

# Joni Mitchell – Early Thematic Constructs

A detailed look at the major themes from the first 6 albums (1968 – 1974).

Art Rerecich



# Joni Mitchell – Early Thematic Constructs

A detailed look at the major themes from the first 6 albums (1968 – 1974).

## *Table of Contents*

<i>Preface</i>	<b>3</b>
<i>Introduction</i>	<b>3</b>
Joni Mitchell's Recorded Work (enumerated for reference)	<b>4</b>
<i>Themes</i>	<b>4</b>
Political or Social Comment	<b>4</b>
Escape	<b>6</b>
Escape- Person	<b>6</b>
Escape- Situation	<b>7</b>
Alternate Reality	<b>7</b>
Freedom	<b>8</b>
Tragic Love	<b>8</b>
Friend's Tragedy	<b>10</b>
Industry Reflections	<b>12</b>
Personal Reflections	<b>14</b>
Summary	<b>16</b>
<i>Bibliography</i>	<b>17</b>
Books	<b>17</b>
Magazines	<b>17</b>
Albums	<b>17</b>
Official Website	<b>17</b>
<i>Appendix- Songs by Category</i>	<b>18</b>
Political and Social Comment	<b>18</b>
Escape	<b>18</b>
Freedom	<b>18</b>
Tragic Love	<b>18</b>
Friend's Tragedy	<b>18</b>
Industry Reflections	<b>18</b>
Personal Reflections	<b>19</b>
Special	<b>19</b>

Preface

This document originated as a research paper for the Master of Arts (MA) program in Mass Communication at the University of Denver in mid-1970. The course was “Art and the Mass Culture”. At that time, Marshall McLuhan’s book *“The Medium is the Message”* had just come out, however basing a research paper on a popular singer/poet was unusual to say the least. Of course, that was long before Bob Dylan would be awarded the Nobel Prize, reinforcing the concept that our modern poets are worthy of serious consideration.

My professor liked the paper, yielding an ‘A’ for the course, I graduated and went on with my life. Fast forward 40+ years, while simplifying my life, I came across this paper in some basement boxes. Around this time, I had read that Joni was having some medical issues which generated an existential moment for me. It’s challenging enough coming to terms with your own mortality, however it was always comforting knowing of Joni exitance.

In our current era of music streaming, I can't say that I listen to a lot of Joni's music anymore, however whenever one of her songs pops up, it always makes me smile. Transcribing this paper to electronic form, made me revisit these early albums, which also made me smile quite a bit. Consequently, I'd like to share it to hopefully bring some smiles to others.

I don't know if this will ever make it to Joni herself, I have no experience ever trying to contact a famous person. But if it does, I'd just like to say thanks, not only for touching the lives of all her fans ... but helping me make it through grad school ... in many ways. Hopefully that will make her smile as well.

## Introduction

As each day goes by, we, as humans, are confronted with a variety of problems. There are also an endless amount of circumstances and emotions, which color these problems. How we deal with these problems, depend largely on the individual. How these problems are confronted, or whoever does the confronting, one result occurs: there is no short cut to a viable answer.

Joni Mitchell takes the complexities of modern life and paints us ‘word pictures’, describing them. Most times it is easier to understand something when you are able to step back and observe from a distance, then you get a better picture of what’s really going on. Since we are all intimately involved in the human race, stepping back to observe presents a problem. Joni enables us to get a sort of overview, by her commentary. She is involved with life and her observations point out the major aspects of life’s difficulties. She, like all of us, is torn between alternate realities; how it is and how it should be. This is the beauty of her work, she not only describes how it is, but goes further to speculate on how good it could be.

Joni's career is one of the growth and development, just as life is a maturation process. Because of this, some themes appear once or twice, while others run through all her work. Life is also like this, some concerns remain with us from childhood, while others come and go as we grow.

