

## “Dreams and False Alarms”: Melancholy in the Work of Joni Mitchell

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The twenty-first century opened with a renewed interest in melancholy that has continued well into its second decade (Radden 2000, 2009, 2013; Burton 2001; Réunion des musées nationaux 2005; Schwenger 2006; Bowring 2008; Wilson 2008; Holly 2013). Melancholy suggests “a turbulence of heart that results in an active questioning of the status quo, a perpetual longing to create new ways of being and seeing” (Wilson 2008, 8). Joni Mitchell’s music frequently depicts melancholy in its swings of narrative theme and emotional expression. However, this chapter is interested in identifying additional musical strategies that produce a subtler register of melancholy in Mitchell’s work. This register specifically comprises oppositions of lyric and tonality; the figure of the lone traveler in an isolated landscape and a persistent and audible undertone of restlessness. Such melancholic elements are often in tension with other emotional registers within Mitchell’s music. Using “Amelia” (1976) as a case study, the final segment of this chapter shows how Mitchell deploys all three tropes (opposition, travel, and restlessness) to build a layered meditation on the lived experience of melancholy.

Contemporary definitions of melancholy associate it broadly with sorrow, rather than the more limited and Freudian notion of loss, which attributes melancholy’s unrest only to the conflation of the self with a lost love object (Freud 1957, 159). Sorrow is not to be confused with mere sadness, which looks back, regretful and defeated. Although Mitchell’s music indeed captures moments of sadness, to call it “sad” as a whole overlooks the range of its expression.<sup>1</sup> The melancholic shares with the Daoist concept of yin and yang

a tendency to see life events in oppositional pairs, each carrying the seeds of the other—a philosophy Mitchell has herself referenced.<sup>2</sup> But resolution of those oppositions eludes the melancholic, yielding ongoing emotional turmoil rather than any lasting balance.

Mitchell's work often describes the melancholic's unease and, particularly, the artist's specifically melancholic torments: "You're in that continual conflict with yourself, you know. You can express these really high and beautiful thoughts but your life may not back them up" (Marom 2014, 87). Her own life has been marked dramatically by uncertainty and death.<sup>3</sup> And like the melancholic, she requires solitude: "I need a lot of time, solitary time. Ideally, I would like to be able to withdraw into a corner in a room full of people and work."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, critics have often depicted Mitchell as a melancholic. For example, Eric G. Wilson places Mitchell alongside Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Each "endures the limbo. Each grasps the secret marriage of sorrow and joy. Each creates out of this insight original products" (Wilson 2008, 101).

## The color blue

Mitchell's most critically acclaimed album, *Blue* (1971), references the color associated with the mood of melancholy since medieval times (Bowring 2008, 141–206). As an album, *Blue* performs the melancholic's search for resolution across its wide canvas, where experiences range from joy amid moments of hurt and anger ("All I Want"), a paean to a carefree Mediterranean frolic ("Carey"), to the depths of drug addiction ("Blue"), and the loss of a child ("Little Green"—generally accepted as a reference to Mitchell's daughter, Kelly, whom she gave up for adoption).<sup>5</sup> The final track ("The Last Time I Saw Richard") conjures despair, frustration, and loss, describing two lives that have moved apart—the story told from the shadowy space of an unnamed café. *Blue* has also frequently been read as the product of an intense period of melancholy in Mitchell's personal life (Yaffe 2017, 40, 142).

Mitchell has also specifically invoked or described melancholy in her lyrics. In the later "Hejira," from the album of the same name, its narrator makes vivid references to the harsher physical artifacts of life and death (1976). "Nothing

Can Be Done" (1991) is both desperate and resigned in its description of aging; "Chinese Café/Unchained Melody" (1982) despairs of life's changeability, and its final lines ask where time goes. "The Sire of Sorrow (Job's Sad Song)" (1994) elects "sorrow" for its chorus. But to hear these songs merely as singular expressions of melancholy obscures the musical strategies that make up its presence in more layered combinations of tone, melody, and lyric.

