

ROMANTICISM TODAY: THE SINGER/SONGWRITER-PARADIGM

Lecture 5: 'Classic' Singer/Songwriters

- 1) Jackson Browne
- 2) Joni Mitchell
- 3) Leonhard Cohen

1) Jackson Browne

Jackson Browne, "Late for the Sky"

Late for the Sky (1974)

The words had all been spoken
And somehow the feeling still wasn't right
And still we continued on through the night
Tracing our steps from the beginning
Until they vanished into the air
Trying to understand how our lives had led us there

Looking hard into your eyes
There was nobody I'd ever known
Such an empty surprise to feel so alone

Now for me some words come easy
But I know that they don't mean that much
Compared with the things that are said when lovers touch
You never knew what I loved in you
I don't know what you loved in me
Maybe the picture of somebody you were hoping I might be

Awake again I can't pretend
And I know I'm alone
And close to the end of the feeling we've known

How long have I been sleeping
How long have I been drifting alone through the night
How long have I been dreaming I could make it right
If I closed my eyes and tried with all my might
To be the one you need

Awake again I can't pretend
And I know I'm alone
And close to the end of the feeling we've known

How long have I been sleeping
How long have I been drifting alone through the night
How long have I been running for that morning flight
Through the whispered promises and the changing light
Of the bed where we both lie
Late for the sky

1) Placing the Song

- Opening song on Jackson Browne's third album, frequently regarded to be his best and most sustained effort
- Also used on the soundtrack of the film *Taxi Driver* (1976, Martin Scorsese)

2) Voice/Lyrics and Subject Position

- Narrative (note past perfect > past tense movement in stanza 1) making sense of experience of failed love *and* writing a song about it
- The I is reluctant to let go of the we
- Individual voice, vulnerable but firm, not trained but competent

3) Style and Form

- Intro AAB AAB C guitar solo B C coda
- Understated but mellifluous arrangement in rock instrumentation (voc, p, electric g, b, org, dr, background vocals)
- Generically loose: not folk, not blues (but echoed in AAB), not jazz, echoes of art song

4) Reference

- Frequently performed live with Browne solo on the piano (e.g. Montreux 1982), with occasional solo spots for one other player
- One of his most famous songs

> introspection as a forte, but also rocking out on occasion:

Jackson Browne, "The Road and the Sky"

Late for the Sky (1974) / Live Recording Montreux (July 18, 1982)

When we come to place where the road and the sky collide
Throw me over the edge and let my spirit glide
They told me I was going to have to work for a living
But all I want to do is ride
I don't care where we're going from here
Honey, you decide

Well I spend my time at the bottom of a wishing well
And I can hear my dreams singing clear as a bell
I used to know where they ended and the world began
But now it's getting hard to tell
I could be just around the corner from heaven or a mile from hell

I'm just rolling away from yesterday
Behind a wheel of a stolen Chevrolet
I'm going to get a little higher
And see if I can hot-wire reality

Now can you see those dark clouds gathering up ahead?
They're going to wash this planet clean like the bible said
Now you can hold on steady and try to be ready
But everybody's gonna get wet
Don't think it won't happen just because it hasn't happened yet

I'm just rolling away from yesterday
Behind the wheel of a stolen Chevrolet
I'm going to get a little higher
And see if I can hot-wire reality

Jackson Browne, "For a Dancer"

Late for the Sky (1974)

Keep a fire burning in your eye
Pay attention to the open sky
You never know what will be coming down
I don't remember losing track of you
You were always dancing in and out of view
I must've thought you'd always be around
Always keeping things real by playing the clown
Now you're nowhere to be found

I don't know what happens when people die
Can't seem to grasp it as hard as I try
It's like a song I can hear playing right in my ear
That I can't sing I can't help listening
And I can't help feeling stupid standing 'round
Crying as they ease you down
Cause I know that you'd rather we were dancing
Dancing our sorrow away
(Right on dancing)
No matter what fate chooses to play
(There's nothing you can do about it anyway)

Just do the steps that you've been shown
By everyone you've ever known
Until the dance becomes your very own
No matter how close to yours another's steps have grown
In the end there is one dance you'll do alone

