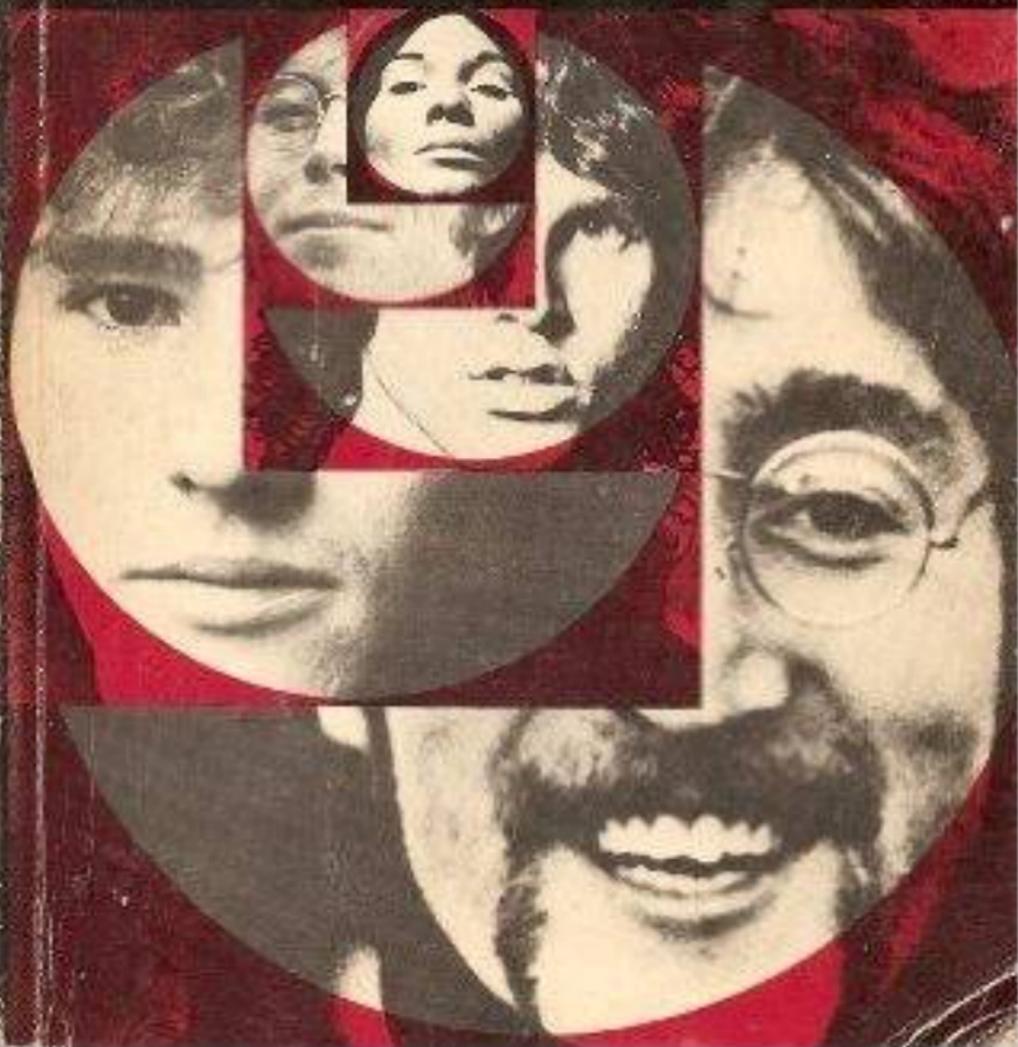


# Poetry of Relevance

# 1

Homer Hogan



All, all of a piece throughout:  
Thy chase had a beast in view;  
Thy wars brought nothing about;  
Thy lovers were all untrue.  
'Tis well an old age is out,  
And time to begin a new.

John Dryden  
(from *The Secular Masque*)

# Poetry of Relevance

# 1

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# To the Instructor

*Poetry of Relevance* invites students to find significant connections between poems of our literary heritage and songs that express contemporary interests and concerns. The table of contents makes clear the general strategy: each song lyric is followed by one or more poems that develop the theme or poetic technique found in the lyric.

To take full advantage of this text, the instructor should be sure to play the recommended recording of the song preceding the poems he wishes to discuss. Once a mood is established by the recording, the ways of working from song to poem are limited only by the instructor's ingenuity. The special interest sparked by hearing the songs of such artists as John Lennon, Leonard Cohen, Paul Simon, and Joni Mitchell extends to the poetry itself.

However he proceeds, the instructor should be able to use one or more of the following features of this book: (1) the index of themes, (2) the critical approach developed in the introductions and transitional material, (3) the indexes of poets and song-writers in each volume, and (4) the *Suggestions for Study* prepared for high school students by Kenneth Weber, Assistant Professor of English at the Ontario College of Education. (The *About the Poets* section was also contributed by Professor Weber.)