### "Chords of Inquiry"

While *Blue's* tonalities arguably match their lyric message, throughout Mitchell's other work particular combinations of chord and lyric, as well as the decoupling of their emotional coloring, produce keener expressions of melancholy. Mitchell employs a range of tonal strategies to alter or challenge lyrical assertions. Her tonalities express mood through the harmonics of chord and melody, the relative continuity and repetition of melodic line between verses, and the presence or lack of resolution in individual chords. At points in Mitchell's compositions, tonality enhances the uncertainty of the accompanying lyric, its meaning at once hopeful and despairing; at other times, songs contain rich harmonies and simple melodies that contradict their dark lyrical content. Certain scholars of Mitchell's music have called the effect that of duality or uncertainty (Whitesell 2008, 218; Bennighof 2010, 178) but they also recognize in it an overarching strategy, in terms that themselves invoke melancholy.<sup>6</sup>

Most frequent within this strategy is Mitchell's use of suspended chords.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes describing these as "chords of inquiry,"<sup>8</sup> Mitchell has said that "using them a lot is like keeping you in the state of no resolution," and she frequently pairs them with lyrics that convey uncertainty, delay, and futility (Marom 2014, 166). In its basic form, the suspended chord omits its third tone, one way in which the ear identifies the tonality of that chord, for example, as major or minor (Whitesell 2008, 18–19). That omission creates audible uncertainty that reinforces the lyrics' figuring of suspended, ambivalent states (Marom 2014; Whitesell 2008, 134–135). For example, in "The Last Time I Saw Richard" (*Blue*), the narrator dwells on her past encounter with Richard, while

he has moved on to a marriage that has brought him boredom and alcoholism. Ending with the words “café days,” describing the liminal space of darkness and anonymity, a sustained suspended chord adds to this phrase deliberately uncertain sound, moving in its final bars from Gsus2 to B minor.<sup>9</sup> Tonality here deepens the lyrics’ suggestion of a phase of painful indecision.

Mitchell’s opposition of lyric and tonality further express a sense of melancholy. Like melancholy itself, suspended chords load questions onto otherwise seemingly forthright lyrics. In particular, suspended seventh chords add an extra dissonance to uncertainty: the ear hears the jarring note below the root’s octave, while lacking the confirmation of the tonal third. Mitchell has noted that she uses tonality to change the meaning of lyrics, and suspended sevenths do just that (Marom 2014, 166). Frequently and effectively, Mitchell pairs suspended sevenths with regular rhyming verse to destabilize the verse’s meaning. One of her most well-known compositions, “Both Sides, Now” (*Clouds*), uses this strategy to infuse the song with the melancholic’s questioning, using the figure of illusion versus reality to muse upon the quandaries of space, affection, and time. The suspended seventh lingers behind each point of uncertainty: Mitchell’s spare studio recording ends each verse with the voice sustained against two measures of guitar at B7sus that finally resolve to E.<sup>10</sup> “Woodstock” (*Ladies of the Canyon*, 1970) employs a similar technique.<sup>11</sup> The song’s chorus is predominantly A7sus, resolving only to E minor.<sup>12</sup> The use of the suspended seventh makes audible the song’s hopeful, but as yet unrealized, dreams.

Other artists dropped the tonal challenge of the suspended sevenths in covering these works. Judy Collins omitted Mitchell’s message of melancholy in her fast-paced hit cover of “Both Sides, Now” in 1967, her high clear voice briskly upbeat, the musical production overwhelming the suspended sevenths with skipping harpsichord, lush strings in major tonalities, and, in the last verse, the entry of a playful chime.<sup>13</sup> When Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young released their version of “Woodstock” in 1970, major chords replaced Mitchell’s suspended sevenths.<sup>14</sup> Scholar Jon Andersen, noting this difference between the two versions, uses the language of melancholy—if not the term itself: the notion of paradise in Mitchell’s original “is spun with a serpent tongue” with the message that “we’ll just have to do the best we can [ . . . ] It won’t be sufficient” (Andersen 2013, 48). Perhaps in pursuit of a simpler

musical message, Collins and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young left Mitchell's signature melancholy behind.