Keep a fire for the human race
And let your prayers go drifting into space
You never know what will be coming down
Perhaps a better world is drawing near
Just as easily, it could all disappear
Along with whatever meaning you might have found
Don't let the uncertainty turn you around
(The world keeps turning around and around)
Go on and make a joyful sound

Into a dancer you have grown
From a seed somebody else has thrown
Go on ahead and throw some seeds of your own
And somewhere between the time you arrive and the time you go
May lie a reason you were alive but you'll never know

1) Placing the Song

- Side B track 2 on the album (following "The Road and the Sky")

2) Voice/Lyrics and Subject Position

- Meditation on death and life on the occasion of a friend's death
- I begins by addressing the deceased but then moves on to address the living

3) Style and Form

- Similar to title track, but electric guitar is replaced by violin (both played by David Lindley)
- Background vocals more pronounced (gospel vs. Eagles influence)
- Verse (AAB pattern) – verse – chorus – solo violin – verse – chorus coda

4) Reference

- Like title track one of the songs that remained in the repertoire as a solo performance with Browne accompanying himself on the piano
- Frequently dedicated to a recently deceased person (Pretenders guitar player James Honeymoon Scott on the Montreux concert, for example)

Mit dem Song ['Doctor My Eyes'] eröffnete Jackson Browne auch das Hamburger Konzert, doch mißfiel ihm, wie er und seine Band es da gesungen und gespielt hatten, hinterher so sehr, daß er die Aufnahme nicht zur Sendung freigeben mochte. An den anderen Songs des Hamburger Konzerts verbesserte und feilte der Perfektionist Jackson Browne hinterher an drei Tagen bzw. Nächten in endlosen Studiomischterminen herum, bis sie seinem Qualitätsmaßstab entsprachen – eine so anstrengende wie auf- und anregende Erfahrung, die Euren Berichterstatter, der Konzerte nun gerade wegen ihres hohen künstlerischen Risikos und ihrer Nichtperfektion liebt, ja, auch wegen der ganz normalen Schwächen, die die Künstler da enthüllen mögen, in tiefes Grübeln versetzte: *Was hat dies noch mit einem Konzert, mit Spontaneität und Authentizität zu tun?* Aber ich kann mich auch Jackson Brownes Argumentation nicht entziehen: "Ich nehme mich nicht wichtig genug," so ungefähr verstand ich ihn, "um meine Fehler und Unvollkommenheit als Live-Performer für unterhaltsam zu halten. Die Songs sind wichtiger, und wenn ich finde, daß meine Unvollkommenheit als Sänger, daß kleine Fehler der Band, die man als Konzertbesucher im Saal so gar nicht merkt, aber als Zuhörer am Radio sehr wohl, dem Song schaden, dann tilge ich sie nachträglich am Mischpult so gut es geht. Ich versuche natürlich den Geist des Konzerts zu erhalten, aber der Geist des Konzerts sind nicht die Fehler und Schwächen, sondern die Songs."

(Wellershaus 1993)

> Romantic authenticity vs. Modernist authenticity!

Montreux 1982 marked a climax of Browne's rock orientation in being looser than most of his published recordings, but it was never published! The studio albums of the 1980s and 90s and 2000s tend to be highly polished sound sculptures, admirable but slightly aseptic.

Jackson Browne, "For Everyman"

For Everyman (1973) / Live recording Montreux (July 18, 1982)

Everybody I talk to is ready to leave
With the light of the morning
They've seen the end coming down long enough to believe
They've heard their last warning
Standing alone each has his own ticket in his hand
And as the evening descends I sit thinking 'bout everyman

Seems like I've always been looking for some other place
To get it together
Where with a few of my friends I could give up the race
And maybe find something better
But all my fine dreams
Well thought-out schemes to gain the motherland
Have all eventually come down to waiting for everyman

Waiting here for everyman –
Make it on your own if you think you can
If you see somewhere to go I understand
Waiting here for everyman –
Don't ask me if he'll show –
I don't know

Make it on your own if you think you can
Somewhere later on you'll have to take a stand
Then you're going to need a hand

Everybody's just waiting to hear from the one
Who can give them the answers
And lead them back to that place in the warmth of the sun
Where sweet childhood still dances
But who'll come along and hold out that strong and gentle father's hand?
Long ago I heard someone say something 'bout everyman