Let's examine Joni Mitchell's world and see just how close it comes to ours. I believe that after studying her work, we shall see that she is able to touch on the majority of human emotions and experiences. What I hope to find at the end of this examination, is not the answers (indeed some of these topics have puzzled mankind for centuries), but rather a thorough examination of the problem. A hopeful side effect will be an insight; to ourselves, our society and maybe even Ms. Mitchell herself.

*"I seek not to know all the answers, but rather to understand the questions"* Kung Fu

## Joni Mitchell's Recorded Work (enumerated for reference)<sup>1</sup>

1. SONG TO A SEAGULL	2. CLOUDS	3. LADIES OF THE CANYON
a) I had a King b) Michael from Mountains c) Night in the City  d) Marcie  e) Nathan La Franeer f) Sisotowbell Lane g) The Downtreader h) The Pirate of Penance  i) Song to a Seagull j) Cactus Tree	a) Tin Angel b) Chelsea Morning c) I don't Know Where I Stand  d) That Song About the Midway  e) Roses Blue f) The Gallery g) I Think I Understand h) Songs to Aging Children Come  i) The Fiddle and the Drum j) Both Sides, Now	a) Morning Morgantown b) For Free c) Conversation  d) Ladies of the Canyon  e) Willy f) The Arrangement g) Rainy Night House h) The Priest  i) Blue Boy j) Big Yellow Taxi k) Woodstock l) The Circle Game
4. BLUE	5. FOR THE ROSES	6. COURT AND SPARK
a) All I Want b) My Old Man c) Little Green d) Carey e) Blue f) California g) This Flight Tonight h) River i) A Case Of You j) The Last Time I Saw Richard	a) Banquet b) Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire c) Barangrill d) Lesson in Survival e) Let the Wind Carry Me f) For the Roses g) See You Sometime h) Electricity i) You Turn Me on I'm a Radio j) Blond in the Bleachers  k) Woman of Heart and Mind l) Judgement of the Moon and Stars (Ludwig's Tune)	a) Court and Spark b) Help Me c) Free Man in Paris d) People's Parties e) The Same Situation f) Car on a Hill g) Down to You h) Just like this Train i) Raised on Robbery j) Trouble Child  k) Twisted <sup>2</sup>

## Themes

### Political or Social Comment

This is by far one of her major themes as it runs the entire gambit of her work. She starts her career by commenting on the harshness of the 'city'. Although New York is implied, it could

<sup>1</sup> Since I quote from these works often, I've listed them according to album and position, for example: "Marcie"-1d. Any discrepancy will be noted.

<sup>2</sup> Not written by Joni Mitchell

just as well be any major city. The song is “*Nathan La Franeer*”<sup>1e</sup> and the scene is a girl (presumably Joni) in a taxi, on her way to the airport, escaping from the city. As she rides with Nathan, she gazes out the window and reflects on the ills of the city. She sees it as a “ghostly garden” which is fed by the misery within the city:

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

The meanness of the city life extends to the people she meets, outward resentment to compensate inward frustration:

*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*

Until as:

*You feed it all your woes  
The ghostly garden grows.*

Next she goes from social to political, this time commenting on power and war. The scene is an apprehensive view of a powerful neighbor (Canada/US perhaps) whose intentions are unknown and whose direction is frightening. The song is “*The Fiddle and the Drum*”<sup>2i</sup> and is possibly her most dramatic statement, since she sings it unaccompanied. Rather than passing judgement, her tone remains one of bewilderment to the violent reaction she gets to her question:

*And so once again you are fightin’ us all  
And when I ask you why  
You raise your sticks and cry, and I fall.*

Now her tone changes slightly to confusion; of what was, and what is:

*You say I have turned  
Like the enemies you’ve earned  
But I can remember  
All the good things you are*

Which poses the main question:

*How did you come?  
To trade the fiddle for the drum  
...  
To trade the handshake for the fist.*

This leads to outright fear:

*We have all come  
To fear the beating of your drum.*

Next she returns to social situations again, claiming in “*The Arrangement*”<sup>3f</sup> that:

*You could have been more  
Than a name on the door  
On the thirty-third floor in the air  
More than a consumer  
Lying in some room trying to die  
More than a credit card  
Swimming pool in the back yard  
You could have been more ... you could have ...*

Although the songs we have examined so far, deal only with the ills of the topics discussed, she doesn't stop here. Her ability to examine whole situations, gives her work further depth and significance. In the aptly titled “*Both Sides Now*”<sup>2j</sup> she looks at life and love from these directions, first the illusion and then the reality. The complexities of growing up in a changing world are dealt with in the “*The Circle Game*”<sup>3l</sup>; while “*California*”<sup>4f</sup> suggests that homesickness can't cover the ills that exist at home.

We also see that the nightclub scene isn't all it's supposed to be in both “*Barangrill*”<sup>5c</sup> and “*Down to You*”<sup>6g</sup>; nor is high society, as seen through “*People's Parties*”<sup>6d</sup>. Then she goes and tackles society as a whole, analogizing the ‘push-pull’, rat-race’ of society, to a very vicious “*Banquet*”<sup>5a</sup>. All in all she paints a pretty bleak picture. After you compile all of this evidence, a logical conclusion would be to escape and leave it all behind. This is where we go next.

## [Escape](#)

To Joni there are two kinds of escape; either through another person or through another situation (or set of situations). Therefore our analysis will take the following form:

1. Escape through another person or personal situation,
2. Through different circumstances or environments
3. A look at her alternate reality

### [Escape- Person](#)

Our first vehicle of escape is “*Michael from Mountains*”<sup>1b</sup>. He is able to take her from the harshness of the city life, by turning ordinary things into something special. These types of arguments get more graphic detail in “*Chelsea Morning*”<sup>2b</sup>. Here her painter's eye describes with picture post card accuracy, what morning is like with someone special:

*Woke up, it was a Chelsea morning, and the first thing that I saw  
Was the sun through yellow curtains, and a rainbow on the wall  
Blue, red, green and gold to welcome you, crimson crystal beads to beckon  
...  
If only you will stay*

This same type of paradise is again encountered in “*Morning Morgantown*”<sup>3a</sup>, the implication being that it wouldn't be so wonderful, if that certain someone wasn't there to share it with you. This is made even clearer in “*My Old Man*”<sup>4b</sup>, no implications here, she explains exactly what his absence means:

*But when he's gone*

*Me and them lonesome blues collide  
The bed's too big  
The frying pan's too wide*

But when that special someone is here, as in “*Carey*”<sup>4d</sup>, you can:

*Laugh and toast to nothing and smash our empty glasses down*

While on the other hand, if you get romantically involved, solely for pleasure, or just to escape, it is destined for failure, i.e. “*Raised on Robbery*”<sup>6i</sup>. Again we can see this “Both Sides, Now” attitude, first one side, then the other.

### Escape- Situation

This is an attempt to get lost in the glitter; hopefully losing your problems in the crowds. We first encounter this in “*Night in the City*”<sup>1c</sup>:

*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*

Her desire for contentment through this atmosphere gets a frantic plea in “*All I Want*”<sup>4a</sup>:

*Alive, alive, I want to get up and jive  
I want to wreck my stockings in some juke box dive*

Of course these attempts are destined for failure and the albums where these tracks appear expound on this failure.

### Alternate Reality

This was hinted at strongly in both “*Morning Morgantown*” and “*Chelsea Morning*”. Now it gets a thorough description in “*Sisotowbell Lane*”<sup>1f</sup>, so complete in fact that:

*Anywhere else now would seem very strange.*

It's a place where:

*Jovial neighbors come down when they will  
With stories to tell  
...  
We have a rocking chair  
Each of us rocks his share  
Eating muffin buns and berries  
,,, (and if you)*

*Go to the city you'll come back again.*

This theme is also the purpose of “*Ladies of the Canyon*”<sup>3d</sup>, only here the emphasis on her neighbors. We see how good life can be, even in the suburbs (Laurel Canyon), where all you need for paradise are the right people. Sometimes paradise isn’t a person or a place, but rather a state of mind. Joni implies this by her preoccupation with freedom … the next topic.