Complete record information is given with each song and in the discographies at the end of books 1 and 2. Most likely, the instructor will find that about six albums will be all he needs for the semester's work in poetry. Students might be asked to buy or borrow some records of songs not used in class, so that they can do independent study.

In comparing books 1 and 2, it will be noticed that although they may be used independently of one another, there are certain advantages in using both. Together they offer a much wider range of songs and poetry. Furthermore, the first volume offers a substantial amount of commentary in the introduction and transitions between sections, whereas the second keeps commentary to a minimum in order to provide a greater number of

songs and poems to which the student can apply his own thinking. The introductions to the two books also complement each other. In the first book the introduction is an essay on wonder addressed mainly to the student's affective experience of literature. In the second, the introduction is more intellectually oriented, sketching out certain logical principles that students might use to help settle arguments about literary interpretations. Special topics considered in the first book include the forms of poetic development (1 *Folk Songs and Blues*); the perspectives and philosophy of New Generation songwriters (3 *Tim Buckley*); contexts of imagery (4 *Joni Mitchell*); uses of ambiguity (5 *John Lennon and the Beatles*); surrealism (11 *Robin Williamson*); and the function of myth (12 *Myth and The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest*). A model of detailed poetic analysis is offered in the discussion of Joni Mitchell's song-poems. The relation of truth to art is touched upon in connection with an analysis of the blues in the second book (2 *John KaSandra*).

In order to make *Poetry of Relevance* useful to young people who wish to write their own songs and poems, I place particular emphasis on the ways that poetry and song *move* an audience and keep technical terminology at an absolute minimum. I also include song lyrics and poems that vary considerably in quality and effectiveness so that instructors can challenge students to discover why one song or poem works better than another.

Contemporary Canadian, British, and American poetry accounts for about half of the poems in the books; the remainder represent the major periods of British and North American poetic literature. Some of the contemporary poems are by high school and college students. Of special importance is the attention paid to the poetry of the black people of North America. The books include not only some powerful examples of traditional blues lyrics and songs by Jerry Moore, Bukka White, John KaSandra, and the Rev. F. D. Kirkpatrick, but also poems by Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, Bob Kaufman, Margaret Walker, Dudley Randall, Robert J. Abrams, Donald Jeffrey Hayes, Calvin C. Hernton, M. Carl Holman, Lucy Smith, Paul Vesey, and Dr. Martin Luther King, whose oratory, as I hope to show, often rises to the level of poetry.

### **Acknowledgements**

With great pleasure, I offer my profound thanks to Joni Mitchell, who first encouraged me to begin this project; my wife, Dorothy, whose musical knowledge was an invaluable resource; Mr. Jay Mark, of TRO; and most of all, my friend and colleague, Dr. Eugene Benson, whose imagination and erudition are responsible for some of the happiest combinations of songs and poems in these books, especially in the sections on John Lennon and Leonard Cohen.

H.H.  
University of Guelph  
March, 1970

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4



# Joni Mitchell

Unlike most of her contemporaries, Joni Mitchell manages to write verse of enchanting subtlety without deflecting our attention away from melody, mainly because her melody is as subtle as her verse, every melodic motion and gesture perfectly matched with the turns of her words. What is the secret of this lyrical magic? Perhaps what first strikes us when we hear a Joni Mitchell song is her imagery. New York is a place where "the stars paid a light bill" (*Song to a Seagull*); summer "falls to the sidewalk like string and brown paper" (*Marcie*); and "an aging cripple" can be seen "selling Superman balloons" (*Nathan La Franer*). Here are objects we can see with our eyes, minds, and feelings. Because of the opposition between the elements united in them, they also surprise us into asking questions. But the wonder-work done by these images is not due solely to their internal content and structure. By far the greatest part of that work results from the release her images provide for the poetic energy she generates in the contexts of the images.

For the sake of those who wish to write poetry and those who want simply to sharpen their awareness of it, we shall present here a detailed analysis of the contexts controlling the development of Joni Mitchell's songs. We shall consider how she achieves her effects by discussing five general contexts of poetry: attitude, manner, style, thought, description and narration, and representation.

## **Attitude**

For Joni Mitchell's songs, the most important context is the *attitude* she takes toward her material. Her attitude is primarily lyrical, her work being experienced principally as an expression of a personal feeling or state of mind. Not just any attitude will do in writing lyrical poetry. If we sense that the poet is merely gushing or raging, for example, we will pull back. An attitude that has internal tension is most effective. Such tension is immediately interesting and provides a natural basis for developing the conflict that all poems require if they are to live. Joni

Mitchell's attitude is of this sort. In one way intimately involved in all she says and sings, and yet, on another level always carefully distanced from her material, she projects an ambivalence that is exquisitely intriguing. Of course we are not speaking here of Joni Mitchell the person. All that is aesthetically relevant is Joni Mitchell as she reveals herself in her songs. In the attitude of this "apparent" personality a polarization takes place between involvement and detachment, naivete and awareness, sensitivity and tough-mindedness, child and woman. There is, however, no confusion in these oppositions. Throughout each song we sense their fusion in the sustained mood of gentle irony playing under her imagery.