Waiting here for everyman –
Make it on your own if you think you can
If you see somewhere to go
I understand

I'm not trying to tell you that I've seen the plan
Turn and walk away if you think I am –
But don't think too badly of one who's left holding sand
He's just another dreamer, dreaming 'bout everyman

1) Placing the Song

- Closing track from Browne's eponymous second album, emerging from the preceding "Sing My Songs to Me", and all in all a pretty subdued affair
- One of the guitar based songs, also performed by Browne solo on guitar

2) Voice/Lyrics and Subject Position

- The singer positions his subjective experience vis-à-vis his generation and stands by his idealism, though disappointment shines through

3) Style and Form

- The song sways on a characteristic figure played on acoustic guitar
- Intro – verse (AAB) – verse – chorus (C) – guitar solo – bridge (D) – verse – chorus – bridge tipping back to intro leading to staged redemption with drums building tension and release in organ dominated coda

4) Reference

- Frequently read as a disenchanting comment on the hippie/Woodstock era

Jackson Browne, "Your Bright Baby Blues"

The Pretender (1976) / Live recording Montreux (July 18, 1982)

I'm sitting down by the highway
Down by that highway side
Everybody's going somewhere
Riding just as fast as they can ride
I guess they've got a lot to do
Before they can rest assured
Their lives are justified
Pray to God for me baby
He can let me slide

'Cause I've been up and down this highway
Far as my eyes can see
No matter how fast I run
I can never seem to get away from me
No matter where I am
I can't help feeling I'm just a day away
From where I want to be
Now I'm running home baby
Like a river to the sea

Baby if you can see me
Out across this wilderness
There's just one thing
I was hoping you might guess
Baby you can free me
All in the power of your sweet tenderness

I can see it in your eyes
You've got those bright baby blues
You don't see what you've got to gain
But you don't like to lose
You watch yourself from the sidelines
Like your life was a game you don't mind playing
To keep yourself amused
I don't mean to be cruel baby
But you're looking confused

Baby if you can hear me
Turn down your radio
There's just one thing
I want you to know
When you've been near me
I've felt the love stirring in my soul

It's so hard to come by
That feeling of peace
This friend of mine said
"Close your eyes, and try a few of these"
I thought I was flying like a bird
So far above my sorrow
But when I looked down
I was standing on my knees
Now I need someone to help me
Someone to help me please

Baby if you need me
Like I know I need you
There's just one thing
I'll ask you to do
Take my hand and lead me
To the hole in your garden wall
And pull me through

Jackson Browne, "Standing In the Breach"

Standing In the Breach (2014)

And though the earth may tremble and our foundations crack
We will all assemble and we will build them back
And rush to save the lives remaining still within our reach
And try to put our world together standing in the breach

So many live in poverty while others live as kings
Though some may find peace in the acceptance of all that living brings
I will never understand however they've prepared
How one life may be struck down and another life be spared

And though the earth may tremble and cast our works aside
And though our efforts resemble the fluctuating tide
We rise and fall with the trust and belief that love redeems us each
And bend our backs and hearts together standing in the breach

You don't know why it's such a far cry
From the world this world could be
You don't know why but you still try
For the world you wish to see
You don't know how it will happen now
After all that's come undone
But you know the change the world needs now
Is there, in everyone

The unpaid debts of history, the open wounds of time
The laws of human nature always tugging from behind
I want to think that the earth can heal and that people might still learn
How to meet this world's true challenges and that the course we're on could turn

And though the earth may tremble and the oceans pitch and rise
We will all assemble and we will lift our eyes
To the tasks that we know lie before us and the power our prayers beseech
And cast our souls into the heavens, standing in the breach

You don't know why it's such a far cry
From the world this world could be
You don't know why but you still try
For the world you wish to see
You don't know how it'll happen now
After all that's come undone
And you know the world you're waiting for may not come
No it may not come
But you know the change the world needs now
Is there, in everyone

2) Joni Mitchell

Once barely known even among a small group of professional folk singers in the musical outpost of Toronto, Joni is now [1970] one of the most famous people in the world. She uses her wide range as a singer to give women a new voice – soaring, conversational, witty and yearning. As a songwriter, her pre-eminence is challenged only by Dylan and Leonard Cohen, though unlike either she can sing in tune, a nightingale compared to Dylan's prairie-dog vocals or Cohen's froglike moans.

