

SILLIMAN JOURNAL



*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

T.S. Eliot (1942)
Four Quartets: Little Gidding

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IN TURBULENT INDIGO:
A LITERARY JOURNEY WITH JONI MITCHELL

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Ceres,

Since you are my imagined reader, I will tell you the framework of this summary application paper through a letter. Doing so gives a post-modernist effect, a meta effect—meta-paper!

L'écriture feminine inspired me to unsheathe my wings and take flight. You'd say, ah, how Cixous. Yes, I chose to be "arational, contrallogical, and circular" in this paper, but not necessarily Cixousian. In my judgment, it seems to be more like Meese... (I wish!)

My friend, who read this paper, asked me what was the point. I thought, it was a good start. His comment did not worry me for my friend is male and the fact that he could not "get it" may possibly confirm that I have done it, write as a woman. Also, he made the comment after I hurt his ego by writing a note to him which said, "this paper does not follow your typical male logic or phallic reasoning," among other things. But of course, he could be right, that I have actually written an incomprehensible paper. In the end, it would be your judgment that would decide it all.

Anyway, I chose Joni Mitchell just to part from the typical literary text that I have always written about. I knew her lyrics are considered poetry by many and the music would add to the feel or tone of the paper I was writing.

Remember I mentioned to you Geoff Dyer's talk about imaginative criticism? I aimed for the same. What Dyer did in *But Beautiful* was he fused the novel with music criticism. Since I did not have the time or the resources to do the same, I decided to fuse criticism writing with non-fiction narratives. I had a special affinity with the personal essay and I wanted to use that strength in writing the summary application paper.

I put together several theories that we discussed in class, it is like taking the word 'summary' literally. Whatever theory the Joni

Mitchell text or my narratives were open to, I absorbed it in the paper.

The framework of this paper, though, is largely Post-Structuralism, Deconstruction, Post-Modernism, and Feminism. I wanted to deviate from the typical scholarly paper and put some mush, some schmaltz into this project. I like what Dyer wrote in his introduction. He talked about how in criticism, one would discover that there are not enough jargon to capture everything and that most of the time one will have to resort to metaphors, symbols, narratives... elements found in creative writing.

In poetry, I learned that either you come from a center and move outwards (centrifugal) or from the periphery moving in (centripetal). I chose the latter. My friend said, "So it is opposite of the shit hitting the fan..." What could I say but, "Yeab, it's more like you take a video of the, uh, shit, hitting the fan, and then you play it backwards." So it is my hope that the paper had actually reached a center, that the elements I had infused in it, had come together in the end. Well, I could always give the excuse that I wrote using stream of consciousness. You know, wallowing and never arriving at a center and knowing that it is the point.

Ayvi

Oh what do you know about
*Living in Turbulent Indigo?*¹

When postmodernism killed the author, it did not spare the critic. Everyone is getting killed these days. Back in college we killed a god in a poetry reading. Nietzsche only said that god is dead. That was just an observation. We made it happen on stage to the tune of *The Grateful Dead*.

My friends, Pastorius

and Satriani, called me Pollyanna. I was looking through rose-tinted glasses they said. I was Catholic. I adored Monet. I had *The Ascent* at Mount Carmel in my bag. I wrote with blue pens. They called me a girl and my body did not enfeeble nor threaten them. As far as they were concerned, I was asexual—like an angel. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar² explained what being an angel

meant. I was trapped in one of the double-binds which has evolved to keep women in their place. There were only two things I could have been: "angel" or "monster." In their eyes, I was not Error, or Lucifera, or Medea but I was Beatrice, or Beth, or worse, the Virgin Mary.

I was the transcendent, angel figure. My waking up in the arms of a stranger in a cheap motel was an absurd joke. After all, it was something I could never do because I was, yes, an angel. I could have done it just to prove a point yet it would merely be a crossing over to the other side. If I were not an angel, then I must be a monster.