#### **Manner**

The way that the tension within Joni Mitchell's attitude shapes the other contexts of her work can be seen first in the general *manner* in which she expresses her feelings and state of mind. Compelling her to talk with someone, her inner tension is such that the person spoken to should be neither (at least not directly) a lover (for that would be too intimate) nor the general public (for that would be too distant). The right balance is hit when she takes her audience to be her friend and makes her form of communication something like a personal letter, which she either addresses directly to the friend, as in *Nathan La Franeer*, *Michael from Mountains*, and *Marcie*, or which she shows to the friend after writing it to someone else, as in *Song to a Seagull*. Of course, her poems are not really personal letters to or for a friend. They are essentially descriptive and narrative songs. But they have the effect of personal letters, for they speak of places she's been, people she's known, things she's seen—bits of ordinary life she herself has lived and is now telling about in the sort of colloquial language a good friend expects to hear. The song-letter form, however, is not merely appropriate for the attitude she takes toward her material. It carries its own interest, for it both heightens the credibility of the content and teases us with the distance it places between us and the delightful character who is trying to communicate with us.

#### **Style**

We might next consider how Joni's attitude shapes the *style* of the song-letters. Pressure from the open, child-like side of her nature is felt in her light, conversational idioms,

in phrases like "silly seabird," "night in the city looks pretty to me," and "yellow slickers up on swings." Against this language of spontaneous response work the sharp intellectual observations she makes from her other side—the Joni Mitchell who appears to keep life removed from herself so that she can know it in freedom. The result is a continual tension between intimate, colloquial expression and a contrapuntal irony. To appreciate the interest that this tension in her style creates, one need only consider what would happen to her songs if she simply proclaimed her views, or milked her audience for sympathy instead of engaging them to share with her the bitter-sweet humor of things.

### Thought

The irony characterizing Joni's style operates not only in individual observations she makes about her subject matter, but also through the general view of life that motivates her to make them. Technically, this aspect is usually called the context of *thought*. Ironic thought in Joni Mitchell's song-poems is not, however, unmitigated. Again in keeping with the duality of her attitude, while she sees, without withdrawing into pessimism, the ironic disparity between human aspirations and what is in fact attainable, her joy in life is too great to be defeated by her sceptical intellect. There is no suggestion, for example, that it would have been wiser for the deserted Marcie not to have hoped for her lover's return, or for Joni not to have identified with the seagull; nor even in the bitter *Nathan La Franeer* does the ugliness of New York completely excuse the cab driver for his unkindness.

### Description and Narration

We come next to the question of how the thought behind Joni Mitchell's poems is artistically realized. The simplest way of implementing thought is through straight argument. But argument would not express what Joni has to say. Standing aside, she lets her material speak for itself through word-sketches of persons, places, and things, and "word-films" of events. The word-films are the most important. Through them a brief moment in time can suggest a much larger pattern of activity, which in turn becomes the object of the thought in the poem. In *Nathan La Franeer*, Joni is on her way to the airport; in *Song to a Seagull*, she visits the seashore; and in *Michael from Mountains*, a little boy is going home in the rain.

In each of these vignettes of daily routine, a whole way of life and a whole set of relations to existence are revealed. Consider, for example, these lines in *Michael from Mountains*:

There's oil on the puddles in taffeta patterns  
That run down the drain  
In colored arrangements  
That Michael will change with a stick that he found.

What sort of a person would pay such attention to oily puddles and a boy fiddling with a stick? Only someone with a quiet passion for "useless" surfaces. Michael, too, is obviously a lover of colors and patterns, but his love is the active wonder of the child. The difference between them, however, only underscores what they share: a playful reverence for being.

### Representation

Joni's suggestively anecdotal *representation* evidences again the intriguing manner in which she is continually feeling her way between remoteness and involvement. As is usual in songwriting, her music consists of tightly balanced repetitions and variations of a common theme, and consequently the lyrics welded to the music must also be developed in that fashion. But there are few songwriters whose lyrics take such subtle advantage of that confinement. In her hands, the verses that must be balanced for the sake of the music often become delicately juxtaposed scenes that in contrast to one another expose the detailed working of change on people we might watch from windows. In other words, Joni makes the balance and distance inherent in the song form perfect expressions of her reflective approach to her material, while at the same time her love of life finds its way out through the care with which she observes.

