They play on street corners, they are husbands, they are generally to be pitied. She chooses men who will not stop her from her prime purpose which is to explore the planet and life. 'Life is our cause,' she says on *Blue*. And that is the key to what she says about men.'²

Clouds (1967), her second album was essentially folk-based with little supporting instrumentation. Produced by Mitchell herself, it included her own version of 'Both Sides Now', and was her first record to reach the Top 40, winning a Grammy for Best Folk Performance. The song's central

metaphor of 'clouds' resonates with a youthful optimism tinged with reality. Focusing the 'ups' by a childlike evocation of pleasure:

Rows and flows of angel hair
And ice-cream castles in the air

and the 'downs' through a more cynical realism:

But now they only block the sun
They rain and snow on ev'ry one

the imagery of the first four lines is not dissimilar to the cotton-candy of Jimi Hendrix's 'Spanish Castle Magic'. But here the comparison with psychedelia ends. There is little sense of the hallucinogenic. Rather, the lyrics overall read like a thoughtful evaluation of relationships, a coming to terms with life rather than an escape from reality. The vocal delivery is distinctive and clear, with the highs and lows of the melody reflecting the imagery of the lyrics.

Verses two and three again focus in on the transitory, as the fairytale rapture of first love gives way to a realisation that things change and that feelings often need to be hidden. The realisation that experience does not necessarily bring a clarity of vision is opened out by the chorus. Here, Mitchell makes use of melodic contouring and word-painting to focus the imagery:

I've looked at clouds from both sides now... from
up and down etc

and reflective tied notes which are coloured by the shifting instrumental harmonies to effect a musical metaphor for the transitory nature of clouds, love and life itself.

I really don't know clouds
love
life
at all
at all
at all etc

Above all, the song comes across as a personal statement of self-doubt – 'I really don't know' – and, as such, has a sense of candour and honesty which resonates with the introspection of the late 1960s. Within the broader arena of rock the questioning of 'Who am I?', the solipsistic 'I', 'Me', had informed such songs as 'Nowhere Man', 'Fixing a Hole' (the Beatles), 'Be Yourself' (Graham Nash), 'Dare to be Different' (Donovan), 'I've Got a Name' (Jim Croce) and 'Who Am I?' (Country Joe and the Fish). With Mitchell, the quest for self-identity – its many struggles, frustrations, confusions and confidences – is expressed through a richness of imagery where optimism and pessimism are informed by personal reflection. This, in turn, is enhanced by a sensually rhythmic use of language. Rhyme is used extensively, both to emphasise romantic clichés – 'Moons and Junes', 'Dreams and Schemes', and to draw more complex emotions into association:

Tears and fears and feeling proud
To say 'I love you' right out loud.

The exploration of positive and negative subjectivities, the juxtaposition of the poetic with the prosaic, is compounded by the sense of personal reflection/resignation in the chorus. Mitchell again makes use of clichés ('win and lose', 'give and take') but any sense of weighing-up, of coming to a conclusion, is compromised by her continuing emphasis on illusion which, as she points out, is what people both refuse to acknowledge in their continuing espousal of the romantic discourse of love and which, paradoxically, is what they ultimately buy: 'I also knew how fickle people could be. I knew they were buying an illusion and I thought, "Maybe they should know a little bit more about who I am."' ³

'Both Sides Now' thus implies a truthfulness, a connection between the 'who I present and who I am' in its exploration of the personal in everyday life. The pacing of the song, the plateaux, the focus on change itself allied to the gentle ebb and flow of the supporting harmonies are far removed from

either the 'timelessness' of hallucinogenic songs of the period, or the thrusting urgency of contemporary rock. The vocal delivery, in particular, aligns the feminine 'who I am' with the transitive experiences of the lyrics. Mitchell's wide ranging melody (octave plus perfect fourth), the clarity of her top register, the resonant lows and the overall flexibility in intonation are the most obvious points of reference. More specifically, her vocal style provides a metaphor for the highs and lows, the personalised experience of love and life as narrated in the lyrics. This alignment between lyric content and a deeply personalised vocal delivery suggests a self-involvement which is, at one and the same time, extraordinary and – at least for some listeners – disturbing in its range of power and register. In particular, the lyric's constant emphasis on *I* involves 'motion, perception, reflection, separation/connection, materiality, process, relationality'⁴ and her aural impact is one of truthfulness to experience. It is about self-recognition, but she remains bombarded by contradictions which are picked up in her next solo album, *Blue*.