Mitchell's expression of melancholy lies not just in specific tonalities that alter the meaning of the lyrics they accompany, but also in more sustained oppositions of melody and lyric. In Mitchell's music, melody, and lyric often destabilize each other—for example, major tonalities and regular rhythms are paired with narratives of despair. One instance of this is the "The Circle Game" (*Ladies of the Canyon*) where the singsong repetitive melody is set against a lyric that relates the melancholic's contemplation of folly: time is the ultimate trap, humans forced to live—and age—in the face of its scarcity. "Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire" (*For The Roses*) suggests that suicide—or just another hit—beckons a destitute addict, describing looming self-destruction in graphic terms. But the accompanying saxophone riffs seduce, and the guitar is richly concordant, marked with the teasing whine of slides in the introduction and chorus.<sup>15</sup> The song's playfulness of melody subverts the gravity and grim stakes of its lyrics. "The Beat of Black Wings" (*Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm*), released in 1988, might have been familiar to the ear grounded in pre-Beatles rock, sampling from "Johnny Angel," made popular by a Shelley Fabares recording in 1962.<sup>16</sup> Its even dance beat and smooth harmonies enclose the story of a Vietnam-era soldier who has endured both deployment and his girlfriend's abortion of their child, deaths packed so tightly in the lyric that they seem to unfold relentlessly in a life ill-equipped to register their pain—while the ominous black wings in the chorus flap incessantly.<sup>17</sup> Its multiple tragedies are persistent and inevitable but, musically, it is almost cheery.<sup>18</sup> Of similar effect is the upbeat pacing of Mitchell's musical setting of William Butler Yeats's poem, "The Second Coming" ("Slouching Towards Bethlehem," *Night Ride Home*). Yeats's lyric emphasizes the instability of a humanity that faces destruction, a center that "cannot hold" (2008, 200). But in Mitchell's version, its apocalyptic references are set to frenzied pop-rock choruses, multiple overdubbings that belie their reference to the coming beast and its shape, seeming to celebrate its arrival. In "Love" (*Wild Things Run Fast*), voice and sax jazz riffs disrupt First Corinthians's reverential meditations on love. "Magdalene Laundries" (*Turbulent Indigo*) has the tone of a ballad, with a muted bass and an accessible melody, but its lyrics speak of the captivity of young women working in

a convent laundry, one impregnated by the local priest, and all ultimately destined for unmarked graves. Biblical in theme and epic in scale, these narratives are also potentially moralizing, but instead they teeter off-balance when set to music that leers and lures. Simpler and starker, is Mitchell's use of hymn-like choral voices in "Shadows and Light" (*The Hissing of Summer Lawns*) to sacralize the darkness and mask it with joy.

In live performances, Mitchell often further varies the tone of these songs. For example, in the studio version of "The Last Time I Saw Richard," the repeated last words of each verse evoke a doubting pause, emphasized with suspended chords. These refrains are despairing, even cynical. In the live performance on *Miles of Aisles*, however, Mitchell shifted to a major tonality at those same points, her piano joined by a strongly rhythmic percussion and bass accompaniment. The combination creates a sudden forward, and oddly hopeful, motion. This tonal surprise, wrapped in enriched instrumentation, implies a reversal of the meaning of the studio version: perhaps it is possible that marriage and life—Richard's, specifically—can be fulfilling. Such changes render the meaning of the composition uncertain from performance to performance.