The beginning and final verses of *Marcie* provide a good illustration of this representational technique. We first see Marcie trying to make time pass while she waits for word from her lover; in the last verse, however, we don't see her at all—we just learn that "someone heard she bought a one-way ticket/and went west again." Joni stops short of showing us Marcie's final despair, out of respect, perhaps, both for her protagonist and her audience's imagination.

In any event, the distancing of the little tragedy produces an effect typical of Joni's songwriting, a poignancy that outlasts sorrow.

The second aspect of her technique, the care she feels toward her material, is shown in the tender realism of the poetic details. Marcie does not begin in simple hope; that would be false to life and to art, for the beginning would then not contain the grounds for the ending. Hope is there only implicitly, in the "coat of flowers" she wears, and the man's shirt she uses to "dust her tables". What dominates is the impression of empty daily routine into which Marcie, not without bravery, is trying to escape, an impression which provides the theme that the rest of the song develops musically and lyrically.

When we move from the verse-scenes of Joni's songs to her individual lines, we can find everywhere examples of this combination of reflective juxtapositioning and warm, concerned observation. Watch, for instance, what happens to the words "red" and "green" in *Marcie*. But perhaps enough has been said to support our main thesis, namely, that the sources of the power in Joni's imagery are not only in the images themselves, but also in the contexts that control the images. In her song-poems, the contexts of attitude, manner, thought, narration, and representation each have their own interest; and because of the organic way in which they connect with one another, these contexts also concentrate their interests into unified appeals which it is the task of the images to communicate.

In the following section the student can gain further insight into the possibilities of treating imagery by considering the poems associated with *Song to a Seagull*. Joni Mitchell's song and the related poems illustrate what can be done with one basic image, the bird-figure of countless myths and daydreams.

**Marcie**

Words and Music by Joni Mitchell  
Joni Mitchell, Reprise S 6293

*Marcie in a coat of flowers  
Stops inside a candy store  
Reds are sweet and greens are sour  
Still no letter at her door  
So she'll wash her flower curtains  
Hang them in the wind to dry  
Dust her tables with his shirt and  
Wave another day goodbye*

*Marcie's faucet needs a plumber  
Marcie's sorrow needs a man  
Red is autumn green is summer  
Greens are turning and the sand  
All along the ocean beaches  
Stares up empty at the sky  
Marcie buys a bag of peaches  
Stops a postman passing by  
And summer goes  
Falls to the sidewalk like string and brown paper  
Winter blows  
Up from the river there's no one to take her  
To the sea*

*Marcie dresses warm it's snowing  
Takes a yellow cab uptown  
Red is stop and green's for going  
Sees a show and rides back down  
Down along the Hudson River  
Past the shipyards in the cold  
Still no letter's been delivered  
Still the winter days unfold  
Like magazines  
Fading in dusty grey attics and cellars  
Make a dream  
Dream back to summer and hear how he tells her  
Wait for me*

*Marcie leaves and doesn't tell us  
Where or why she moved away  
Red is angry green is jealous  
That was all she had to say  
Someone thought they saw her Sunday  
Window shopping in the rain  
Someone heard she bought a one-way ticket  
And went west again*

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### **Patterns**

Amy Lowell

I walk down the garden paths,  
And all the daffodils  
Are blowing, and the bright blue squills,  
I walk down the patterned garden-paths  
In my stiff, brocaded gown.  
With my powdered hair and jewelled fan,  
I too am a rare  
Pattern. As I wander down  
The garden paths.

My dress is richly figured,  
And the train  
Makes a pink and silver stain  
On the gravel, and the thrift  
Of the borders.  
Just a plate of current fashion,  
Tripping by in high-heeled, ribboned shoes.  
Not a softness anywhere about me,  
Only whalebone and brocade.  
And I sink on a seat in the shade  
Of a lime tree. For my passion  
Wars against the stiff brocade.  
The daffodils and squills  
Flutter in the breeze  
As they please.  
And I weep;  
For the lime-tree is in blossom  
And one small flower has dropped upon my bosom.

And the plashing of waterdrops  
 In the marble fountain  
 Comes down the garden-paths.  
 The dripping never stops.  
 Underneath my stiffened gown  
 Is the softness of a woman bathing in a marble basin,  
 A basin in the midst of hedges grown  
 So thick, she cannot see her lover hiding,  
 But she guesses he is near,  
 And the sliding of the water  
 Seems the stroking of a dear  
 Hand upon her.  
 What is Summer in a fine brocaded gown!  
 I should like to see it lying in a heap upon the ground.  
 All the pink and silver crumpled up on the ground.

I would be the pink and silver as I ran along the paths,  
 And he would stumble after,  
 Bewildered by my laughter.  
 I should see the sun flashing from his sword-hilt and the  
     buckles on his shoes.