## Freedom

Freedom gets looked at just like her other topics, from both sides. Sometime she is the leaver, sometimes she gets left; but at all times she explores the emotions involved in the separation. Her first piece to deal with this was “*Urge for Going*”<sup>3</sup>, which although written, didn’t make it on these first 6 albums. It equates the leaving of a lover with the changing of the seasons:

*She gets the urge for going  
When the meadow grass is turning brown  
All her empire's falling down  
And winter's closing in.*

But leaving isn’t all one sided and this is where her empathy comes in to play:

*I'll lock the vagrant winter out and  
I'll bolt my wanderings in*

In “*Cactus Tree*”<sup>1j</sup> we see her as the woman who’s:

*... so busy being free*

While in “*Help Me*”<sup>6b</sup>, the situation is near equal:

*We love our lovin'  
But not like we love our freedom*

However, sometimes circumstances force separation; it can be unclear, where nothing is definite as in “*I Don’t Know Where I Stand*”<sup>2c</sup>; or it can be very clear what elements are causing the situation, as in *Conversation*”<sup>3c</sup>, where:

*I bring him apples and cheeses  
He brings me songs to play  
He sees me when he pleases  
I see him in cafes*

*And I only say hello  
And turn away before his lady knows  
How much I want to see him*

Then she branches off from this topic, into tragic love, the next section.

## Tragic Love

This section is very diverse; sometimes the songs lament for an ended relationship, sometimes for one that is ending, still other times for one that has fallen into stagnation. It is around these

---

<sup>3</sup> Atkinson “Sons of the Open Road”; ‘*Urge for Going*’ p23-24

themes that make up the bulk of her work in this examination (16 songs). Instead of covering them all, I'll try to focus on some significant topics.

We see one of her few statements about marriage ‘per se’, in “*I Had a King*” <sup>1a</sup>, which is a lament on an ended marriage:

*I had a king in a salt-rusted carriage  
Who carried me off to his country for marriage too soon  
Beware of the power of moons  
There's no one to blame.*

It is this last line that I believe distinguishes Joni from many of her contemporaries, even when hurt very badly, she refuses to point a finger. It takes a special kind of person to own up to the fact that they are also partly to blame. She really bears down on herself in “*River*” <sup>4h</sup> where she admits:

*I'm so hard to handle  
I'm selfish and I'm sad  
Now I've gone and lost the best baby  
That I ever had*

However her view of marriage as an institution gets further explored in “*My Old Man*” <sup>4b</sup>:

*We don't need no piece of paper  
From the city hall  
Keeping us tied and true*

The implication in “*I Had King*” is that her lover (husband?) was an artist of some description. Coincidentally, Joni has been involved with artists herself, with unhappy results (singers- Chuck Mitchell <ex-husband>, James Taylor, Graham Nash, David Crosby; radio personality B. Mitchell Reid). Whether or not real people are represented in her songs, who knows. One thing for sure is that artist types crop up in her work, usually at the broken end of a relationship. The fact that artists crop up in “*The Gallery*” <sup>2f</sup>, “*Rainy Night Hours*” <sup>3g</sup>, “*See You Sometime*” <sup>5g</sup> and “*Blond in the Bleachers*” <sup>5j</sup>, gives her one more vantage point from which to empathize.

Out of the ‘artist involvement’ context, a broken relationship gets a classical treatment in “*Pirate of Penance*” <sup>1h</sup>, while an apprehensive relationship gets a similar treatment in “*Dawntreader*” <sup>1g</sup>. It’s interesting to note the symbolism here, as it is of a classical, rather than a contemporary nature. The remainder of the songs in this category concern themselves not with ended relationships, but rather with:

- Skeptical Attempts-
  - *Tin Angel* <sup>2a</sup>
  - *The Priest* <sup>3h</sup>
  - *The Same Situation* <sup>6e</sup>
- Dismal Situations-
  - *Willy* <sup>3e</sup>
  - *A Case of You* <sup>4i</sup>
  - *Woman of Mind and Heart* <sup>5k</sup>
  - *You Turn me on I'm a Radio* <sup>5i</sup>
  - *Car on the Hill* <sup>6f</sup>

As mentioned earlier, it is sometimes easier to see problems when you're on the outside looking in. Joni also takes this position as she observes a friend's tragedy ... our next topic.