### Traveling, traveling

Mitchell also evokes melancholy in her repeated use of barren terrains as narrative settings. In art and literature, melancholy evokes states of isolation; the contemplation of life in the face of death is the outsider's occupation (Bowring 2008, 161). Melancholy finds a pictorial representation in the desolate landscape (Wilson 2008, 34; Bowring 2008, 164; see also Radden 2009, 180–187). Many of Mitchell's songs open with descriptive lines that picture such landscapes, as in the moody and wintry skies of "Hejira," and the narrator's description of "Paprika Plains" (*Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*).<sup>19</sup> The longed-for invitation of "Come in from the Cold" (*Night Ride Home*) never arrives, remaining only imagined.<sup>20</sup> Instead, the song opposes the heat of sex, freedom, and longing with shivers of solitude and age.

Mitchell's music also depicts melancholy in its travels through (sometimes barren) landscapes, with motion occasionally rendered futile even as it

continues. Often in her songs, the figure of the journey represents an undefined, liminal space of uncertainty; frequently, her travelers never arrive. For example, "All I Want" (*Blue*) describes a solitary traveler searching for something unknown. In other songs, midpoints don't mark progress, but instead emphasize the traveler's distance from both the beginning and end: the narrator of "Chinese Café" (*Wild Things Run Fast*) finds herself and Carol in the "middle," socially and chronologically. "That Song About the Midway" (*Clouds*) can be understood as a meditation on the paralysis of melancholy, its narrator remaining behind after its addressee has moved on, the midway itself a reference both to a fair's traditional center and also to a place of neither departure nor arrival. The youth of Mitchell's "Woodstock" (*Ladies of the Canyon*) are "caught" in a bargain with the devil. Andersen writes that "Woodstock's" oppositional images include the contrast of "the return and the journey forward," and that the song invites listeners to be part of a collective journey, "never quite arriving, perhaps, but always a little farther down the road" (Andersen 2013, 48).

The itinerancy of melancholy in Mitchell's work lies in more than lyrical portrayals of lone travelers in isolated landscapes. Her music gestures toward perpetual movement, whether by visiting the same point over and over, or, in her use of tonal polarities, moving between two points—in neither case permitting the resolution of an arrival. Contemporary scholars of melancholy source its instability in the mind's attempt to be in two places at once in an effort to accept or reconcile contradictory alternatives.<sup>21</sup> As a result, melancholy oscillates and vacillates (Wilson 2008, 32, 84, 90). Music is particularly suited to conveying this back-and-forth: the metrical repetition of chords or notes makes travel audible by rendering distance in rhythmic time, while its sounding in the same or nearby notes might limit a sense of progression.

Lloyd Whitesell hears such a vacillation in "Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire" (*For The Roses*). Noting that the song's tonal poles are C and G, he writes that "the C passages are infused with elements of G major, and vice versa. Arrival on one or the other tonal pole thus usually provides only a momentary stability, since an impetus toward the other pole is immediately set up [ . . . ] Neither pole is clearly differentiated from the other" (Whitesell 2008, 141). More than just vacillation, this two-point movement specifically performs

the melancholic's restless rumination. The song's tonal polarity augments the contrast already noted here between its harmonics and lyrics, the combination of strategies further destabilizing this meditation on death as life's companion (Whitesell 2008, 142; see also 78, 104, 218).

In Mitchell's hands, the guitar strings also map this same terrain of oscillation. Her picking and strumming, particularly in her early studio recordings, create a regular undertone of persistent single- or two-point movement. Melancholy becomes both audible and visible: most pronounced in "Cactus Tree," "Nathan La Franer," and "The Pirate of Penance" on *Song to a Seagull*. In "Roses Blue" on *Clouds*, a sense of urgency lingers, unresolved, through a relentless picking on the sixth string.<sup>22</sup> The sixth string becomes a drone—in music theory, the repetition of a single note throughout a composition.<sup>23</sup> Mitchell frequently uses "dropped D" tuning—tuning the guitar's sixth string as D, rather than E.<sup>24</sup> This tuning is also specifically melancholic in tone.<sup>25</sup> The same back-and-forth movement is visible, this time horizontally, in Mitchell's strumming of the dulcimer, in performances of "A Case of You" and "Carey" both from her compendium of melancholy, *Blue*.<sup>26</sup> Her dulcimer technique employs drone strings that play a constant, unchanging note, much like the repetitive plucking of the guitar's sixth string.<sup>27</sup>