Simone de Beauvoir identified five myths of women: flesh, nature, poetry, mediatrix, and immanence.³ She saw all the five classifications in five authors namely, Montherlant, Lawrence, Claudel, Breton and Stendhal. Of the five, Montherlant is the blackest swine. Imagine a man who, in the words of de Beauvoir, "likes war because in war one gets rid of women,"

and tell me what do you see? Exactly! "For Montherlant transcendence is a situation: he is the transcendent, he soars in the sky of heroes; woman crouches on earth; beneath his feet; it amuses him to measure the distance that separates him from her; from time to time he raises her up to him; takes her, and then throws her back; never does he lower himself down to her realm of slimy shadows."⁴

Angels are supposedly mute creatures. An angel could not sing a Joni Mitchell song. Pastorius and Satriani gathered around a mermaid and taught her how to sing Joni while I stayed at the far side of the living room strumming Lisa Loeb's *Stay*. The mermaid had hair to her waist and shells that held her breasts while I was practically wearing a cassock and pathetic white wings. My friends were sea-men and they had to respond to her siren calls. The only time Pastorius ever helped me out with any indigo turbulence was with his playing the guitar while I sang about Pink Floyd's *two lost souls swimming in a fish bowl year af-*

ter year. That song is Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*! It is Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* set into music. A woman would know how it is to live in a fish bowl, to be trapped; it is to live in Turbulent Indigo.

* * *

You wanna make Van Goghs...

Joni's jacket cover for *Turbulent Indigo* was her self-portrait which spoofed Van Gogh's famous 1889 self-portrait. The painting must have opened discussions in art reproduction, an issue that has come to the attention of critics. Did she paint her self-portrait or did she reproduce Van Gogh's? Was it Joni as Van Gogh or Van Gogh as Joni? You know a Van Gogh when you see one, so was the painting a Van Goghed Joni or a Jonied Van Gogh? Between Joni Mitchell and Vincent Van Gogh, which is the noun and which is the adjective?

Critics have not agreed over the issue of art reproductions. Cynthia Ozzick addressed that issue in her story

Puttermesser Paired.⁵ In this story a fifty year old woman re-lives, to some literal extent, the lives of George Eliot and George Lewes with a copyist by the name of Rupert Rabeeno. They actually met in a museum after Rupert, to the astonishment of his audience, made a copy of Jacques-Louis David's "Death of Socrates." Puttermesser asks Rupert, "Shouldn't you begin with a new idea?" To which Rupert responds with, "Whatever I do is original. Until I've done them my things don't exist."

Joni's re-interpretation of van Gogh is original in that sense. The effect Joni produced is different from the meaning found in the original Van Gogh. In an article in *Vogue* by Charles Gandee,⁶ Joni's painting reflected "her black comedy...her ironic allusion." What Joni has done is of course far from being considered as forgery since her work never posed as a substitute for the original. But the openness of a work of art to adaptation or even alteration by recent artists is a good location for discourse.

In the same article, Joni expressed her concern that people might miss the point, "It's true, a lot of people don't know what a Van Gogh painting looks like, so they're not going to get a big guffaw off of it." The sensibility of today's art consumers may not be so rooted in the classicism or modernism of canonical art. Pierre Bourdieu points to the direction of social class and education as determinants of competence in "decoding" the message in a work of art. As he argues, "consumption is, in this case, a stage in a process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code."⁷ Even as Joni Mitchell is identifiable with popular music, certain characteristics or subtleties in her craft may just go unnoticed.

For example, there is a Derridian quality to what she has created. We can assume that Vincent Van Gogh and Joni Mitchell are binary oppositions and Joni's painting is a deconstruction of that structure. It is the fusion of the du-

alities: Mitchell-woman-alive-novice/Van Gogh-man-dead-master. In this painting you can see that the seeming oppositions are really components of each other. These dualities are really unities up to the bandaged ear. This leads us back to Ozick. Puttermesser insists on the duplicity of Rupert's copies, "A painting isn't alive." Rupert answers, "Well, I am—that's the point. Whatever I do is happening for the first time. Anything I make was never made before." Between Van Gogh and Joni, she is at an advantage because she is the one alive, the one still creating—in the same way woman eclipses man because *Feminisms* are alive and whatever opposes it does not have a name and must be dying if not paralyzed.