Blue was released in 1971 and sold over a million copies. It is an intriguing album, providing once again a personalised insight into relationships,⁵ this time through a sensitive use of colour imagery. In particular, the musical and literary associations of blue/blues/bluesness provides a colour wash for her compositional canvas, a spectrum which draws into association such images as the sea, Little Green's blue eyes, her tattoo, and the blue TV screen light in 'A Case of You'. The significance of colour is also evident in the accompaniment to the songs. 'My Old Man', 'Blue', 'River' and 'Richard' are brought into association through reflective piano accompaniments. The largely arpeggiated flow works like a musing counterpoint to the vocal line, providing a feeling of musical space which complements the introspection of the lyrics. In contrast, the guitar accompanied songs, 'All I Want', 'Little Green', 'Catey', 'California', 'This Flight Tonight' have analogies with the artist's sketch pad

Oh, I am a lonely painter
And I live in a box of paints

accessing the immediacy of personal thoughts through alternative tunings, complex extended chords, pedals and common notes that contribute to the effect of the connotations in the music.⁶

'All I Want', the first track on the album, begins quite simply by setting the scene 'I am on a lonely road and I am travelling, travelling, travelling.' Melodically, the phrase is narrow ranged, the iterative structure underpinning the anomie, the boredom, and the pressures of being on the road. The 'looking for something, what can it be?', then, provides a certain ironic twist. Mitchell knows what she wants ('applause, applause, life is our cause') – but the road is typically male territory – and the personal cost of pursuing

a creative career creates emotional pressures. In particular, there is a tension between freedom and dependency which comes across in the spontaneous outburst 'Oh, I hate you some ...' where the pitch rises on here, following the natural inflection of the voice, before the more reflective 'love ... you some'. Here 'love' is mused over, given time and coloured by a minor tonality which draws it into association with the 'travelling' of the first phrase to create an underlying bluesness, a realisation that the cost of dependency is Self, and the recognition that relationships only work when 'I forget about ... me'.

In a song which is concerned primarily with self-reflection and coming to terms with the 'all I want' (from life and relationships), it is unlikely that the omnipresent *I* can be so easily dismissed. After a momentary pause, the *me* triggers a stream-of-consciousness needs which are again tempered by a mood of instability. The 'I want to be strong' for example, is compromised by the Bb minor on 'strong' to create a feeling of self-doubt, an underlying insecurity. Travelling the lonely road takes strength, but as the song progresses Mitchell stakes out her needs – 'I want to laugh along, I want to belong to the living. Alive, alive, I want to get up and jive', etc. and while the contemplative 'I want to belong', 'I want to renew you again and again' suggests a certain *cri-de-coeur*, this is undercut by the challenging 'Do you want to dance with me ... do you want to take a chance ...' where, once again, internal rhyme draws thoughts and ideas into association.

Musically, the song works because Mitchell's careful use of harmonic colour and melodic contouring act as word-painting for her emotional outbursts. The reflective 'Do you see how you hurt me, baby' is underpinned by blunt, major tonalities. In contrast, the 'hurt you' is given time, both in the move to minims and the use of added colour in the Ab9 chord. The final phrase 'then we both get' draws pain into a shared experience by the avoidance of gendered coding (the defining major/minor third and its traditional associations with male/female) before an effective use of contemplative silence and the move to the climactic high on 'so'. The falling vocal contour on 'blue' then effects a musical metaphor of instability which is enhanced by the shifting harmonies in the guitar accompaniment, with the final Abm7 providing a pivotal bluesness before the lonely road of the final verse.

Do you see how you hurt me ba -
 - by so I hurt you too
 Then we both get so
 blue
 blue

It is clearly no coincidence that the final word of the song 'free' should be supported by the same restless harmonies as 'blue'. The first song of a concept album is instrumental in establishing thematic content and from the onset Mitchell prioritises her ambition, aware that the 'road' will be problematic, but equally certain that it provides 'the key to set me free'.