## Friend's Tragedy

A further lament on lost love shows here, as she watches other relationships breaking up. The first example is "*Marcie*"<sup>1d</sup>, the story of a girl waiting in the city, for a lover to return. As the story goes, he left in the summer, promising to return, so Marcie waits through the winter with no word from him, until she finally leaves also. The symbolism is very important, again she paints separation with the changing seasons and uses the city to point up loneliness. "*Blue Boy*"<sup>3i</sup> follows along similar lines, but the symbolism isn't quite as clear. The best example of a dramatic breakup is seen in the "*Little Green*"<sup>4c</sup>, where a child is concerned. The story is nothing new, only the delicate treatment it gets, puts it above the ordinary:

*He went to California  
Hearing that everything's warmer there*

The inevitable breakup occurs, but all is not lost:

*Weary of lies you are sending home  
So you sign all the papers in the family name  
You're sad and you're sorry but you're not ashamed  
Little green have a happy ending*

And somehow you believe she will.

The most abstract and symbolic examination of a relationship's many facets is "*Electricity*"<sup>5h</sup>. Here the complexities of love are equated with the complexities of electronics:

*We once loved together  
And we floodlit that time  
Input output electricity  
But the lines overloaded  
And the sparks started flying  
And the loose wires  
Were lashing out at me  
She's not going to fix that up  
Too easy*

Although many times it is in the first person that she tells her tale, I feel that Joni is merely a bystander, whom 'she' (whoever 'She' is) turns to for help:

*And she holds out her flashlight  
And she shines it on me  
She wants me to tell her  
What the trouble might be*

Joni might understand, because:

*Well I'm learning  
It's peaceful*

*With a good dog and some trees  
Out of touch with the breakdown  
Of this century*

But Joni won't be able to explain it to 'she' because:

*She don't know the system Plus  
She don't understand  
She's got all the wrong fuses and splices*

As a result:

*She's not going to fix it up  
Too easy*

So far we have been concerned with a friend's love life, but friends are a bit more complex than this. Here Joni reverts back to the questioning attitude of "*The Fiddle and the Drum*", as she shows her concern for a friend she no longer understands in "*Roses Blue*"<sup>2e</sup>:

*I think of Rose, my heart begins to tremble  
To see the place she's lately gotten to*

...

*She's gotten to mysterious devotions  
She's gotten to the zodiac and Zen  
She's gotten into tarot cards and potions  
She's laying her religion on her friends*

...

*Friends who come to ask her for their future  
Friends who come to find they can't be friends  
Because of signs and seasons that don't suit her*

Her reaction to friends mentioned in "*The Gallery*"<sup>2f</sup> that "... got into funny scenes", is one of two actions. On one hand they can disappoint and depress her as in "*Lesson in Survival*"<sup>5d</sup>:

*I went to see a friend tonight  
Was very late when I walked in  
My talking as it rambled  
Revealed suspicious reasoning  
The visit seemed to darken him  
I came in as bright  
As a neon light  
And I burned out  
Right there before him*

On the other hand they come right out and prophesy her doom as in "*The Last Time I Saw Richard*"<sup>4j</sup>:

*The last time I saw Richard was Detroit in '68  
And he told me all romantics meet the same fate someday*

*Cynical and drunk and boring someone in some dark café  
You laugh he said you think you're immune  
Go look at your eyes they're full of moon*

But the results are reassurance rather than depression and it works to strengthen her belief in herself (dark cafes are):

*Only a dark cocoon before I get my gorgeous wings and fly away  
Only a phase these dark café days*

This leads us to another aspect of her evaluation process, here Joni considers the industry that she's in, so let us consider this next.

