

# ROMANTICISM TODAY: THE SINGER/SONGWRITER-PARADIGM

## Lecture 5: 'Classic' Singer/Songwriters

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

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### 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 Berichtersteller, 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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