I would choose  
 To lead him in a maze along the patterned paths,  
 A bright and laughing maze for my heavy-booted lover.  
 Till he caught me in the shade,  
 And the buttons of his waistcoat bruised my body as he  
     clasped me,  
 Aching, melting, unafraid.  
 With the shadows of the leaves and the sundrops,  
 And the plopping of the waterdrops,  
 All about us in the open afternoon—  
 I am very like to swoon  
 With the weight of this brocade,  
 For the sun sifts through the shade.

Underneath the fallen blossom  
 In my bosom,  
 Is a letter I have hid,  
 It was brought to me this morning by a rider from the Duke.  
 'Madam, we regret to inform you that Lord Hartwell  
 Died in action Thursday se'nnight.'  
 As I read it in the white, morning sunlight,  
 The letters squirmed like snakes.  
 'Any answer, Madam,' said my footman.  
 'No,' I told him.  
 'See that the messenger takes some refreshment.

No, no answer.  
 And I walked into the garden,  
 Up and down the patterned paths,  
 In my stiff, correct brocade.  
 The blue and yellow flowers stood up proudly in the sun.  
 Each one.  
 I stood upright too,  
 Held rigid to the pattern  
 By the stiffness of my gown.  
 Up and down I walked,  
 Up and down.

In a month he would have been my husband.  
 In a month, here, underneath this lime,  
 We would have broke the pattern;  
 He for me, and I for him,  
 He as Colonel, I as Lady,  
 On this shady seat.  
 He had a whim  
 That sunlight carried blessing.  
 And I answered, 'It shall be as you have said.  
 Now he is dead.

In Summer and in Winter I shall walk  
 Up and down  
 The patterned garden-paths  
 In my stiff, brocaded gown.  
 The squills and daffodils  
 Will give place to pillared roses, and to asters, and to snow.  
 I shall go  
 Up and down,  
 In my gown.  
 Gorgeously arrayed,  
 Boned and stayed.  
 And the softness of my body will be guarded from embrace  
 By each button, hook, and lace.  
 For the man who should loose me is dead,  
 Fighting with the Duke in Flanders,  
 In a pattern called a war.  
 Christ! What are patterns for?

### **Michael from Mountains**

Words and Music by Joni Mitchell

*Joni Mitchell*, Reprise S 6293

*Michael wakes you up with sweets  
He takes you up street and the rain comes down  
Sidewalk markets locked up tight  
And umbrellas bright on a grey background  
There's oil on the puddles in taffeta patterns  
That run down the drain  
In colored arrangements  
That Michael will change with a stick that he found.*

*Chorus:*

*Michael from mountains  
Go where you will go to  
Know that I will know you  
Someday I may know you very well*

*Michael brings you to a park  
He sings and it's dark when the clouds come by  
Yellow slickers up on swings  
Like puppets on strings hanging in the sky  
They'll splash home to suppers in wallpapered kitchens  
Their mothers will scold  
But Michael will hold you  
To keep away cold till the sidewalks are dry*

*Chorus*

*Michael leads you up the stairs  
He needs you to care and you know you do  
Cats come crying to the key  
And dry you will be in a towel or two  
There's rain in the window  
There's sun in the painting that smiles on the wall  
You want to know all  
But his mountains have called so you never do*

*Chorus*

**Ode: Intimations of Immortality**

William Wordsworth  
(stanzas VII and VIII)

Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,  
A six years' darling of a pigmy size!  
See, where 'mid work of his own hand he lies,  
Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,  
With light upon him from his father's eyes!  
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,  
Some fragment from his dream of human life,  
Shaped by himself with newly-learned art;

A wedding or a festival,

A mourning or a funeral;

And this hath now his heart,

And unto this he frames his song:

Then will he fit his tongue

To dialogues of business, love, or strife;

But it will not be long

Ere this be thrown aside,

And with new joy and pride

The little Actor cons another part;

Filling from time to time his 'humorous stage'

With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,

That Life brings with her in her equipage;

As if his whole vocation

Were endless imitation.

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie

Thy soul's immensity;

Thou best philosopher, who yet dost keep

Thy heritage, thou eye among the blind,

That, deaf and silent, read'st the Eternal Deep,

Haunted forever by the Eternal Mind,—

Mighty prophet! seer blest!