## Industry Reflections

She starts off with a very abstract view of her industry by comparing it to a carnival with “*That Song About the Midway*”<sup>2d</sup>; she next moves on to playing for pay and the consequences in “*For Free*”<sup>3b</sup>; but she really tells the story in both “*For the Roses*”<sup>5f</sup> and “*Free Man in Paris*”<sup>6c</sup>. It is with these last two that we’ll examine this topic. Although they are both dealing with the industry, their differences is in direction. “*Roses*” is more concerned with the interaction between artist and manufacturer, while “*Paris*” concerns itself more with interaction between the artists. Let’s look at each separately.

“*For the Roses*”<sup>5f</sup> tells us what it’s like for the struggling artist to get started (notice how her painter’s eye ‘paints’ little scenes for us):

*In some office sits a poet  
And he trembles as he sings  
And he asks some guy  
To circulate his soul around*

Then the transition:

*Up the charts  
Off to the airport  
Your name's in the news  
Everything's first class*

Then the confrontations; with yourself, with the industry and with the people that make it up. Most important is the precarious position the artist is left. The whole scene of where the artist was, is now, and is going looks like this:

*Remember the days when you used to sit  
And make up your tunes for love  
And pour your simple sorrow  
To the sound-hole and your knee  
And now you're seen  
On giant screens  
And at parties for the press  
And for people who have slices of you  
From the company*

*They toss around your latest golden egg  
Speculation well who's to know  
If the next one in the nest  
Will glitter for them so*

Now this statement by other artists would seem either hypocritical or like ‘*sour grapes*’. Joni transcends this by a further examination of the process, ending with an attitude reminiscent of “Richard’s”. Here we have a bit of self-examination and some pessimistic prophesy:

*I guess I seem ungrateful  
With my teeth sunk in the hand  
That brings me things  
I really can't give up just yet  
Now I sit up here the critic  
And they introduce some band  
But they seem so much confetti  
Looking at them on my TV set  
Oh the power and the glory  
Just when you're getting a taste for worship  
They start bringing out the hammers  
And the boards  
And the nails*

There you have it, if you exchange ‘*growing up*’ with ‘*the recording industry*’, you’d have “*The Circle Game*”<sup>31</sup> all over again.

In “*Free Man in Paris*”<sup>5c</sup>, she seems to take a slightly different attitude towards her fellow artists. You seem to get the implication that they belong in the industry which they are entering. There are no more ‘*trembling poets*’, everybody seems to want to get ahead, period. In her comment, she establishes her position and reflects on her surroundings:

*Everybody's in it for their own gain  
You can't please 'em all  
There's always somebody calling you down  
I do my best  
And I do good business  
There's a lot of people asking for my time  
They're trying to get ahead  
They're trying to be a good friend of mine*

As always some self-justification must come in, you must constantly be asking why you’re here and where you are. Many times you don’t get much of an answer, but as long as you keep asking... In three lines she sums up her entire professional atmosphere and still has time to question:

*I deal in dreamers  
And telephone screamers*

*Lately I wonder what I do it for*

Then as a sort of explanation, her confrontation with reality and illusion, completes the circle:

*I was a free man in Paris  
I felt unfettered and alive  
Nobody was calling me up for favors  
No one's future to decide  
You know I'd go back there tomorrow  
But for the work I've taken on  
Stoking the star maker machinery  
Behind the popular song*

This aspect of circular situations, although implied in all her work, gets brought up very strongly here. We shall see how this remains prominent as we approach our final section. This is where Joni comments on herself and her situations.

## Personal Reflections

*“Like her voice, Joni Mitchell’s lyrics have always suggested emotional life with startling highs and lows and an attenuated middle. Just because she knows herself, she reveals how dangerous and attractive such a life can be.”<sup>4</sup>*

This I believe, is the intended end result of her work, for both her fans and herself; self-knowledge. As we have pointed out before, it's sometime easier to learn when we can watch from the sidelines. Joni's description of human problems, whether her own or someone else's, tend to expose the conflicts encountered. However, you can't learn from watching, you must participate, no matter what the consequences. If examination exposes the challenge, then experience reinforces it. That is what this final section is all about, learning lessons from experience. Again this is a bulky category (11 songs), I'll try to focus on the most significant themes.

