

ROMANTICISM TODAY: THE SINGER/SONGWRITER-PARADIGM

Lecture 3: 9/11 Songs

- 1) Neil Young, "Let's Roll" (2001)
- 2) John Hiatt, "When New York Had Her Heart Broke" (2001)
- 3) Loudon Wainwright, "No Sure Way" (2002)
- 4) Bruce Springsteen, *The Rising* (2002)
- 5) Richard Thompson, "Outside of the Inside" (2003)

1) Neil Young, "Let's Roll" (2001)

Single release (Nov 2001) / *Are You Passionate* (2002)

I know I said I love you,
I know you know it's true,
I've got to put the phone down,
and do what we got to do.

One's standing in the isleway,
Two more at the door,
We've got to get inside there,
Before they kill some more.

Time is runnin' out,
Let's roll.
Time is runnin' out,
Let's roll.

No time for indecision,
We've got to make a move,
I hope that we're forgiven,
For what we got to

How this all got started,
I'll never understand,
I hope someone can fly this thing,
And get us back to land.

Time is runnin' out,
Let's roll.
Time is runnin' out,
Let's roll.

No one has the answer,
But one thing is true,
You've got to turn on evil,
When it's coming after you,
You've gotta face it down,
And when it tries to hide,
You've gotta go in after it,
And never be denied,
Time is runnin' out,
Let's roll.

Let's roll for freedom,
Let's roll for love,
We're going after Satan,
On the wings of a dove

Let's roll for justice,
Let's roll for truth,
Let's not let our children,
Grow up fearful in their youth.

Time is runnin' out,
Let's roll.
Time is runnin' out,
Let's roll.
Time is runnin' out,
Let's roll.

1) Placing the Song

- Immediate reaction to the attacks by Neil Young, legendary maverick singer-songwriter from Canada, picking up Todd Beamer's last words uttered in his last phone call from flight United 93 before passengers attacked the terrorists before they could steer the plane into the White House > universalization of individual perspective

2) Voice/Lyrics and Subject Position

- Starting from simulation of situation (ringtone, portentous drone, 'strokes of fate')
- Todd Beamer speaking, 'I' > 'we' > 'I' > universalization/metaphysical framework (Evil, Satan vs. Freedom, Justice, Love, Truth)
- American formulas ('do what we gotta do'), millennialism ('Time is running out')

3) Style and Form

- Classic rock (2 guitars, bass, drums, Hammond B3), generic riff as basis
- Intro – verse – verse- chorus – verse – verse – chorus – bridge – verse – verse – chorus – outro (guitar solo)

4) Reference

- Chiming in with political agenda of the Bush administration (> nationalism, patriotism / 'Axis of Evil', 'War on Terror')
- highly controversial
- Young tried to regain his credibility as a critical and independent spirit with the *Living with War* album (2006)

2) John Hiatt, "When New York Had Her Heart Broke" (2001)

Dirty Jeans and Mudslide Hymns (2011)

On that fiery day
When the towers gave way
NY had her heart broke
NY had her heart broke

Many heroes died
Trying to save someone inside
When NY had her heart broke
NY had her heart broke

And I was there that day
And I don't know what to say
Except NY had her heart broke
NY had her heart broke

And the daylight fell dark
F16's over Central Park
When NY had her heart broke
We were dazed in the streets
From the blood and dust and heat
When NY had her heart broke
NY had her heart broke

And the world changed that day
Forever some will say
When NY had her heart broke
In a million years
She couldn't cry more tears
When NY had her heart broke
NY had her heart broke

Ah, but she will rise
Again

1) Placing the Song

- After various attempts at a pop career from the late 1970s onwards, John Hiatt has become the epitome of authentic roots rock and Americana after his classic albums *Bring the Family* (1987) and *Slow Turning* (1988)
- Written on the occasion or immediately after, but not published before 2011 in response to the fact that producer Kevin Shirley had lived in NY with his family at the time of the attacks

2) Voice/Lyrics and Subject Position

- Voice emerges late from portentous drum pattern and indecisive soundscape
- Acoustic guitar becomes more prominent, prepares entry of voice
- Voice claims witness status (verse 3) before instrumental interlude
- Lyrics somewhat clichéd, but effectively preparing the ground for glimpse of hope at the end
- The repetition of the title line is omitted in verse 4 and 6

3) Style and Form

- Classic rock (drums, electric guitars, bass, keyboards, acoustic guitar) > roots rock context
- Long instrumental intro ('racket') with slowly emerging contours, then verse 1 – verse 2 – verse 3 – instrumental interlude – double verses 4 and 5 – coda
- Little harmonic or melodic variation, but recognizable redemption in coda

4) Reference

- Originally not meant to be preserved, spontaneous utterance
- Slightly clichéd lyrics may actually capture the bewilderment and confusion of 9/11 witnesses and onlookers quite accurately