* * *

I found Joni's *Hits* in a record store. I bought it without second thoughts. My only regret was I could not find *Mises*. There was something so New Critical about those twin albums. It was ironic that Joni got run over by the songs that

hit the charts.

I got to know her through the songs that "killed" her. Anyway, I revived my walkman by feeding it two new batteries and Joni and I talked without Pastorius nor Satriani knowing. She told me this story.

*Yesterday a child came out to wonder
Caught a dragonfly inside a jar
Fearful when the sky was full of
thunder
And tearful at falling of the star...*

*Sixteen springs and sixteen summers
gone now
Cartwheels turn to car wheels thru
the town
And they tell him, take your time,
it won't be long now
Till you drag your feet to slow the
circles down*

*So the years spin by and now the
boy is twenty
Though his dreams have lost some
grandeur coming true
There'll be new dreams, maybe better
dreams and plenty
Before the last revolving year is
through.*

And the seasons they go round and

round

*And the painted ponies go up and
down
We're captive on the carousel of time
We can't return, we can only look
behind from where we came
And go round and round in the
circle game.*

Mikhail Bakhtin⁸ said that we are in a carnival with all the dizzying parades and palavers of meaning: "We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of 'inside-out,' of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings." Joni extends that analogy a little by saying that yes we are in a carnival but look, we are not even on our feet. We are all in this merry-go-round together. The merry-go-round is the perfect carnival mechanism that illustrates Bakhtinian festivity for does it not go up and down and around and around? Imagine my friend Pastorius with his stringy body, long hair and goatee on a pink pony. Then

there is my friend Satriani with his receding hairline and pot-belly on a yellow one. Of course there is the mermaid with her seaweed hair and silver scales on a black seahorse. And Joni, Van Gogh, Ozick, de Beauvoir, Georges Eliot and Lewes... Montherlant not on a pony but on a pig... And then there would be me in my nightgown and chicken wings...going round and round...

I saw the blur of colors and faces. And if ever I picked up anything remarkably familiar, I turned to look and felt the strain behind my neck all the way the stretch of my back to my waist. But there was really nothing, just a blur and a dizziness that would not go away. There was only the bend up ahead.

And as Joni told me the story of the boy who caught a dragonfly (I read somewhere that Joni wrote the song for Neil Young), I immediately thought of my friends Pastorius and Satriani. They had gone past the twenty seasons. This song has stopped telling their story a long time ago.

When I asked Pastorius

about Joni's *The Circle Game* and enthusiastically expressed my complete enchantment over that song, he simply said it is one of Joni's popular songs and that people play it during children's pre-school graduation. He added that he listens to Joni not because of it and that she has written far better songs. It was so Bourdieu. I knew what he was saying being the musician that he was. I had mainstream tastes. *Circle Game* was as far as my education could make me understand. In my mind I still believed pre-school graduation was the most fitting occasion for the song. I closed my eyes and tried to imagine what my painted pony looked like.

* * *

Dear Pastorius,

-By the way, do you remember that night at Caribana with Carlo and the three of us were making a list of the fifty books that we would take to the moon? It occurs to me now that what we were doing was forging our own canon. You know that the question of the canon is one very controversial issue. We were treading on highly

political ground. When we meet again, remind Carlo to bring that list. I need to count how many women, Asian and black writers we included in it. We need to discuss any form of marginalization that we shamelessly committed. We did vow to go over that list once a year.

Thank you for the Joni tapes that you gave me. I am waiting for more.