### "Dreams and False Alarms"

"Amelia" (*Hejira*), one of Mitchell's most enigmatic compositions, engages all of her approaches to melancholy. Some have found in the song a rejection of love or an embrace of solitude.<sup>28</sup> Yet its swings between the polarities of earth and sky, narrative and contemplation, movement and stasis, present and past, and suspended and major tonalities, are best understood as expressions of the melancholic's questioning sorrow. Here are the conflicts of lyric and tonality; the journey without arrival; two-point motion, lyrically, tonally, rhythmically, and thematically; and, ultimately, a work that lacks resolution, narratively or musically. Mitchell doubles and redoubles lyrical expressions of melancholy in their accompanying musical registers, layering questions in words and tones that work with and against each other, the effect of their

oscillating movement unstable and restless. "Amelia" can be understood as a tale of rejection that opens onto a wider contemplation of rootlessness, but this analysis shows that it is just the reverse. At its center, "Amelia" conveys the inconstancy of the melancholic's life, one of chosen isolation. Rejection is merely its leitmotif.

In seven successive verses, Mitchell's narrator weaves her story with those of two others lost between sky and earth, sun and water, each longing to fly, physically or emotionally. These spaces are passageways, liminal and essentially melancholic. The song's narrator first counts jet vapor trails as she drives across the desert, referencing jets again in the second and final verses. In the third verse, she references arrival, but only as a rumor: its release is just out of sight, the narrator guessing that its experience might offer insight. In the fourth, she reveals a personal story: rejected by her lover, she is exiled to the road, melancholy's transient space. She is away, her location unspecified. The fifth contains the stories both of Amelia Earhart and of Icarus. The known narrative of Earhart's own journey lies somewhere between departure and arrival, the location of her ultimate descent and the circumstances of her death are unknown.<sup>29</sup> Man-made wax wings propel Icarus toward the sun. Each fails in their attempt to accomplish the physically impossible, doomed by a misplaced reliance on technology. In the sixth, the narrator describes herself as unable to love, perched in the cold upper air of the stratosphere, finally falling fatally into the arms of her lover. At the end of a single day of travel in the life of a late twentieth-century Ulysses, she sleeps in a motel with her wanderings beneath, and in, her head.

Ultimately, movement brings the narrator no closer to any destination: circular in structure, the composition arrives where it began, itinerant and without progress. In this way, the song invokes but then subverts the ring structure documented by anthropologist Mary Douglas in works that include the *Book of Numbers* (Douglas 2007). In Douglas's analysis, the ring is a fulfilling journey, its subjects venturing out, and, transformed or informed, returning along the same path. But "Amelia's" journey lacks a clearly defined beginning and/or end, serving also as metaphor for the melancholic's perpetual itinerancy. The first three verses convey, in turn, what the narrator saw; the disruptive effect of travel; and the uncertainty

both of arrival and of any satisfaction it might bring. At the song's center—the fourth verse—is the narrator's story of her personal loss. From here, the lyrics circle back, each verse linked to its pair with narrative detail. In the fifth verse, Earhart and Icarus fail in their attempts, the counterpart to the uncertainties of arrival in the third; in the sixth, the narrator, too reserved, falls, and fails, in her relationship, the counterpart to the lure and disruptive effect of travel in the second; and in the final verse, asleep, she sees jets in her dreams as she did awake, in the first, no nearer and no farther from either place of departure or arrival. In Mitchell's construction, the ring simply spins. Like the melancholic, "Amelia" travels, but never arrives; it asks, but receives no answer.