3) Loudon Wainwright, "No Sure Way" (2002)

Here Come the Choppers (2005)

So I started out on High Street
Had to travel into town
Like some Orpheus descending
Through a turnstile underground
From Brooklyn Heights into Manhattan
Which was where I had to be
Now you have to take the A train
There's no more service on the C

And when you are underwater
Sometimes the mind plays tricks
And there beneath the East river
It felt like the river Styx
The first stop was Broadway-Nassau
A few more passengers got in
We all sat, no one was standing
There somewhere we'd never been

They say heaven's high above us
Hell's not far below
In that subway tunnel
There was no sure way to know

Chambers Street a closed ghost station
Passing through we seemed to glide
Like prisoners inside compartments
On some house of horrors ride
The walls were tiled, I hadn't noticed
They seemed so antiseptic and clean
But we knew what we were under
The lights were on, that seemed obscene

And there I saw the three initials
W, T, and then the C
I'd survived somehow was living
But somewhere I shouldn't be
At the next stop the doors opened
And I emerged up above ground
I was in another country
Elysian Fields? No, Chinatown

They say heaven's high above us
Hell's not far below
Standing on Canal Street
There was no sure way to know
They say heaven's high above us
Hell's not far below
Standing on Canal Street
There was no sure way to go

1) Placing the Song

- Loudon Wainwright III is famous for relentless autobiographical soul baring and acute social commentary between folk, country, rock and pop
- Originally performed for *Village Voice* CD compilation *Love Songs for New York, Wish You Were Here* (April 2002), band arrangement for *Here Come the Choppers* (2005)

2) Voice/Lyrics and Subject Position

- Sujet: a subway ride under Manhattan after the attacks, taken from 'real life'
- Understated deviations from the normal state of affairs ('take the A train', 'no one was standing') vs. striking markers ('Orpheus descending', 'river Styx')
- Interiorization of perspective with collective overtones ('we') facing a spectacle ('House of Horrors ride')
- Metaphysical overtones introduced in chorus
- Trajectory of song indicates profound change ('another country') after the attacks

3) Style and Form

- Carefully scored musical texture (Bill Frisell), combining electric guitar, pedal steel guitar, acoustic guitar, bass and drums into a dreamlike soundscape
- Country is referenced but transcended
- Intro – verse 1 – verse 2 – chorus – instrumental passage – verse 3 – verse 4 – chorus (2x) - outro

4) Reference

- The experience that is described in the song can clearly be mapped on to the topography of New York after the attacks and is contextualised in popular culture discourses
- As a speech act, 'No Sure Way' remains more open than both Neil Young's and John Hiatt's songs

4) Bruce Springsteen, *The Rising* (2002)

First Track:

“Lonesome Day”

[...]

Hell's brewin' dark sun's on the rise
This storm'll blow through by and by
House is on fire, Viper's in the grass
A little revenge and this too shall pass
This too shall pass, I'm gonna pray
Right now all I got's this lonesome day

It's alright? It's alright? It's alright

Better ask questions before you shoot
Deceit and betrayals bitter fruit
It's hard to swallow, come time to pay
That taste on your tongue don't easily slip away

Let kingdom come I'm gonna find my way
Through this lonesome day

Last Track:

“My City of Ruins”

There is a blood red circle
On the cold dark ground
And the rain is falling down
The church door's thrown open
I can hear the organ's song
But the congregation's gone
My city of ruins
My city of ruins

Now the sweet bells of mercy
Drift through the evening trees
Young men on the corner
Like scattered leaves,
The boarded up windows,
The empty streets
While my brother's down on his knees
My city of ruins
My city of ruins

Come on, rise up! Come on, rise up!
Come on, rise up! Come on, rise up!
Come on, rise up! Come on, rise up!

Now's there's tears on the pillow
Darlin' where we slept
And you took my heart when you left
Without your sweet kiss
My soul is lost, my friend
Tell me how do I begin again?
My city's in ruins
My city's in ruins

Now with these hands,
With these hands,
With these hands,
I pray Lord
With these hands,
With these hands,
I pray for the strength, Lord
With these hands,
With these hands,
I pray for the faith, Lord
We pray for your love, Lord
We pray for the lost, Lord
We pray for this world, Lord
We pray for the strength, Lord
We pray for the strength, Lord

Come on
Come on
Come on, rise up
Come on, rise up

...

1) Placing the Song

- Bruce Springsteen is 'the Boss'
- *The Rising* as the most sustained rock engagement with 9/11, but "My City in Ruins" had been written before the attacks
- Springsteen is said to have overcome years of writer's block after an ordinary guy drew up next to him in a car in the aftermath of 9/11 and just said 'We need you!'

2) Voice/Lyrics and Subject Position

- The singer observes the utter lack of spirituality and faith in American cities and tries to counter it by prayer and exhortation, metaphysical and physical
- Muted ending?