Ayvi

* * *

We were at a bar called Naked Ear, which was three blocks away from UST. This was a time when the peripheral areas of UST did not look like Malate yet. It was just one of those old tiny Sampaloc houses which was remade into a bar. Naked Ear was not a sleazy joint but it was not exquisite either. For Pastorius and Satriani, it was a museum. For me, it was the house of my decadence, one of the first few beer joints where I suffered my first bouts of inebriation.

It was really a museum though for on the walls of this lowly bar were framed black

and white photographs of earlier jazz masters. There was John Coltrane leaning on a stool with his alto saxophone in hand and Miles Davis in a very languid pose as if seducing his brass woman. You would be, in a drunken stupor, hunched over your beer and Ella Fitzgerald would be looking over your shoulder. Yes, we found ourselves transported back in time. Who could help it when just above Satriani's head would be Billie Holiday smiling down on you like a dark angel?

It was the music after all which we went there for. The jazz masters were not only pictures hung on the beige walls. Naked Ear was anachronistic and through it we got transported back into their world as we listened to them play their music, creating the illusion of the smoky jazz bars of old.

Naked Ear was also a lying-in clinic for me. It was in this place where John Coltrane fell on my lap like a shiny, slippery baby, newly-born and immaculate. It was Pastorius who wrote *India* on tissue and it was

he who gently tapped my shoulder and said, "Hey, listen to this one."

I saw snakes draped on the steps going up the mezzanine, snakes nudging at my feet as they slithered under me, snakes curling up on the ledge by the window. They were of all colors, blue and green and yellow, black and brown and red and of course, indigo...

I felt like Coltrane was just in one dark corner of Naked Ear blowing his life into the saxophone. I felt smoke purl on the floor like sea froth and curl around my legs like tiny wavelets. The music rose to my thighs and around my hips like rising tide. I swam that night in the rivers of Coltrane's *India*.

"They don't have it."

Pastorius' voice bounced off the liquid surface of my trance. He was saying he asked for another song but they could not play it because the compact disc was with the owner of the bar. He turned to me and said, "If you liked *India*, you might like *Hejira* better. It is by a woman." He flashed his knowing, but at

that time to me, rather condescending, semi-smile, proud to let me know that he had become well aware of my growing feminist sensibilities.

* * *

What would my essentialist feminist sisters say if I tell them that my friend, Pastorius, a man, really knows my soul well? I know Hélène Cixous would not mind because Pastorius is one of the many sons of James Joyce, having read the whole of *Ulysses* and half of *Finnegan's Wake* and understood. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan parenthetically pointed out Cixous' observation, "It should be noted that for writers like Cixous, feminine writing also characterizes the work of male writers like Joyce."¹⁰ And so when I said Pastorius understands my soul, I also meant my woman-soul.

I listened to the tape that Pastorius gave me as a going-away-again present. He said that side A of that tape was his "*Hits*" and that Side B of it was his "*Misses*". What he did was he, using the term quite

loosely, deconstructed the Joni Mitchell *Hits* and *Misses* albums and put together his own version.

I scanned the listing. *Hejira* was in his *Misses*. That meant Pastorius thought it should have been a hit if only people knew what to listen to or how to listen. And so I listened, intent on going beyond the *Circle-Game*-Joni-Mitchell that I knew. Perhaps I even listened too well and too hard....

It is magical how the first strains of the song enter your ear one after the other. First, your right ear. Then, your left. Then the music hits you as the notes, coming together, are measured by a plucked string and held by taps on drums struck from far away.

And then the words, or more aptly, the poetry starts flowing.

I'm travelling in some vehicle

I'm sitting in some café

A defector from the petty wars

That shell shock love away

I have associated bus rides with music. I have gone all the way to Nueva Vizcaya

with Sheryl Crow and farther North to Pangasinan with Enya. I even have crossed a sea and went to Palawan with Tori Amos. I have lived in Zamboanga with Tuck and Patti. Now here I am in Dumaguete with Joni Mitchell. It is not only the geographies that could designate the changes that have happened in me neither could the miles measure how far I have gone from who I had been. The music is the motif of my journeys and the singers are the bards of my stories.