Whereas the acoustic guitar is analogous to the sketch-pad and implies movement, (6) Mitchell's songs which are piano-accompanied are rooted in a bluesness where freedom and personal flight no longer appear a viable option. 'My Old Man' provides an insight into the 'I want's of the opening song. No longer an enigmatic presence, he is constituted by action – a singer, a walker, a dancer. In contrast, Mitchell is homebound and her happiness is dependent upon his presence, and while there is a certain optimism in the 'we don't need no piece of paper from the city hall' (with the implication that the bonds of marriage are no longer relevant in a freewheeling post-1960s' culture), the musical coding implies *bravado*. Mitchell's characteristic use of the equivocal sus4 chord implies an underlying instability and her personal experience of blues. bluesness, is then opened out through the

tension between major/minor tonalities, a darkening chromaticism, and edgy vocal leaps:

But when he's gone me and them lone-
 some blues col - lide
 the bed's too big the
 fry - in' pans too wide

before the harmonic progression back to the tonic, A major. Even here, there is a sense of fragile insecurity, for although her lover returns ('then he comes home'), the displacement of accents, the vocal leaps and the E7sus on 'home' paint a feeling of wisfulness. This is equally implied in the fade out at the end of the song where the alternating major/minor tonalities resonate with the omnipresent bluesness of dependency.

The tensions inherent in dependency/freedom are developed further in the third song, 'Little Green', a lullaby to Mitchell's only child who was surrendered to adoption.

Choose her a name she will answer to
 Call her Green and the winners cannot fade her ...

It is interesting to contrast this mother-to-daughter song with 'Eli's Song', a father-to-son song by country artist Jack Williams and sung by John Denver. Traditionally, theories have been posited that feminine modes of self-expression are characterised by an intuitive, figurative, more 'felt' lexicon than masculine modes which may be more coldly rational and concrete.⁷ This is illustrated by the statement of fact in 'Eli's Song' ('Born in

the month of June') and Mitchell's allusion to the astrological 'Age of Aquarius' in 'Little Green' ('Born with the moon in cancer') which is rich in iconography, with the moon linking the child to the sexuality of the mother, fertility and birth, Maiden and Mother. The child is, by analogy, the young goddess, the new moon, surrounded by the vibrant colours of spring – 'Just a little green like the colour when the spring is born' – and the endless cycle of life itself – 'There'll be icicles and birthday clothes'.

While 'Little Green' is primarily a poetic and highly personalised song about Mitchell's relationship to her child, it equally provides a particular insight into the problems surrounding the single mother. As Mifflin writes: 'To be pregnant and unmarried in 1964 was like you killed somebody ... Joni allowed her daughter to be given up for adoption and then relocated to a one bedroom billet in Manhattan's Chelsea district.'⁸ As such, the underlying poignancy of 'stay, baby' ('My Old Man'), with its restless harmonic instability locks into the starkness of 'He went to California ... He sends you a letter and she's lost to you' to create an articulate musical expression of loss.

At the same time, the song constructs a mood of underlying resilience ('You're sad and you're sorry but you're not ashamed') which, in its avoidance of the personalised 'I' implies a certain emotional distancing. 'Little Green' is situated within a qualitative experience of time – conception, birth, beginnings, endings. She may wish her child 'a happy ending', but the song nevertheless closes with the reflective 'sometimes there'll be sorrow'. There is, then, no easy solution, rather a continuing engagement with the ups and downs of life, the tensions between stability and freedom – a theme which is also present in the next track 'Carey' where the iconography surrounding the moon (and its relationship to the feminine) is replaced by the star.

Mitchell's use of imagery is closely linked to her mapping of personal identity. Traditionally the star is aligned with hope and faith, often in the hour of crisis when darkness appears to immobilise the senses. At the same time, it can signify a struggle with life, a seeking of destiny and an attempt to become more independent. As such, it is not surprising that within the context of the album, the star is associated with her lover –

Starbright, starbright?
You've got the lovin' that I like alright
(This Flight Tonight)

with moments of crisis

Just before our love got lost you said
I am as constant as a northern star
(A Case of You)

or impending separation –

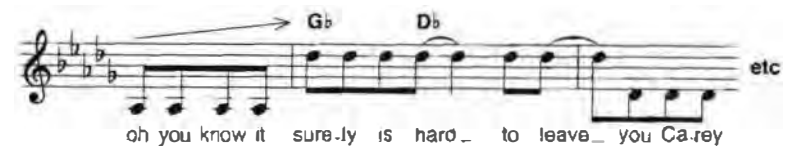
Let's not talk of fare-thee-wells now
The night is a starry dome
(Carey)