On whom those truths do rest,

Which we are toiling all our lives to find,

In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave;

Thou, over whom thy Immortality

Broods like the Day, a master o'er a slave,

A Presence which is not to be put by;

Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might

Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,

Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke  
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,  
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?  
Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,  
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,  
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

### **Nathan La Franeer**

Words and Music by Joni Mitchell  
*Joni Mitchell*, Reprise S 6293

*I hired a coach to take me from confusion to the plane  
And though we shared a common space I know I'll never meet again  
The driver with his eyebrows furrowed in the rear-view mirror  
I read his name and it was plainly written Nathan La Franeer*

*I asked him would he hurry  
But we crawled the canyons slowly  
Through the buyers and the sellers  
Through the burglar bells and the wishing wells  
With gangs and girly shows  
The ghostly garden grows*

*The cars and buses bustled through the bedlam of the day  
I looked through window-glass at streets and Nathan grumbled at the grey  
I saw an aging cripple selling Superman balloons  
The city grate through chrome-plate  
The clock struck slowly half-past-noon  
Through the tunnel tiled and turning  
Into daylight once again I am escaping  
Once again goodbye  
To symphonies and dirty trees  
With parks and plastic clothes  
The ghostly garden grows*

*He asked me for a dollar more  
 He cursed me to my face  
 He hated everyone who paid to ride  
 And share his common space  
 I picked my bags up from the curb  
 And stumbled to the door  
 Another man reached out his hand  
 Another hand reached out for more  
 And I filled it full of silver  
 And I left the fingers counting  
 And the sky goes on forever  
 Without mermaids and peace parades  
 You feed it all your woes  
 The ghostly garden grows*

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## London

William Blake

I wander thro' each charter'd street,  
 Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,  
 And mark in every face I meet  
 Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,  
 In every Infants cry of fear,  
 In every voice, in every ban,  
 The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry  
 Every black'ning Church appalls;  
 And the hapless Soldier's sigh  
 Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
 How the youthful Harlots curse  
 Blasts the new-born Infants tear,  
 And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

**Sion Lies Waste**

Fulke Greville

Sion lies waste, and thy Jerusalem,  
 O Lord, is fallen to utter desolation;  
 Against thy prophets and thy holy men  
 The sin hath wrought a fatal combination;  
     Profaned thy name, thy worship overthrown,  
     And made thee, living Lord, a God unknown.

Thy powerful laws, thy wonders of creation,  
 Thy word incarnate, glorious heaven, dark hell,  
 Lie shadowed under man's degeneration;  
 Thy Christ still crucified for doing well;  
     Impiety, O Lord, sits on thy throne,  
     Which makes thee, living light, a God unknown.

Man's superstition hath thy truths entombed,  
 His atheism again her pomps defaceth;  
 That sensual unsatiable vast womb  
 Of thy seen church thy unseen church disgraceth.  
     There lives no truth with them that seem thine own,  
     Which makes thee, living Lord, a God unknown.

Yet unto thee, Lord, mirror of transgression,  
 We who for earthly idols have forsaken  
 Thy heavenly image, sinless, pure impression,  
 And so in nets of vanity lie taken,  
     All desolate implore that to thine own,  
     Lord, thou no longer live a God unknown.

Yet, Lord, let Israel's plagues not be eternal,  
 Nor sin forever cloud thy sacred mountains,  
 Nor with false flames, spiritual but infernal,  
 Dry up thy mercy's ever springing fountains.  
     Rather, sweet Jesus, fill up time and come  
     To yield the sin her everlasting doom.

### Song to a Seagull

Words and Music by Joni Mitchell  
*Joni Mitchell*, Reprise S 6293

*Fly silly seabird  
 No dreams can possess you  
 No voices can blame you  
 For sun on your wings  
 My gentle relations  
 Have names they must call me  
 For loving the freedom  
 Of all flying things  
 My dreams with the seagulls fly*

*Out of reach out of cry  
 I came to the city  
 And lived like Old Crusoe  
 On an island of noise  
 In a cobblestone sea  
 And the beaches were concrete  
 And the stars paid a light bill  
 And the blossoms hung false  
 On their store window trees  
 My dreams with the seagulls fly  
 Out of reach out of cry*

*Out of the city  
 And down to the seaside  
 To sun on my shoulders  
 And wind in my hair  
 But sandcastles crumble  
 And hunger is human  
 And humans are hungry  
 For worlds they can't share  
 My dreams with the seagulls fly*

*Out of reach out of cry  
 I call to the seagull  
 Who dives to the waters  
 And catches his silver-fine  
 Dinner alone  
 Crying where are the footprints  
 That danced on these beaches  
 And the hands that cast wishes  
 That sunk like a stone  
 My dreams with the seagulls fly  
 Out of reach out of cry*

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### Tern

John Bruce

Every year at this time and on this windless sort of evening  
 The single tern fishes across from me on the same flat bay;  
 In measure after measure and mismeasured swoops and feints  
 It shapes and arcs at the sheen and silver beneath his eye;  
 And on the last furring of light I can see his finned wing  
 Cut above the trees and away down as old as myth,  
 As cold white as Greece's last great murmurations of art.