In my travelling, I have been a deserter. I have hid in the buses, in the ships, in the planes. I have hid in the anonymity of being a stranger. I have run away from trivial battles that destroyed for me many beliefs, many friendships. Journeys necessitate loneliness. In loneliness, I have dodged pains.

There's comfort in melancholy

When there's no need to explain

It's just as natural as the weather

In this moody sky today

Clifford Chase, in his

article *Trouble Child*, wrote, "There are two kinds of people in the world: those who find Joni Mitchell depressing, and those who, already depressed, find her comforting."¹¹ I do not think I am depressed. I find in her simply, accuracy, and there is nothing depressing about accuracy. Melancholy is comforting. It is steady and even—and yes, oh yes, natural, like the weather.

*In our possessive coupling
So much could not be expressed
So now I'm returning to myself
These things that you and I sup-
pressed...*

We hold out from ourselves and from our families, lovers, and friends so much. It took the context of lesbian love to recognize how much we lose when we are not careful with how we express what we feel. For Hélène Cixous the body is the word. This idea is taken to its limit as Elizabeth Meese saw the difficulty in that equation. "There is no properly spoken body, no body properly speaking, it being always 'more' or 'less.' We speak it improperly

as an always imperfect translation, a bad match of flesh and word, but also as a violation of the law, its spirit if not its letter, identity and language."¹² What is possessive coupling but an ignorance of the difficulty of expression and interpretation. On both ends, the word-flesh never meets. Neither words nor touch could quite articulate the idea and neither the ears nor the skin could quite decipher what is needing to be said.

*You know it never has been easy
Whether you do or you do not re-
sign
Whether you travel the breadth of
extremities
Or stick to some straighter line*

I have kept on telling everybody. Whether I stay with them or leave them, it is the same. I chose not to give up that which I owed myself and if it seemed to mean that it is them whom I have given up, then that means I have chosen the breadth of extremities and not the straighter line. In this era of extreme contradiction or extreme relativity, one can

barely distinguish oppositions. Jacques Derrida has deconstructed all dualities to be unities. The mere fact that taking the straighter line is as difficult a decision as going the breadth of extremities shows they are the same after all.

*I'm porous with travel fever
But you know I'm so glad to be on
my own
Still somehow the slightest touch of
a stranger
Can set up trembling in my bones*

Maybe the thought that my journeys terrify me never occurred to them. Sometimes I reeled with the height or the expanse before me. During long bus rides I would sit sleeping and feverish, my head bobbing between sleep and wakefulness. Bus rides are like momentary paralyzes, the body sleeps but the mind is awake. Yet for the body to awaken from a bad dream into new territory is the bliss I merit and the kind of joy that justifies me. And to alienate oneself deliberately from places or people welcomes familiarities that could never be described. In

intimacy, a kind of solace is lost. In my journeys, I find it in strangers.

*I know—no one's going to show me
everything
We all come and go unknown
Each so deep and superficial
Between the forceps and the stone*

If there is somebody who can show me everything, it is myself. They have their own lives. Do I still assume that they owe me anything? I have lost friends. They have come to me and I, to them, deeply. Now they have gone and I have gone, unknown. Sometimes I think of them and I can not remember. Sometimes I think of them and I mourn.

*Well I looked at the granite markers
Those tribute to finality — to eternity
And then I looked at myself here
Chicken scratching for my immortality*

My friend Jupiter says that he wants to travel, just like me. But unlike me, he says he does not want to stay in one place for a long time. He says if some people go around look-

ing at churches, or resorts or hotels, he wants to tour cemeteries. Graves are sometimes granite markers, too. Finality? Eternity? It seems Joni does not want to be certain. Well, we shouldn't be. But how does one chicken scratch for immortality? I am pecking at metaphors, and lining them up like seeds.