(Hinton 1996, 11)

Joni Mitchell, "Both Sides, Now"

Clouds (1969)

Rows and flows of angel hair
And ice cream castles in the air
And feather canyons everywhere,
I've looked at clouds that way.

But now they only block the sun,
They rain and snow on everyone
So many things I would have done,
But clouds got in my way.

I've looked at clouds from both sides now
From up and down and still somehow
It's cloud illusions I recall
I really don't know clouds at all

Moons and Junes and Ferris wheels,
The dizzy dancing way that you feel
As every fairy tale comes real,
I've looked at love that way.

But now it's just another show,
You leave 'em laughing when you go
And if you care, don't let them know,
Don't give yourself away.

I've looked at love from both sides now
From give and take and still somehow
It's love's illusions I recall
I really don't know love at all

Tears and fears and feeling proud,
To say "I love you" right out loud
Dreams and schemes and circus crowds,
I've looked at life that way.

But now old friends are acting strange,
They shake their heads, they say I've changed
Well something's lost, but something's gained
In living every day.

I've looked at life from both sides now
From win and lose and still somehow
It's life's illusions I recall
I really don't know life at all

I've looked at life from both sides now
From up and down, and still somehow
It's life's illusions I recall
I really don't know life at all

1) Placing the Song

- Arguably Mitchell's most famous and most-covered songs, first recorded by Judy Collins in 1967 before Mitchell's version on *Clouds* (1969)

2) Voice/Lyrics and Subject Position

- The I reflects upon experiences of clouds, love and life, first addressing the positive and then the negative side, coming to the conclusion that "I really don't know"

3) Style and Form

- Simple verse – verse – chorus (AAB) form accompanied by simply strummed guitar (doubled or double-tracked on the recording?)
- Modified guitar tuning (E–B–E–G#–B–E with a capo at the second fret)
- Folk drone (pedal point) plus slight blues influence at the end of the verses

4) Reference

- Experience is generalized to the extreme, not particulars

Joni Mitchell, “Woodstock”

Ladies of the Canyon (1970)

I came upon a child of God
He was walking along the road
And I asked him, where are you going
And this he told me
I'm going on down to Yasgur's farm
I'm going to join in a rock'n'roll band
I'm going to camp out on the land
I'm gonna try an' get my soul free

We are stardust
We are golden
And we've got to get ourselves
Back to the garden

Then can I walk beside you
I have come here to lose the smog
And I feel to be a cog in
something turning
Well maybe it is just the time of year
Or maybe it's the time of man
I don't know who I am
But you know life is for learning

We are stardust
We are golden
And we've got to get ourselves
Back to the garden

By the time we got to Woodstock
We were half a million strong
And everywhere there was song
and celebration
And I dreamed I saw the bombers
Riding shotgun in the sky
And they were turning into butterflies
Above our nation

We are stardust
[Billion year old carbon]
We are golden
[Caught in the devil's bargain]
And we've got to get ourselves
Back to the garden

1) Placing the Song

- Written in response to not having been there because her manager had told her that it would be better to appear on TV

2) Voice/Lyrics and Subject Position

- Decentred subject position: I > you (child of God/I) > we + countervoices
- Strange coda without words

3) Style and Form

- Sparse electric piano accompaniment groping for a shape and dissolving again
- Verse – chorus – verse – chorus – verse – chorus
- Generically unexpected, electric piano connoting jazz rather than folk influence

4) Reference

- Became a countercultural anthem in spite of its fractured character and note of caution (“caught in the devil’s bargain”) especially on the basis of successful cover versions

Cover Versions:

Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, *Déjà Vu* (1970)

Matthews Southern Comfort (single release, #1 British Charts 1970)

Joni Mitchell, “The Hissing of Summer Lawns”

The Hissing of Summer Lawns (1975)

He bought her a diamond for her throat
He put her in a ranch house on a hill
She could see the valley barbecues
From her window sill
See the blue pools
In the squinting sun
Hear the hissing of summer lawns

He put up a barbed wire fence
To keep out the unknown
And on every metal thorn
Just a little blood of his own
She patrols that fence of his
To a latin drum
And the hissing of summer lawns

Darkness
Wonder makes it easy
Darkness
With a joyful mask
Darkness
Tube's gone darkness darkness darkness
No color no contrast

A diamond dog
Carrying a cup and a cane
Looking through a double glass
Looking at too much pride and too much shame
There's a black fly buzzing
There's a heat wave burning in her master's voice
Hissing summer lawns

He gave her his darkness to regret
And good reason to quit him
He gave her a roomful of Chippendale
That nobody sits in
Still she stays with a love of some kind
It's the lady's choice
The hissing of summer lawns

Darkness ...