Any convincing interpretation of "Amelia" requires more than a consideration of its narrative structure. In an apparent invocation of Freudian notions of loss and the Freudian melancholic's holding on to past objects, the song's lyrics reference tropes of melancholy from Mitchell's early albums, here reimaged as stops along Amelia's journey. The narrator has lived in "clouds," a look back to "Both Sides, Now" (*Clouds*) and comes to rest at the "Cactus Tree" motel, a reference to the ultimate track on *Song to a Seagull*.<sup>30</sup> But even as she employs referents that seem to suggest a longing for a lost past, Mitchell renders these markers themselves transitional and itinerant. Clouds move and shift, evanescent, incapable of supporting human life, sending visitors to their deaths; the "Cactus Tree" has become a motel, itself never a destination, but a temporary stop from which departure is always imminent.

Recurring, too, in "Amelia" is Mitchell's pairing of suspended chords with unstable lyrics, stressing their lived ambiguity. The last chord of the penultimate line of each verse, transcribed as Am7, emphasizes the chimera-like nature of the word it accompanies, each both enchanting and luring, and each a harbinger of as much potential evil as happiness. Here also are both unstable tonalities and rhythms.<sup>31</sup> Mitchell audibly isolates her musical line by employing a second: on the studio recording, Victor Feldman's vibraphone circles the melody but neither joins nor supports it. In the live performance (on *Shadows and Light*), Pat Metheny's guitar replaces the vibraphone, entering in the later verses and ultimately finding its own isolated course as his solo performance, itself leading into "Hejira."

## Conclusion

In "Amelia," as in much of the work described here, Mitchell confronts and conveys the lived experience of melancholy. The methods she uses to do so are multilayered and sometimes in opposition. Her "chords of inquiry," ironic tonalities, and the trope of itinerant isolation mingle to create an overall effect of melancholy. Only by hearing the separate components of these layers does the intricacy of their structure become apparent; only by comparison with others' simpler, less melancholic performances of her music does the singularity of Mitchell's approach become evident. Ultimately, we can hear Mitchell's music as a travelogue of the terrain of melancholic thought, constantly in motion, but forever trapped.

## Notes

- 1 On the early critical and popular positioning of Mitchell as "drowning in her own feelings," see Ruth Charnock, "Joni Mitchell: Music and Feminism," *United Academics Journal of the Social Sciences*, 12.2 (2012): 91–92.
- 2 Mitchell told Malka Marom that at the time she went into analysis, she had "combed religions for certain answers, found them to be for the most part too idealistic for me to put into my everyday life except for some of the broader religions which include the yin-yang principle which give you a broader pendulum swing, you know?" "The Entertainers Interview," *CBC-AM* (February 3, 1974). <http://jonimitchell.com/library/view.cfm?id=2542> (accessed: June 3, 2018).
- 3 "Well [ . . . ] look at my life—chronic illness, the bomb hanging over us. There were external iconic situations and personal chronic situations of tension. And stalker after stalker after stalker in my yard." In Malka Marom, *Joni Mitchell: In Her Own Words—Conversations with Malka Marom* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2014), 166.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 80.
- 5 Whitesell calls it one of her "concept" albums, one "unified by melancholy and bittersweet tones," *The Music of Joni Mitchell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 199, 196; Eric G. Wilson calls it "an early product of Mitchell's acute sorrow." *Against Happiness* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 98. On "Little Green," Kilauren Gibb, and her reunion with her mother, see Brian D. Johnson with Danylo Hawaleshka and Dale Eisler, "Joni's

Secret: Mother and Child Reunion,” *MacLean’s* (April 21, 1997), reprinted in *The Joni Mitchell Companion: Four Decades of Commentary*, ed. Stacey Luftig (New York: Schirmer Books, 2000), 191–197.