Traditionally, the star is also associated with the birth of a child and 'Little Green' and 'Carey' are brought into association not simply through an impending sense of separation and loss, but equally through the immediacy of the guitar accompaniments.⁹ While the gentle acoustic lullaby resonates with the folk tradition of self-expression in its fusion of the poetic with the starkly autobiographical, the funky guitar intro to 'Carey' brings the listener to the heart of the album. As Mary Routh observes:

Everything about this song shouts 'traveller' and the opening lines,
The wind is in from Africa
Last night I couldn't sleep

suggest a tiny village called Matella, that only has one road in and out of it. It is separated from the main road by dusty and arid hills. You do not get there by accident, you go there. And you are sitting on the beach, feeling relaxed and happy ... Here is a woman who has made it to this remote and perfect village by herself, can afford to wonder where to go next, and has somewhere to go home to when she feels ready. 'Maybe I'll go to Amsterdam, maybe I'll go to Rome, and rent me a grand piano and put some flowers around my room.' The names are totemic, guaranteeing that she will indeed get there. And when she does, she can afford to rent a grand piano?¹⁰

The transitory nature of the 'good time' are brought into association with Carey – 'the bright red devil who's keeping me in this tourist town'. Here, the implications of staying/leaving are again focused by Mitchell's characteristic swoop to her top register which, in context, triggers a distress signal.



This lack of stability is rooted in the conflict between 'Carey' and the fact that this is 'not my home'. Again, there is word-painting. The melody is musically centred on D \flat (the tonic, the home key) but the word 'home' sits uneasily on the chord of A \flat 7 (the dominant) to effect musically a lack of

resolution in the I-V cadence.¹¹ Carey, himself, is described as 'a mean old daddy', although it is apparent from the harmonic underpinning that Mitchell feels out of her depth

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G minor. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The melody for the lyrics 'but i like you' is written above the staff. The chords are labeled as Ab7 and Db. The second staff continues the melody for the lyrics 'fine'. The chords are labeled as Dbsus, Dbsus, and Db. The word 'fine' is written below the staff.

and, as the hip phrase of the 1970s 'out of sight' implies, while he has 'blown her mind' he is, nevertheless 'out of her league'.

Mitchell then plunges into the bluesness of the eponymous track 'Blue'. As the fifth song on the album, 'Blue' is pivotal, reflecting on what has gone before and informing what is yet to come. At one level, the song is a cynical commentary on the late 1960s:

Acid, booze, and ass
Needles, guns and grass
Lots of laughs, lots of laughs

– the 'everyone is saying that hell's the hippest way to go' resonating with the deaths of Joplin, Hendrix, the death of optimism. It is also a recognition of defeat, of loving someone but being defeated by circumstances. She is 'at sea' with her emotions, torn between staying and leaving ('crown and anchor me, or let me sail away') but there are no answers in this soliloquy to pain. Rather the song opens out the problems, the price that is paid by those who are/were 'on the road' and this sense of anomie, this bluesness, links the song with 'California' which picks up on the continuing war in Vietnam, the dream of peace, 'the bloody changes' juxtaposed with the 'pretty people' in Spain 'Reading Rollin' Stone, reading Vogue'.

The guitar accompaniment is again pivotal in authenticating the 'truthfulness' of the autobiographic, the pithy observations of a woman folk singer travelling through Europe, 'sitting in a park in Paris, France'. The guitar also enhances the feeling of immediacy for the stream-of-consciousness thoughts, 'stroll a lot of lands to see', the wandering hippy in a street full of strangers. Again, Mitchell makes use of colour to effect subtle mood inflections for her thumbnail sketches. 'I wouldn't wanna stay here. It's too old

and cold and settled in its ways here', for example, is accompanied by F#7 (II7) to raise the question 'Why major harmonies when, traditionally, minor harmonies would effect a feeling of bleakness?' The answer lies, most probably, in Mitchell's sense of the poetic and the way in which she uses music 'to create a precise expression of feeling'.¹² Thus, while the inclusion of a major third suggests stability, Mitchell undercuts this by the 7th to evoke both a sense of wish-fulfilment (the major third) and equivocation (the 7th). In contrast, the relationship between the I-V-I harmonies which accompany 'Ah, but California, California' are effective in providing a traditional feeling of warmth and stability. But once again, the realisation of 'coming home' (to California) is tempered by the II7 harmonies. She is not going home immediately (as the narrative of the verses show) nor giving up her right to be true to herself. However, she does get homesick and the final yearning repetitiveness of 'Will you take me as I am' with which the song ends suggests an ongoing vulnerability as it segues into 'This Flight Tonight' where the iconic imagery of the star (starbright) becomes a metaphor for the constancy of her love:

Can't numb you out
Can't drum you out of my mind

However, as the lyrics unfold, it is clear that Mitchell is returning to someone who is not supportive ('you look so critical') and her awareness of the situation, the 'blackness, blackness, dragging me down' is opened up by the realisation 'I shouldn't have got on this flight tonight.'

If the songs on *Blue* reflect a sense of time, then the next track 'River' suggests that running away is no real solution. Prefaced by a moody and resolutely minor 'Jingle Bells', the 'our of runeness' of the intro provides a musical metaphor for not belonging within the context of Christmas, a time when the awareness of being alone is particularly acute:

They're cutting down trees
They're putting up reindeer
And singing songs of joy and peace.

The mood of nostalgia, of looking back over the past, is focused by an all-pervading sense of absence, of snow, of money and of her lover. The bleakness of the narrative is underpinned by the repetitiveness of the vocal line

He tried hard — to help — me you know, he
put me at ease —

The first system of musical notation for 'The Lonely Road' consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (F major/D minor) and a 4/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with a half note 'He', a quarter note 'tried', a quarter note 'hard', a quarter rest, a quarter note 'to', a quarter note 'help', a quarter note 'me', a quarter note 'you', a quarter note 'know', a quarter note 'he', and a quarter rest. Chords F and C are indicated above the staff. The bottom staff continues the melody with a half note 'put', a quarter note 'me', a quarter note 'at', a quarter note 'ease', and a quarter rest. Chords F and C are also indicated above this staff.

which creates a musical alignment between the 'what he did for me' and the 'why' of loss. The introspection of the lyrics, the underlying pain, is realised partly in the formal tensions of the music itself. The narrative of loss is rooted in repetition, the need to escape by upward movement, chord colouring and a lack of resolution.

I would teach my feet — to fly —
Dm

The second system of musical notation continues the melody. The top staff has a half note 'I', a quarter note 'would', a quarter note 'teach', a quarter note 'my', a quarter note 'feet', a quarter rest, a quarter note 'to', and a quarter note 'fly'. Chords C, F, and Am are indicated above the staff. The bottom staff shows a Dm chord with a dotted line underneath, indicating a continuation of the melody.

The final chorus, 'I wish I had a river I could skate away on' and the reappearance of 'Jingle Bells', twisted harmonically as a musical metaphor for self-reproach ('I made my baby cry'), ends with a stark perfect fifth over D (D7 omitting the F#) to provide a final and reflective coding of emptiness. Even here, however, Mitchell does not talk of returning to her lover. Rather there is the implication of skating even further away.

The conflict between love and pain, belonging and freedom, the resultant emptiness that can accompany the 'lonely road' are clearly the unifying themes on the album and, with nostalgia constructed through the evocation of Christmas, 'A Case of You' provides contemplative insights into love and loss. Here, Mitchell muses over her obsessive love:

I could drink a case — of —
you — dar — ling — and I would
still — be on my feet Oh, I would still be on my
feet

The third system of musical notation continues the melody. The top staff has a half note 'I', a quarter note 'could', a quarter note 'drink', a quarter note 'a', a quarter note 'case', a quarter rest, and a quarter note 'of'. Chords C and G7 are indicated above the staff. The bottom staff continues the melody with a half note 'you', a quarter note 'dar', a quarter note 'ling', a quarter note 'and', a quarter note 'I', a quarter note 'would', a quarter note 'still', a quarter note 'be', a quarter note 'on', a quarter note 'my', a quarter note 'feet', a quarter note 'Oh', a quarter note 'I', a quarter note 'would', a quarter note 'still', a quarter note 'be', a quarter note 'on', a quarter note 'my', and a quarter note 'feet'. Chords G7, C, and G7 are indicated above the staff.

acknowledging her selfishness, her pig-headedness, but aware that if she were to 'go to him, stay with him', she should 'be prepared to bleed', to accept compromise. In 'Richard', the final, anti-climactic song of the album, the implications of compromise are given a specific focus.