*We're only particles of change I know, I know
Orbiting around the sun
But how can I have that point of view
When I'm always bound and tied to someone*

Why does Joni insist on that phrase, "I know"? It must mean something. As Boris Eichenbaum, paraphrasing Osip Brik, wrote, "...repetition in verse is analogous to tautology in folklore, that is, that repetition in these instances plays some aesthetic role in its own right."¹³ Is it a musical necessity, an expression of doubt and she needs to convince herself, a chant to make it come true? It has the same

reverberating, hypnotizing effect as Frost's *And miles to go before I sleep! And miles to go before I sleep*. She repeats that phrase as a plea. We must believe her that we are miniscule entities thrown around by forces of the fickle universe. We must learn to move with these forces. Any relationship is contradictory to these energies, relationships need immobility and uniformity no matter what idealists would say.

*I'm travelling in some vehicle
I'm sitting in some café
A defector from the petty wars
Until love sucks me back that way*

To come full circle, to return—and one can only know this if one has actually moved. Joni says, *some vehicle, some café*. Specificity can show affinity and one can not be attached if one knows that there is a need to come full circle.

In AD 622, Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina to evade persecution and that event ushered in the Muslim era, the Hejira. When I recall my reasons for leaving, I, too, feel like I have escaped persecution, that I have

journeyed to a more sympathetic place. But sometimes I think of T. S. Eliot tapping on my soul like a ghost saying, *We will never cease from exploration! But the end of our journeys will be! To arrive where we started! And know the place for the first time.*

* * *

*I've got a blue motel room
With a blue bedspread
I've got the blues inside and outside my head
Will you still love me
When I call you up when I'm down...¹⁴*

The last time I visited Satriani, he was singing this song. I answered, "Of course I would still love you even if you, drunk and obnoxious, would call me at two o'clock in the morning." Even when I was still in Manila, Satriani would simply disappear for days and then would suddenly call me at home during the wee hours of the morning. We were friends after all. He bore the furtive glances from people who would mistake him for a cradle snatcher as he would give me a light hug. It was I

who converted him to vegetarianism, although since I left he had become a meat-eater as a means of spiting a previous relationship. He was my tutor in Jazz 101, the one who would translate the difficult language of jazz for me. With Satriani and me, we would always begin and end with Joni every time we met and parted and met and parted. Of us three, Joni was closest to him for he named his daughter Joni.

* * *

Joni Mitchell was, foremost, a folk singer and even as she has made a crossover to jazz, the old Joni would of course never disappear. Satriani, Pastorius and I were literature majors after all and our affinity with Joni Mitchell was also because of her words, just like the affinity of literature with folk music.

Joni wrote songs about leaving, going somewhere, just somewhere... Don't we all have the *urge for going*? If only we are like ducks then we could fly south when winter comes. But we are wingless and we

have to do with the mere dream of summer all year long. Lorrie Moore has a story, *Lucky Ducks*.¹⁵ It is about a gay couple going on a road trip and staying in a hotel where people gather around to wait for the ducks flying in for summer. Ducks would return to the same place and when the hotel was built, they continued to roost there. People made it into a tradition and even rolled out red carpets as soon as they knew the ducks would come flying in. Yes, there are lucky ducks and we are mere, unlucky people. See

the geese...flapping and racing on before the snow... They got the urge for going and they got the wings so they could go...¹⁶

If we could not fly away then maybe we could skate away but we would need a river for that. *Oh, I wish I had a river! I could skate away on! I wish I had a river so long! I would teach my feet to fly...¹⁷*

* * *

Joni's music was not only poetry, it could tell stories,

too. Joni sang my life in many ways, the way art would always almost inevitably feel like it singles us out from everybody else.