**Ode to a Nightingale**

John Keats

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
 My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
 Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
 One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:  
 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
 But being too happy in thine happiness,—  
     That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,  
     In some melodious plot  
 Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
 Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O for a draught of vintage! that hath been  
 Cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth,  
 Tasting of Flora and the country green,  
 Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!  
 O for a beaker full of the warm South,  
 Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
     With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,  
     And purple-stained mouth;  
 That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
 And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget  
 What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
 The weariness, the fever, and the fret  
 Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;  
 Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,  
 Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;  
     Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
     And leaden-eyed despairs,  
 Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
 Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,  
 Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,  
 But on the viewless wings of Poesy,  
     Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:  
 Already with thee! tender is the night,  
 And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,  
     Clustered around by all her starry Fays;  
     But here there is no light,  
 Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
 Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
 Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
 But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
 Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
 Fast-fading violets covered up in leaves;  
 And mid-May's eldest child,  
 The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
 The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and for many a time  
 I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
 Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
 To take into the air my quiet breath;  
 Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
 To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
 In such an ecstasy!  
 Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—  
 To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!  
 No hungry generations tread thee down;  
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
 In ancient days by emperor and clown:  
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn,  
 The same that oft-times hath  
 Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam  
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell  
 To toll me back from thee to my sole self!  
 Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
 As she is fabled to do, deceiving elf.  
 Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades  
 Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
 Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep  
 In the next valley-glades:  
 Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
 Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

### Nun on a Beach

John Harney

Birds, black or white, both;

They wheel:

one like a dervish  
on the windy beach,  
a nun flailing at  
the lusty afternoon,  
blushing for the waves  
that leer and kiss and toss  
on their heavy sea-grown beds.

The other is a bird;

gull, white and whistling,  
an improbable yellow  
horn for a beak, eyes  
glowing with love's improper  
hue, bestial ruddy red;  
scavenger, gleaner of refuse,  
his feathers belie his dusty trade.

Today she gleans on the shores of heaven,

And he's in his paradise;

for both, black or white,  
the almighty is a fish:  
once, to be caught alive,  
twice, to be eaten dead,  
and three, as ever, or always,  
swimming in a mystery.

**Night in the City**

Words and Music by Joni Mitchell  
*Joni Mitchell, Reprise S 6293*

*Light up, light up  
 Light up you lazy blue eyes  
 Moon's up, night's up  
 Taking the town by surprise*

*Night time, night time  
 Day left an hour ago  
 City light time  
 Must you get ready so slow?  
 There are places to come from  
 And places to go*

*Night in the city looks pretty to me  
 Night in the city looks fine  
 Music comes spilling out into the street  
 Colors go flashing in time*

*Take off, take off  
 Take off those stay-at-home blues  
 Break off, shake off  
 Take off those stay-at-home blues  
 Stairway, stairway  
 Down to the crowds in the street  
 They go their way  
 Looking for faces to greet  
 But we run on laughing with no one to meet*

*Night in the city looks pretty to me  
 Night in the city looks fine  
 Music comes spilling out into the street  
 Colors go waltzing in time*

**Composed Upon Westminster Bridge**

William Wordsworth

Earth has not anything to show more fair:  
 Dull would he be of soul who could pass by  
 A sight so touching in its majesty:  
 This city now doth like a garment wear  
 The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,  
 Ships, towers, domes, theatres,

Open unto the fields, and to the sky;  
 All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

Never did sun more beautifully steep  
 In his first splendour valley, rock, or hill;  
 Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!  
 The river glideth at his own sweet will:  
 Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;  
 And all that mighty heart is lying still!

ways before it is too late, or is it simply a statement of pessimism, an acknowledgement of the fact that it is already too late?

**b) perspective of the child**

Precisely how did Traherne see the world when he was born? What suggestion is there in *Wonder* that disillusion was inevitable? Both these elements (wonder and disillusion) are present in *Goodbye and Hello*, but how do Buckley's children react to them? Does the narrative style of *The Game* suggest that the wonder of childhood doesn't last?

**c) attitude toward the body**

Describe how Buckley, and Whitman in *A Woman Waits for Me*, express an almost identical attitude toward sex, but in different ways. Would John Donne, if he were alive, condone Buckley's attitude toward the body?

**d) attitude toward country**

Both Buckley, and Wilfred Owen in *Dulce et Decorum Est*, reject intense patriotism, but their reasons differ; explain how this difference is revealed in the technique of each work. Show how Shakespeare achieves such power in John of Gaunt's death speech *This Royal Throne of Kings*. Does this speech, when compared with *Goodbye and Hello*, make the lyric less profound?

**e) perspective of the puritan**

How does Stafford's *One Home* convey a sense of self-righteousness? In what way does this poem explain much that *Goodbye and Hello* opposes? Does *The Lotos-Eaters* actually praise hedonism, or is there an element of criticism in the poem? What differences in outlook exist between Tennyson's poem and those sections of the lyric beginning "O the new children . . .?"

2. Most poetry involves a certain amount of mythology, or a body of known and widely accepted material, to which it can allude, thereby establishing in a brief stroke all the meaning that might be otherwise impossible to express.

a) Identify the source of most of the allusions in any three poems from this section and Buckley's lyric.

b) Do the source and the allusions in each case automatically limit the audience?