For Richard, romanticism is a weakness. It belongs to the past, the dark cafés of youth. It feeds the anecdotes of the drunk and the boring. Mitchell, with the moon in her eyes, reminiscing about 'the last time I saw Richard ...' knows that she is not immune, but reassures herself with the thought that 'all good dreamers pass this way some day' and while the butterfly imagery of 'gorgeous wings' and flight suggest that the mood will pass, at that moment her loss is complete. Richard is no solution, rather he personifies the end of the late-1960s' dream. He has opted out, 'married a figure skater' rather than a travelling woman. She, in turn, is still sitting in a dark café, three years on, still alone, but still part of that dream. 'And that,' says my friend Mary Routh, 'is why she despises him.'

Blue, then, is like a cycle of songs that has no real beginning, no real end.

Rather the piano outro to 'Richard' with its somewhat desolate final chord returns the listener to the lonely road where the album began. What is evident, however, is the fact that behind the experience of the songs lies the reality of the choices Mitchell had to make if she were to achieve her ambitions. In that she was a pioneer,

actually enjoying the same rewards as men both financially and in terms of personal freedom. But unlike men, she has a female tradition behind her which sits on her shoulder and whispers, 'Capitulate.' If she is lonely, it is because she refuses to give in ... and ultimately it is the little devil in her ear that is the problem ... once other women learn from her and catch up she will not longer be the only woman with attitude.¹³

However, as Jim Miller observes, it took her nearly the course of her six albums 'to understand and accept her dependency upon men'.¹⁴ It wasn't until *Hejira* that she could say 'No regrets, coyore.'

Nearly three decades after the release of *Blue*, Mitchell remains a significant force in popular music, having influenced artists as diverse as Annie Lennox, Prince and Seal. Her legacy is to focus attention on the personal, to express freedom of choice, to admit mistakes, unhappy love affairs, involvements with weak men, rough men and to move on – 'no regrets, we just come from different sets of circumstances'.¹⁵ Her strength lies in her pragmatism. She was/is a realist who accepts change, a 1970s' woman who chose her lovers, accepted pain and bounced back. Her self-exploration anticipates the post-feminist emphasis of the 1990s, not least the importance for women to know, accept and explore personal feelings, to 'bridge the gap between mind and body, reason and emotion, thinking and feeling'.¹⁶ It is a personal experience that is communicated with wit and intelligence and has certainly proved an inspiration for me.

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It is always helpful to get constructive feedback from friends and fellow academics and I am especially grateful here to Mary Routh (School of Media, Music and Performance, University of Salford) and Dr John Richardson (South Bank University, London), author of *Singing Anthology: Philip Glass's Akhnaten*, Hanover and London: University Press of New England, for personal insights from which I quote freely.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 I would acknowledge the thoughts here of my friend and colleague Mary Routh whose feedback on my first draft provided many provocative and significant ideas that have been incorporated into this chapter. Thank you, Mary.

- 2 Again, I would thank Mary for her insight here
- 3 Interview with Joni Mitchell. Makeover, J. (1989) *Woodstock*, London: Sidgwick and Jackson, p. 23.
- 4 Rycinga, J., 'Lesbian Compositional Process: One Lover-Composer's Perspective', in Brett, P., Wood, E. and Thomas, G.C. (eds) (1994) *Queering The Pitch. The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, London: Routledge, p. 284. It is not suggested that Mitchell's compositions indicate a closet lesbian, rather that Rycinga's identification of motion, perception, reflection etc has a relevance to the compositional approach of the song. I would also refer here to Elizabeth Wood's article 'Sapphones' (also in *Queering the Pitch*) which provides an interesting discussion of the ways in which women's voices cross the thresholds of register in a way that challenges the established order. As my colleague John Richardson observes, vocal and, particularly, instrumental virtuosity is a transgressive element – particularly for women performers – and the extraordinary range and power of Mitchell's voice quite literally upsets some listeners.
- 5 John Richardson has also contributed some relevant points on Joni Mitchell's alternative tunings which he interprets as a possible search for a different woman's voice. As he points out,

alternative tunings also become alternative in a wider sense. It is true that people like Dave Van Ronk, David Crosby and Neil Young used similar tunings, but not with the same musical results. Mitchell herself cites Elizabeth Cotton, a black woman, as having influenced her guitar playing style, and not so much men who were working with alternative tunings at the time. Pat Merheny's frustration with Mitchell because of her use of alternative tunings (and her inability to categorise the chords) appears to lend support to the idea that these tunings are *truly* alternative and annoy people because of this.