*I know you don't like weak women
You get bored so quick
And you don't like strong women
'Cause they're hip to your tricks'¹⁸*

I fell in love with one of those men who read and liked Norman Mailer. It would only be several years later that Kate Millet would warn me about Mailer and the men who love him: "Mailer's *An American Dream* is a rallying cry for a sexual politics in which diplomacy has failed and war is the last political resort of a ruling caste that feels its position in deadly peril."¹⁹ I should have seen his lugging around *An American Dream* as a warning to the danger that would pounce on me. It seems that all of my love affairs were fought on the battlegrounds of politics. Like Joni, I had my James Taylors and Graham Nashes. I had my share of coyotes²⁰, too.

*And we're dancing close and slow
Now he's got a woman at home*

He's got another woman down the ball...

Yes, men are too often like coyotes. Women just have to stand up, brush their skirts and walk away. Ophelia Alcantara-Dimalanta has a poem about foregoing the risk of pain, better to be spared from loving, severing all bonds, cutting clean, one is less bound to be broken, less bereaved, little violated... *martyrs have such short shelf lives.*²¹ From martyrdom to indifference, we just have to stop taking it too personally and see men the way Joni does. They are coyotes jumping straight up and making passes! *He had those same eyes.* They just have to chase a prize down and treat you like a prey. I would have wanted to turn around and shoot my coyote in the face but I looked him in the eye instead, packed my bags and said:

*No regrets coyote
I just get off up aways
You just picked up a hitcher
A prisoner of the white lines of the freeway.*

Although at times to be strong meant to be callous. One would think hurt people

are the last ones to inflict pain on others but no... There is the tendency to overdo fortifying one's defenses. As much as the worst men have hurt me, I have hurt the best of them.

*But 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...
Oh I wish I had a river
I made my good baby say goodbye²²*

* * *

It is not just my stories though that Joni tells. In the three decades of her career she has told all our stories and commented on our histories. Joni has the eye for the ironic, the amusing and the tragic. In *The Sire of Sorrow*,²³ Joni sings the mind of Job, the most beloved and most unfortunate of God's sons.

Let me speak, let me spit out my bitterness —

Born of grief and nights without sleep and festering flesh

Do you have eyes?

Can you see what mankind sees?

*Why have you soured and curdled me?
Oh you tireless watcher! What
have I done to you?
That you make everything I dread
and everything I fear come true?*

What this song does is to point out that we are all Jobs, punished by God and tortured by the forces of the world. The song reflects our fears that perhaps God does not care or that he never even bothers to listen. Joni stands out there in the open fields and dares the lightnings, *Tell me why do you starve the faithful! Why do you crucify the saints? And you let the wicked prosper...* This lone voice, this warrior that dares to speak out the sorrows of the world before God sums up what freethinkers of the past have taught us. The song, though, has a call and response structure. Between the lines are retorts from what Joni identifies as antagonists.

*Why give me light and then this
dark without dawn?
(Antagonists: Evil is sweet in your
mouth
Hiding under your tongue)*

People can not fully believe that they are good, that they have dignity worth the entire universe. There is the little voice, also a person's voice, that tells us we are evil, sinners, and that we are sires of sorrow and have no right to face God. Do we ask forgiveness from God? Louise Gluck defines forgiveness, *Do you know! what forgiveness means? It means! the world has sinned, the world! must be pardoned—*And to be pardoned, man must be punished first? And what is the sin, in the first place?

* * *

*It may be that we shall
even be able to retire sex from the
harsh realities of politics, but not
until we have created a world we
can bear out of the desert we in-
habit.*²⁴

We may never know what is *humankind's* greatest sin but women can tell you *man's*. For Hélène Cixous: "Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their im-

mense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs."²⁵ It is true, the cruelest detractors of women are women—other women or themselves. But Joni, refusing to be destroyed, faced women's predicaments squarely as she sang songs which reflected her own life. In *Magdalene Laundries*,²⁶ she comes so close to her own life as she sang the story of a twenty-seven year old woman who got pregnant out of wedlock. Joni got pregnant in her early twenties and gave up the child, her daughter, for adoption. Joni bravely sings her story, women's stories, *Branded as a jezebel! I knew I was not bound for Heaven! I'd be cast in shame! Into the Magdalene Laundries.* It is in the *Magdalene Laundries* where women are *trying to get things white as snow.*