**Section 4: Joni Mitchell**

***Marcie***

1. a) A critic has said that Joni Mitchell's work is like a painting done in watercolors. Explain how the images, the choice of words, the atmosphere, and the narrative line in *Marcie* reflect the impression given by a watercolor painting.  
b) On the other hand, Amy Lowell's *Patterns* might be likened to a sharply defined oil painting with striking colors. Explain how her poem fits this pattern.  
c) Which poem evokes a greater feeling of pathos?

***Michael from Mountains***

2. Although both the lyric and the Wordsworth poem here present a picture of the beauty of childhood, *Michael from Mountains* seems to create a more authentic, more acceptable picture of what childhood is really like. Consider the reasons for this.

***Nathan La Franeer***

3. a) All three works presented here are critical of society, but does each suggest a different reason for society's degeneration?  
b) "Every time I feel a certain way about something, I hear an argument for the other side. I'm just a hopeless middleman."  
(Joni Mitchell in an interview with Peter Goddard for the *Toronto Telegram*, 1969). Show how *Nathan La Franeer* is essentially a protest song, and yet not entirely a one-sided picture.  
c) Compare Blake's *London* with *Nathan La Franeer* from the following points of view: i) strength of the images, ii) effect of the first-person delivery, iii) breadth of the vision.

***Song to a Seagull***

4. a) By contrasting this lyric with one of its companion poems that is more concrete, show how images, connotations of words, and the sentiments in *Song to a Seagull* create an atmosphere of fragility.  
b) Would the melancholy of *Ode to a Nightingale* be heightened or lessened if it were put to music—any kind of music?  
c) Note carefully the techniques by which Joni Mitchell and John

Harney have created opposite impressions of the seagull. Select any poem in this book and try to create an opposing impression with your own poetry.

**Night in the City**

5. Both *Night in the City* and *Lines Composed Upon Westminster Bridge* present pictures of beauty. Yet both portraits admit a sense of the ephemeral. They seem to be only temporary situations. Why is this feeling more poignant in the Mitchell lyric than in Wordsworth's sonnet?

**Section 5: John Lennon and the Beatles**

***A Day in the Life***

1. a) Arrange each of the works in this unit into a "scale of bitterness", beginning with the least negative (in your opinion) and ending with the most pessimistic.  
 b) What are the elements of poetry and lyric that you chose as your criteria for creating the "scale" in (a)?  
 c) To which of the poems in the unit is *A Day in the Life* most similar: i) in narrative style, ii) in diction, iii) in attitude.  
 d) The significance of many of the lyrics discussed so far in this book depends at least primarily on the fact that they are sung. Yet *A Day in the Life* can stand strictly as poetry and lose little or no impact. Why is this so?

***Eleanor Rigby***

2. a) What factors of content and style make the emotional expression of *Eleanor Rigby* less intense than that of the poetry in the unit?  
 b) Do all the selections in this unit suggest that sexuality might be an antidote for loneliness?  
 c) Examine each of the works in the unit to discover whether there is any common pattern of imagery, situation, character, and so on, used in the portrayal of loneliness.

***Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds***

3. a) Show how each selection in the unit attempts to affect as many of the physical senses as possible.  
 b) If the kind of juxtaposition used in the lyric and poems of this unit achieves such pleasant freshness and vitality, why don't all lyricists write this way?

**Section 6: Bruce Cockburn**

***Bird Without Wings***

1. How does Cockburn make explicit through metaphor the kind of love that he wants? Compare the use of metaphor in *Bird Without Wings* with that of Penelope Schafer's *A Sunlight Myth*.

***The View from Pompous Head***

2. Compare the narrative styles of *The View from Pompous Head* and *To Marguerite*. What are the differences in effect, achieved by such things as physical perspective, emotional involvement, and singing versus speaking?

**Section 7: William Hawkins**

***Cotton Candy Man***

1. a) Compare Shelley's use of contrast with Hawkins' in *Cotton Candy Man*. Which in your opinion is more effective?  
 b) What is the difference between what Shelley seems to want and what Hawkins is looking for? Which desire is the more responsible and mature?

***Gnostic Serenade***

2. a) When you compare Hawkins' lyric with the two sonnets, the latter seem rather stiffly formal and uninviting. Yet, for generations the sonnet was the traditional form for expressing thoughts of love. Can you account for this?  
 b) Show that despite the differences in idiom and diction between Meredith's sonnet and Hawkins' *Gnostic Serenade* both selections convey an impression of helplessness not found in Drayton's *Farewell to Love*.

**Section 8: Jim Morrison and the Doors**

***The End***

- a) When Morrison's lyrics are coupled with their music, the result is a "soul" experience. Because of this, is Morrison's message more effective than Whitman's in *Native Moments, or Darest Thou*