- 6 For example, James Bennighof uses the language of melancholy to describe uncertainty in Mitchell’s music, writing that it “finds an analogy in the examination of society in general, as the singer’s persona in various songs tends to despair of the possibilities for practices that will lead to desirable results, although occasionally (and often almost irrationally) expressions of hope emerge.” Bennighof, *The Words and Music of Joni Mitchell* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 178.
- 7 Mitchell has said that suspended chords are frequent in her work. Marom, *In Her Own Words*, 166.
- 8 On video spliced into a track of a live performance of *Chelsea Morning*, Mitchell says:

“For years people said, Joni’s weird chords, Joni’s weird chords [ . . . ] Chords are depictions of emotions, these chords that I was getting by twisting the knobs on the guitar until I could get these chords that I heard inside that suited me. They feel like my feelings. I called them, not knowing, chords of inquiry. They have a question mark in them. There were so many unresolved things in me and that those chords suited me. I’d stay in unresolved emotionality for days and days.”

*Joni Mitchell: Woman of Heart and Mind (A Life Story)* (London: Eagle Rock Entertainment, 2003), DVD track 2, 15:16. Katherine Monk quotes Mitchell: “Most major chords are a depiction of well-being and happiness. My major chord will have a dissonant note leading to sorrow, then another note leading back to joy. There is always the possibility of the opposite emotion in my chords.” *Joni: The Creative Odyssey of Joni Mitchell* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2012), 71. See also her explanation in “Interview Transcription: Times Talks Luminato Festival: Joni Mitchell and Brian Blade in conversation with Jon Pareles” (June 16, 2013), transcribed by Catherine McKay, *jonimitchell.com*, <http://jonimitchell.com/library/view.cfm?id=3269>.

- 9 Transcription at <http://www.musicnotes.com/sheetmusic/mtd.asp?ppn=MN0074858> (standard tuning) (accessed: January 16, 2017).
- 10 Transcription in standard notation, *Hits* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 2009), 70–73 (“Open E” tuning specified for guitar).
- 11 Transcription for guitar at <https://www.azchords.com/c/crosbystillsnashandyoungetabs-5029/woodstock-tabs-133807.html> (accessed: September 28, 2017).

- 12 Transcription in standard notation for the piano and guitar, *Hits*, 20–26 (tuning down one-half step specified for guitar). The contrast is also noted by Whitesell, *Music*, 34.
- 13 Judy Collins, *Wildflowers* (New York: Elektra Records, 1967).
- 14 Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, *Déjà Vu* (Los Angeles: Atlantic Records, 1970).
- 15 E.g., transcription by Sue McNamara, *jonimitchell.com*, <http://jonimitchell.com/music/guitarfiles/144.pdf> (accessed: January 16, 2017).
- 16 Shelley Fabares, "Johnny Angel," *Shelley!* (New York: Colpix, 1962).
- 17 Whitesell calls the disjunction an "affective dissociation" between words and music that conveys loss. *Music*, 115.
- 18 Whitesell has written in detail of this song:

"The soldier's vortex of rage and despair hardly affects the musical environment – so polished, so transfixed. Joni's setting places a breathtaking emotional distance between her raw subject and her excessive artifice. There is also a defiance of gravity in the multiple musical suspensions, which are not hard to hear as gestures of buoyancy and release."

Lloyd Whitesell, "A Joni Mitchell Aviary," *Women and Music*, Vol. 1, 1997, reprinted in Stacy Luftig, Ed., *The Joni Mitchell Companion: Four Decades of Commentary* (New York: Schirmer Books, 2000), 237–250, at 249. Bennighof has noted this same contrast, 136, and identified a similar effect in "For the Roses," noting that Mitchell sings it in a "rich, warm tone that, combined with the casual nature of the fingerpicked pattern, reflects ironically on the caustic nature of the text," *Words and Music*, 64, observing the same technique in "Trouble Child" and "Edith and the Kingpin" (*The Hissing of Summer Lawns*), 87, and "Cherokee Louise" (*Night Ride Home*), 141.