Pregnancy is a seeding. Men do not only seed. They could plow through your body, too. In *Not to Blame*²⁷, Joni speaks to a wife-beater, *The story hit the news! From coast to*

*coast! They said you beat the girl!
You loved the most.*²⁸ When a woman gets bruised or bleeds, the reaction would be it is her fault and she deserved it. Joni became that woman in her song and she refused to merely receive all the blows, *I bleed — / for your perversity — / These red words that make a stain! On your white-washed claim that! She was out of line! And you were not to blame.*

* * *

Clifford Chase²⁹ wrote a deeply personal essay about Joni Mitchell and the history of his sadness. While I read his essay, I felt like I was comforting one of my gay friends, cradling his head on my lap and finding solace in each other. Joni's songs passed between people's relationships and separations. Chase mentioned about coming across a Joni Mitchell line in an obituary:

Jim.
*"Show them you won't expire
not till you burn up every passion
not even when you die."*
—the Other Jim.

Clifford puts the feeling into words for both of us, *a pleasure so private and so out of style that I wouldn't have dreamed anyone else shared it...* It is through her music that people, complete strangers to each other, find a raw connection.

Icons come and go or have never seemed to come or go at all. What many gays and lesbians today don't know is what Chase discovered himself, that "Lots of fags still love her. And dykes, too. They're [We're] her most loyal fans." Joni crossed barriers. She lived poor and she lived rich. She painted herself as Van Gogh and got on the cover of her album as a black man.³⁰ She could be woman, man, gay or lesbian, *I see something of myself in everyone! Just at this moment of the world*³¹

Chase saw Joni as a gay icon. He enumerated songs which to him had gay content. Yet the most lucid of all his stories was about an impersonation of Joni which was done by an actor during a gay rights demonstration. The last song was *Woodstock*.

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

*By the time we got to Wigstock
We were half a million strong
And everywhere there was song and
celebration...*

*And I dreamed I saw the drag
queens
And they were all dressed up like
maids
And they had the cure for AIDS
Across every nation*

Chase wrote:

*It began to rain again...
I held back tears, putting up my
umbrella. My brother had been sick
maybe a year now; he was dy-
ing.... Everything has intersected
in that hushed moment, just before
the rain began: my old love for the
song; my slightly ironic love for it
now; and the new, daily sadness
that this music might now soothe.*

*She had gone thoroughly out
of style, in part, because introspec-
tion went thoroughly out of style...
But grief is private as well as
political... And anyway, Joni has
kept on singing all these years...*

*somehow she kept going, she made
it through these waves...*

Yes, Clifford Chase is right. Joni Mitchell would always manage to mutate so as to fit in, remain significant even in the *quairest* circumstances. Sometimes, I would listen to *Both Sides Now* and chuckle thinking that if deconstructionists³² would have an anthem, this would be it.

*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...*

* * *

*No mercy Sweet Jesus!
No mercy from Turbulent Indigo.*

Joni has a pet cat by the name of Nietzsche. Even as she had been one of those who were anti-intellectual, she could never quite learn how to be in-

ane. An interview proved that Nietzsche was not only her cat as she quoted from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, "the poet is the vainest of the vain... he muddies his waters that he may appear deep."

Sometimes I would go around town with Joni Mitchell singing for me, and only for me and I would have a certain look on my face. It is difficult to describe one's face. Joni had to use Van Gogh's self-portrait to be able to know the expression on her own face. Maybe it is Van Gogh who knows about faces....

In the end, what have I gathered? My stories, my metaphors, my soul, and all the colorful people who have helped me muddy the waters. Was there really a theory, a philosophy, an art that could put order in chaos? What about Joni's art? Nah, Joni's *Turbulent Indigo* thrives in it. In the confusion and anguish, one must never beg for mercy.