3) Style and Form

- Classic rock / gospel
- Intro – verse 1 – verse 2 – chorus – organ solo – verse 3 – prayer – chorus – coda

4) Reference

- The fact that the song was written before the attacks lends poignancy to its analysis and hints at one of the uncomfortable subtexts of 9/11

“Into the Fire” / “Empty Sky” / “You’re Missing” / “Mary’s Place”

> written from the perspective of people who have lost a beloved person

“Nothing Man” / “The Rising”

> written from the perspective of fire fighters

“Worlds Apart”

> intercultural love story, musical cooperation with Asif Ali Khan & Group (Sufi mysticism)

+ less directly connected songs evoking the history of American popular music and the possibilities of immanent redemption:

“Waitin’ on a Sunny Day” / “Countin’ on a Miracle” / “Let’s Be Friends” / “Further On (Up the Road)” / “The Fuse”

Penultimate Track:

“Paradise”

Where the river runs to black
I take the schoolbooks from your pack
Plastics, wire and your kiss
The breath of eternity on your lips
In the crowded marketplace
I drift from face to face
I hold my breath and close my eyes
I hold my breath and close my eyes
And I wait for paradise
And I wait for paradise

The Virginia hills have gone to brown
Another day, another sun goin' down
I visit you in another dream
I visit you in another dream
I reach and feel your hair
Your smell lingers in the air
I brush your cheek with my fingertips
I taste the void upon your lips
And I wait for paradise
And I wait for paradise

I search for you on the other side
Where the river runs clean and wide
Up to my heart the waters rise
Up to my heart the waters rise
I sink 'neath the water cool and clear

Drifting down I disappear
I see you on the other side
I search for the peace in your eyes
But they're as empty as paradise
They're as empty as paradise

I break above the waves
I feel the sun upon my face

1) Placing the Song

- Penultimate track acknowledges the other side before the collective but critical rousing of 'My City in Ruins'

2) Voice/Lyrics and Subject Position

- Juxtaposition of perspectives: suicide bomber vs. grieving American
- Poignant repetition of central lines
- Meditation on 'the other side' leads to affirmation of immanence (the sun; surfacing from submersion in metaphysical concerns in coda (and puts the gospel overtones of 'My City in Ruins' in immanent perspective)

3) Style and Form

- More folk (acoustic guitar, muted percussion) than rock, but synthesized ambience including electric guitar; carefully crafted soundscape
- Intro (guitar emerging from ambience) – verse 1 – verse 2 – verse 3 – instrumental interlude – coda – electric guitar solo – return to opening ambience

4) Reference

- clear allusion to 'The Sound of Silence' by Paul Simon

5) Richard Thompson, "Outside of the Inside" (2001)

The Old Kit Bag (2003)

God never listened to Charlie Parker
Charlie Parker lived in vain
Blasphemer, womanizer
Let a needle numb his brain
Wash away his monkey music
Damn his demons, damn his pain

And what's the point of Albert Einstein
What do we need Physics for?
Heresy's his inspiration
Corrupt and rotten to the core
Curse his devious mathematics
Curse his deadly atom war

There's a message on the wind
Calling me to glory somewhere
There are signs too deep for the dumb
Like perfume in the air
And when I get to Heaven
I won't realize that I'm there

Shakespeare, Isaac Newton
Small ideas for little boys
Adding to the senseless chatter
Adding to the background noise
Hard to hear my oratory
Hard to hear my inner voice

Van Gogh, Botticelli
Scraping paint onto a board
Colour is the fuel of madness
That's no way to praise the Lord
Grey's the colour of the pious
Knelt upon the misericord

There's a message on the wind
Calling me to glory somewhere
There are signs too deep for the dumb
Like perfume in the air
And when I get to Heaven
I won't realize that I'm there

I'm familiar with the cover
I don't need to read the book
I police the world of action
Inside's where I can never look
Got no time to help the worthless
Lotus-eaters, Mandarins, crooks

There's a message on the wind
Calling me to glory somewhere
There are signs too deep for the dumb
Like perfume in the air
And when I get to Heaven
I won't realize that I'm there

1) Placing the Song

- Richard Thompson is a British folk rock pioneer and guitar virtuoso who is also a prolific songwriter with innumerable albums to his credit
- The song was written in direct response to the 9/11 attacks and performed solo acoustic. The band version was included on *The Old Kit Back* (2003)

2) Voice/Lyrics and Subject Position

- Written from the perspective of a fundamentalist, which is only obliquely broken in the final two lines of the chorus

3) Style and Form

- Folk/world music (mandolin, percussion, double bass) > rock (electric guitar, drums)
- Intro – verse 1 – verse 2 – chorus – brief instr, interlude – verse 3 – verse 4 – chorus – brief instr. Interlude – verse 5 – chorus – instr. outro

4) Reference

- Instrumental textures acknowledge the 'other'

Bibliography Lecture 3:

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