- 19 Nathan Wise writes that the landscape for Mitchell can be an active opposing force. "'Urge for Going' and the Luminosity of Genius," in *Gathered Light: The Poetry of Joni Mitchell's Songs*, ed. Lisa and John Sornberger (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2013), 3–4.
- 20 On the isolation of the house in snow, see Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 38–42.
- 21 Wilson writes:

"It is our own nervous fear, our melancholia, that leads to our awareness of the world's innate duplicity, its "both/and." Only by being unwilling to rest on one side of the world or the other do we come to sense the hidden marriage between both sides. Sadly inhabiting this rich limbo, we put ourselves in a position to grasp the profound meaning of life's deepest events. These

- vexed events reveal to us what is already true of everything: all creatures are meldings of grandeur and gloom." *Against Happiness*, 81.
- 22 "How to Play Joni Mitchell 'Cactus Tree' (intro only)," Jerry's Guitar Bar, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETiKTAdKSns>, at 1:32. The instructor calls this "a drone on the sixth string." The repeated thumb-picking of the sixth string is also visible in Sue Tierney's rendering of Nathan La Franeer, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQO9P-unloM>.
- 23 The drone is "a sustained tone, usually rather low in pitch, providing a sonorous foundation for a melody or melodies sounding at a higher pitch level." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s. v. "Drone," <https://www.britannica.com/art/drone-music> (accessed: December 16, 2017).
- 24 On Mitchell's use of the "dropped D," see, e.g., Marc O'Hara, "Joni Mitchell's Guitars and Tunings," January 29, 2013. <http://uniqueguitar.blogspot.com/2013/01/joni-mitchells-guitars-and-tunings.html> (accessed: June 2, 2017).
- 25 On the melancholic effect of the "dropped D," see Jackie Bowring, *A Field Guide to Melancholy* (Harpenden, UK: Oldcastle Books, 2008), 183–184.
- 26 E.g., "A Case of You," performed in London in 1983, [https://youtu.be/f\\_OtHVLAF4o](https://youtu.be/f_OtHVLAF4o), and "Carey," also performed in London in 1983, <https://youtu.be/fFGrRSVW8jk> (accessed: September 24, 2017).
- 27 Bennighof writes about "All I Want," also from *Blue*, that its first verse reveals that the singer, "like the dulcimer, is both uncertain and moving forward [ . . . ] Her vacillation between visions of a joyful companionship [ . . . ] and pain is framed in the journey metaphor and reflected in melodic and formal shifts." *Words and Music*, 50.
- 28 Ron Rosenbaum, "The Best Joni Mitchell Song Ever: An Ode to Obsessive Listening," *Slate.com* (December 14, 2007). [http://www.slate.com/articles/life/the\\_spectator/2007/12/the\\_best\\_joni\\_mitchell\\_song\\_ever.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/life/the_spectator/2007/12/the_best_joni_mitchell_song_ever.html) (accessed: June 2, 2017; emphasis in original):

"It occurs to me that in some way that's what "Amelia's" enigma or paradox is about: True love is far more alarming than a false alarm. True love is truly alarming. Real danger. She's in some respects *grateful*. It was a false alarm. For an independent spirit like Joni Mitchell, it may be better to have loved and lost than to have loved and won, which can be *truly* terrifying."

On "Amelia's" message of solitude, see Ariel Swartley, "Joni Mitchell: Hejira," *Rolling Stone* (February 10, 1977). <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/hejira-19770210> (accessed: June 2, 2017).

- 29 E.g., Susan Butler, "Searching for Amelia Earhart," *New York Times* (July 11, 2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/11/opinion/amelia-earhart-photograph.html> (accessed: September 24, 2017).
- 30 Whitesell notes, in addition, the mention of "paradise" in "Amelia" as a reference to "Big Yellow Taxi." *Music*, 209.
- 31 Mitchell, quoted in Whitesell, *Music*, 139, notes that the tonalities of "Amelia" modulate, and transcribers record the song as alternating between three-quarter and four-four time. E.g., Dave Blackburn, piano transcription of "Amelia," posted on *Joni Mitchell.com*, <http://jonimitchell.com/music/guitarfiles/439.pdf> (accessed: December 16, 2017).

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