1) Placing the Song

- Album cover inscription: "This is a total work conceived graphically, musically, lyrically and accidentally – as a whole. The performances were guided by the given compositional structures and the audibly inspired beauty of every player. The whole unfolded like a mystery. It is not my intention to unravel that mystery for anyone ..."
- Mitchell turning away from her characteristic confessional mould and from folk/rock conventions

2) Voice/Lyrics and Subject Position

- Narrative: He vs. She in terms of alienation, commodification, gender depicted by invisible narrator

3) Style and Form

- Highly sophisticated and atmospheric lounge jazz fabrics, moving away from traditional song forms (but: verse – verse – interlude – verse – verse – interlude/fade)
- Modernist authenticity displaces Romantic authenticity

4) Reference

- Fraught reception at the time by rock audiences, but with hindsight generally acknowledged as a masterpiece

The clash of [Mitchell's] freedom and the view of her fans was an accident waiting to happen. Their devotion to her was so great that they assumed ownership [...] Love so soon turns to jealousy, worship to sacrifice, and the response to Joni Mitchell's later work – including, perhaps, her masterpiece, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, was semi-hysterical, like that of wolves deprived of their meat.

(Hinton 1996, 14)

3) Leonhard Cohen

Leonhard Cohen, "Bird on a Wire"

Songs from a Room (1969) / *Live In London* (2009, rec. July 17, 2008)

Like a bird on the wire,
like a drunk in an old midnight choir
I have tried in my way to be free.
Like a worm on a hook,
like a knight bent down in some old-fashioned book
It was the shape, the shape of our love that twisted me
If I, if I have been unkind,
I hope you can find a way to let it all go right on by.
If I, if I have been untrue
It's just that I thought a lover had to be some kind of liar, too.

Like a baby, stillborn,
like a beast with his horn
I have torn everyone who reached out for me.
But I swear by this song
and by all that I have done wrong
I will make it all up to thee.
I saw this beggar leaning on his wooden crutch,
he said to me, "You must not ask for so much."
And a pretty woman standing in her darkened door,
she cried to me, "Hey, why not ask for more?"

Like a bird on the wire,
like a drunk in an old midnight choir
I have tried in my way to be free.

1) Placing the Song

- One of Cohen's perennial standards, frequently covered and a signature tune for himself

2) Voice/Lyrics and Subject Position

- The I reflects upon the tensions between love and individual freedom
- Striking/original similes (?)

3) Style and Form

- Simple AAB patterns (three-line AAB units + bridge-like chorus)
- Somewhere between country and the blues

4) Reference

- Experience is generalized but remains idiosyncratic

Leonhard Cohen, "Going Home"

Old Ideas (2012)

I love to speak with Leonard
He's a sportsman and a shepherd
He's a lazy bastard
Living in a suit

But he does say what I tell him
Even though it isn't welcome
He just doesn't have the freedom
To refuse

He will speak these words of wisdom
Like a sage, a man of vision
Though he knows he's really nothing
But the brief elaboration of a tube

*Going home without my sorrow
Going home sometime tomorrow
Going home to where it's better
Than before*

*Going home without my burden
Going home behind the curtain
Going home without the costume
That I wore*

He wants to write a love song
An anthem of forgiving
A manual for living
With defeat

A cry above the suffering
A sacrifice recovering
But that isn't what I need him
To complete

I want him to be certain
That he doesn't have a burden
That he doesn't need a vision

That he only has permission
To do my instant bidding
Which is to say what I have told him
To repeat

Going home...

I love to speak with Leonard
He's a sportsman and a shepherd
He's a lazy bastard
Living in a suit

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