John also notes that Suzanne Vega's unorthodox guitar style, although different to Mitchell's (Vega picks rather than strums) works in a similar way – as resisting the prevailing conditions. Thanks, John.

- 6 In folk music, most instruments are acoustic and portable. The important point here is that they can be carried around. As such there is an analogy with the artist's sketch pad in that they can access the immediacy of the moment through the equivalence of a thumbnail sketch.
- 7 Wilfred Mellers has suggested that women are successful with folk/pop because it is about 'instinct, as contrasted with the dominance of intellect and will'. This is debatable. Certainly Mitchell's songs evidence both an emotional content and a definable musical intellect. Mellers, W. (1986) *Angels of the Night. Popular Female Singers of our Time*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 141. The examples are provided by my ex-student, Grant Shalks. My interest in Tarot provides some insight into the associations of the moon and the feminine psyche.
- 8 Miffin, M., 'Barefoot and Pregnant', in *Keyboard*, p. 14, col. 3.
- 9 Mitchell's choice of guitar (as the accompaniment to a song) reflects her folk background. It also has strong associations with travel, the hippy lifestyle that was so significant to the late 1960s.
- 10 Again, I thank Mary here for her traveller's insights and the association of the riff with Stephen Stills' 'Marrakesh Express' which again highlights the exotic of travel.
- 11 Tonic to Dominant (I-V) cadences are associated with an interruption of expectations, a lack of resolution which is generally brought about by the reversal of

the V-I progression. Chord I is the harmonic 'home' of the diatonic scale and the V-I cadence implies finality. As such, Mitchell's use of the chord V on the word 'home' has an underlying irony in its musical implications of moving on.

- 12 As Lucy O'Brien observes, every line is carefully wrought. At times this makes her music curiously difficult to listen to – she doesn't opt for easy melody or satisfying conclusions. 'My music is not designed to grab instantly. It's designed to wear for a lifetime ...' Mitchell said in 1994. O'Brien, L. (1995) *She Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul*, London: Penguin Books, p. 178.
- 13 Mary Routh, *op. cit.*
- 14 Miller, J. (ed.) (1976) *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll*, New York: Rolling Stone Press, p. 314.
- 15 O'Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 178.
- 16 Tong, R. (1992) *Feminist Thought. A Comprehensive Introduction*, London: Routledge, p. 237.

DAUGHTERS OF CHAOS

Patti Smith, Siouxsie Sioux and the feminisation of rock

It is an extraordinary coincidence that punk, arguably one of the most chaotic, yet ordered sub-cultures to emerge within popular music, should coincide with the debates surrounding language in mediating socio-political relations. As Terry Eagleton wrote in 1983:

Meaning was not 'natural', a question of just looking or seeing, or something eternally settled: the way you interpreted your world was a function of the languages you had at your disposal, and there was evidently nothing immutable about these. Meaning was not something which all men and women everywhere intuitively shared, and then articulated in their various tongues and scripts; what meaning you were able to articulate depended on what script of speech you shared in the first place.¹

The emphasis on the text as mediating between language-users is significant, not least in asking 'why these particular groupings of statements at that time and not others'.² In particular the 'why' focuses a shift in emphasis from a preoccupation with the text to a new emphasis on social process, class, gender and ethnic divisions 'where the internal relations of "languages" articulate with social practices and historical structures'.³ Whereas structuralists had stressed the primacy of structure and system in language (concentrating on the way in which the structures of visual, verbal and auditory texts produce meaning through an analysis of sign functions) post-structuralists shifted the emphasis towards the ideological implications of form. Language was seen as an active, transitive force which 'shapes' and positions the subject (as speaker, writer, reader) while always itself remaining 'in process' capable of infinite adaptation.⁴

The tensions between structuralism and post-structuralism, of fixity over process, underpins the 1970s debates surrounding the sign of 'woman' herself. If masculine and feminine are defined on the basis of their difference from each other, then woman can only be constructed as opposite, as 'other'. If, however, feminism accepts the diversity of women's experience as process,