We began our journey with the elusiveness of dreams, symbolized by the free spirit of the seagull in “Song to a Seagull”<sup>1i</sup>. We can see a conscious attempt to identify with the bird:

*My gentle relations  
Have names they must call me  
For loving the freedom  
Of all flying things*

Here we have one of the first conflicts, wanting freedom yet being shot down for trying to attain it. As a result, only our imagination can help us to escape this reality which is so stifling:

*My dreams with the seagulls fly  
Out of reach out of cry*

She now switches from the fantasy of dreams toward the reality of human problems and fears. “I Think I Understand”<sup>2g</sup> tells us that:

*Fear is like a wilderland*

---

<sup>4</sup> Christgau; “Any Old Way you Choose it”, p217

*Stepping stones or sinking sand*

However her work is a maturation process, growing up is a vital part of her personality. “*Songs to Aging Children Come*”<sup>2h</sup> admits her position while the complexities of growing up in a modern society are crystallized in “*Blue*”<sup>4e</sup>:

*Well there're so many sinking now  
You've got to keep thinking  
You can make it thru these waves  
Acid, booze, and ass  
Needles, guns, and grass  
Lots of laughs, lots of laughs  
Everybody's saying that hell's the hippest way to go  
Well I don't think so  
But I'm gonna take a look around it though*

This so far is a setting, society is seen as the background and the real action is the internal conflicts. She confronts herself with her situation in “*Judgement of the Moon and Stars*”<sup>5l</sup>, admitting that:

*Cold white keys under your fingers  
Now you're thinking  
“That's no substitute  
It just don't do it  
Like the song of a warm, warm body  
Loving your touch“*

She further explores her situation with “*Lesson in Survival*”<sup>5d</sup>, not only describing where she's at, but where she must go as well:

*But I know my needs  
My sweet tumbleweed  
I need more quiet times  
By a river flowing*

So far she has been describing her learning process. We, as she, should learn from these experiences. The analogy of herself and a train in “*Just Like This Train*”<sup>6h</sup>, enumerates some of the lessons learned or the positions realized:

*I'm always running behind the time  
Just like this train  
...  
I used to count lovers like railroad cars  
I counted them on my side  
Lately I don't count on nothing  
I just let things slide  
...  
Jealous lovin'll make you crazy*

*If you can't find your goodness  
'Cause you lost your heart*

The rest of the works in this category, more or less follow along these lines. Many of the songs are a series of thoughts, strung together by the same music and not following one central theme. A list of the songs and their categories is at the end.

The value of Joni's work lies not in the results, but rather in the procedure/process. Joni has grown up in these six albums and she has shared her learning experiences with us. The result is not that we will be able to avoid the tragedies of life, if we try to do this we will proceed too carefully. You can't let anything inhibit your emotions, as she explains in "*Willy*"<sup>3e</sup>:

*But you're bound to lose  
If you let the blues get you scared to feel*

## Summary

I believe her aim is to show us the joy of being human. This example should inspire us to remain a whole person, no matter what the consequences. It is on this point that she deviates from her tradition of subtlety. Here she comes out and confronts us with the meaning of living. So far she has been painting us pictures, implying the right and wrong of the situation. She has kept her "*Both Sides, Now*" attitude, giving a valid picture of the entire situation. Now she breaks with this tradition, laying the fact bare, an appeal to preserve the joy of being human. She ends her fifth album with this plea again in "*Judgement of the Moon and Stars*"<sup>51</sup> which is the perfect place to end this discussion:

*You've got to shake your fists at lightning now  
You've got to roar like forest fire  
You've got to spread your light like blazes  
All across the sky  
They're going to aim the hoses on you  
Show 'em you won't expire  
Not till you burn up every passion  
Not even when you die  
Come on now  
You've got to try  
If you're feeling contempt  
Well then you tell it  
If you're tired of the silent night  
Jesus well then you yell it  
Condemned to wires and hammers  
Strike every chord that you feel  
That broken trees  
And elephant ivories conceal*

## Bibliography

### Books

- Bob Atkinson     “Songs of the Open Road” (The Poetry of Folk Rock)
  - New American Library:     New York     1974
- Robert Christgau     “Any Old Way you Choose It” (Rock & Other Pop Music 1967-73)
  - Penguin Book Inc.;     Baltimore     1973
- David Morse     “Grand Father Rock” (The New Poetry and the Old)
  - Dell Publishing Co. Inc.;     New York     1972
- Lillian Roxon     “Rock Encyclopedia”
  - Grosset & Dunlap;     New York     1969
- Bob Sarlin     “Turn it Up” (I can’t hear the words)
  - Simon & Schuster;     New York     1973

### Magazines

- Christian Century     10/15/69
  - C.E.Fagen     “*Thumbs Down, Thumbs Up*”
- Look     1/27/70     p33-34
  - G. Astor     “*Joni Mitchell*”
- New Yorker     3/3/73     p104-105
  - E. Willis     “*Joni Mitchell: Still Travelling*”
- Time     4/4/69     p78+
  - “*Into the Pain of the Heart: Contemporary Folk Composer*”

### Albums

Album #	Title	Label	Number	Released
1	Song to a Seagull	Reprise	RS-6293	March 1968
2	Clouds	Reprise	RS-6341	May 1969
3	Ladies of the Canyon	Reprise	RS-6376	April 1970
4	Blue	Reprise	MS-2038	June 1971
5	For the Roses	Asylum	SD-5057	October 1972
6	Court and Spark	Asylum	7E-1001-B	January 1974

### Official Website

<http://jonimitchell.com/>

## Appendix- Songs by Category

### Political and Social Comment

Album #	Song
1	Nathan La Franeer
2	The Fiddle and the Drum
2	Both Sides, Now
3	The Circle Game
3	The Arrangement
4	California
5	Banquet
5	Barangrill
6	People's Parties
6	Down to you

### Escape

Album #	Song
1	Michael from Mountains
1	Sisotowbell Lane
1	Night in the City
2	Chelsea Morning
3	Morning Morgantown
3	Ladies of the Canyon
4	Carey
4	My Old Man
4	All I Want
6	Raised on Robbery

### Freedom

Album #	Song
1	Cactus Tree
2	I Don't Know Where I Stand
3	Conversation
6	Help Me

### Tragic Love

Album #	Song
1	I Had a King
1	Dawntreader
1	Pirate of Penance
2	The Gallery
2	Tim Angel
3	Rainy Night House
3	Willy
3	The Priest
4	A Case of You
5	See You Sometime
5	Woman of Mind and Heart
5	You Turn Me on I'm a Radio
5	Blonde in the Bleachers
6	Same Situation
6	Car on a Hill

### Friend's Tragedy

Album #	Song
1	Marcie
2	Roses Blue
3	Blue Boy
4	The Last Time I Saw Richard
4	Little Green
5	Electricity

### Industry Reflections

Album #	Song
2	That Song About the Midway
3	For Free
5	For the Roses
6	Free Man in Paris

## Personal Reflections

<b>Album #</b>	<b>Song</b>
1	Song to a Seagull
2	I Think I Understand
2	Songs to Aging Children
	Come
4	This Flight Tonight
4	River
4	Blue
5	Judgement of the Moon and Stars
5	Lesson in Survival
6	Trouble Child
6	Just Like This Train
6	Court and Spark

## Special

<b>Category</b>	<b>Album#</b>	<b>Song</b>
Generations	3	Woodstock
Generations	5	Let the Wind Carry Me
Drugs	5	Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire
Ecology	3	Big Yellow Taxi