CHAPTER 2

‘Something’s Lost but Something’s Gained’: Joni Mitchell and Postcolonial Lyric

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I

Malka Marom, in her recent book of conversations with Joni Mitchell, asks,

> ‘You consider yourself a person without a country? You don’t consider yourself a Canadian, or an American?’ Mitchell replies that she feels ‘way outside the box’:
>
> I consider myself like a salmon. Does a salmon consider himself a South American or an American? I feel that these are arti cially imposed categories. I feel an af nity to the crocuses coming out of the ground. I get a rush from meadowlarks’ song. I’m not a Canadian in that I don’t really know Ontario or Manitoba. I’ve had little experiences here and there, in Alberta and Saskatchewan where I’ve been many seasons, and especially British Columbia, where I spend so much more time there [*sic*] than anywhere. That little plot of land I have up there is home. But none of this is nationality. This is regionality. (qtd. in Marom 200)

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To consider oneself a 'person without a country' can take on a variety of inflections: cosmopolitan, exile, refugee, tourist, or pilgrim. Rather than invoking a difference between Canada and the United States, she extends her attention to South America, and it is dif cult to tell whether its relation to 'America' here is a contrast to the United States or a collectivization of the Americas.[1] Yet, the 'salmon' comparison evokes speci cally the British Columbia coast: 'That little plot of land I have up there is home'. 'Regionality' is somewhat arbitrarily contrasted with 'nationality' (though extensive 'experience' of touring must have given her considerable familiarity with the country as a whole). So should Mitchell be regarded as anadromous, returning inland from the open seas (with a similarly complex mating cycle)? Is her work 'outside' of 'arti cially imposed categories' or might it offer new possibilities for de ning a distinctively Canadian mode of civic identity? This essay will seek to answer this question, focusing on the rst decade of Mitchell's work, beginning with her early live recordings from 1966 up to *Hejira* in 1976.[2] It will rst examine the role of continuous movement and the presence of Canadian landscape in her songs, then offer a close analysis of 'Both Sides, Now' as civic anthem, and conclude by examining 'A Case of You' in terms of the process of spatial contraction into the 'box' Mitchell here considers herself 'way outside' of, in the light of Northrop Frye's 'garrison mentality' thesis of the 'Canadian imagination' ('Conclusion' 350–351).

II

Joni Mitchell's career may initially appear all too typical of US dominance of North American popular culture, in her departure from a Canada which is 'too old and cold and settled in its ways' for the American West Coast seemingly already inhabited in fantasy: 'California, I'm coming home'.[3] However, I would like to argue that such assertions retrospectively take on a form of double-coding. Mitchell's songs throughout her career deal with the experience of continuous movement: the hejira or transforming pilgrimage that serves as the title for her 1976 album. Yet when she sings, 'I wish I had a river I could skate away on', does this suggest going to or departing from?[4] The yearning to 'Teach my feet to fly' is echoed in 'Amelia' where the narrator has a 'dream to fly', in both senses of to soar and to flee, a constitutive tension which sustains the characteristic combination of proximity and distance, intimacy, and hauteur in Mitchell's vocal delivery.[5]

Lloyd Whitesell de nes Mitchell as the 'representative voice of a self-exploratory intellectual bohemianism, shaped by the visionary ideals of the 1960s'. In this description, her presence appears geographically amorphous, though its location is later made slightly more speci c: 'Mitchell is also unique in her perspective on the North American cultural landscape, as projected through a symbolic triangulation of the urban poles of New York City and Los Angeles with the prairies of Western Canada' (Whitesell 3). Numerous other places might merit inclusion: Canadian cities such as Saskatoon, where she spent her teen years; Calgary, where she attended art school; and Toronto, where she established her early reputation. American cities could also be included: Detroit, where she moved with her rst husband, Chuck Mitchell, in order to expand career opportunities; and Florida, where she met David Crosby with whom she subsequently moved to Los Angeles.[6]

In passing, Whitesell notes that Mitchell's 'maintenance of a certain perceptual distance from her milieu no doubt relates to her perspective as a Canadian expatriate in the United States and as a female songwriter of formidable intelligence and talent in a male-dominated industry' (42, 91). Yet, as she herself puts it, 'I'm not a feminist – believe me, I've been with the boys all my life' (qtd. in O'Brien 260).[7] The decision to continue performing under the name of her rst husband rather than revert to the original Roberta Joan Anderson, and the connubial domesticity idealized in 'My Old Man',[8] stand in stark contrast to a biographical record of assertive (even predatory) conduct in both professional and personal life.[9] David Crosby's barbed assessment, 'as modest as Mussolini', is borne out in the acronym, SIQUOMB, given to her rst song-publishing company: She Is Queen Undisputedly Of Mind Beauty.[10] For a female artist whose early career coincides with the emergence of the late 1960s feminism, there is a striking absence of any ethic of collective solidarity: other women are regarded primarily as rivals or antagonists.[11] Male personae are frequently deployed, from 'The Circle Game' onwards: 'So the years spin by and now the boy is twenty/Though his dreams have lost some grandeur on the way'.[12] In 'Free Man in Paris', she ventriloquizes David Geffen in an unillusioned monologue: 'The way I see it he said/You just can't win it/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'.[13] As Sean Nelson argues, there is great complexity in this character portrait which, on the surface, acerbically satirizes, and deeper down, sympathetically humanizes (51–58). The highly

lucrative 'star maker machinery/Behind the popular song' is simultaneously mocked and yearned for. The consumerist idyll of suburban conformity prompts similar ambivalence: in 'The Last Time I saw Richard',[14] the option of settling down with 'a dishwasher and coffee percolator' is perhaps more envied than despised. The critique, in such songs as 'For Free' and 'The Hissing of Summer Lawns',[15] of a 'well-heeled bohemian LA lifestyle' (O'Brien 95)[16] has not prevented qualm-free participation in its privileges; a brief foray into Matala's hippie counter-culture in Crete does not mean that Mitchell ever ceased to 'miss my clean white linen and my fancy French cologne'.[17]

In 1992, Mitchell spoke at the Canadian Conference of the Arts summit 'Educating Van Gogh', at which 'artists, administrators, teachers, academics, writers and bureaucrats discussed how to create creators'. At Calgary airport, when told, 'I'm glad you're back', referring to the recent release of *Night Road Home*, she replied simply: 'But I never left. You did' (O'Brien 255–256). This might be taken as an arrogant gibe delivered from the secure status of a proven international artist, but it also might be regarded as a poignant lament for an ideal community yet to be realized. The well-known thesis of an 'inferiority complex' resulting from a British colonial past, and current US economic-cultural imperialism, posits that 'often what artists have had to do is to leave and gain acceptance abroad and then', like the salmon, 'come home'.[18] There are obvious parallels with British actors and film-makers moving to Hollywood in a kind of inevitable cultural osmosis. David Cronenberg is one notable exception for staying put in Canada to help nurture an indigenous film industry. Yet, similar comments might have been made in the 1970s on the absence of Canadian literature, a decade in which major reputations such as Atwood, Munro, and Ondaatje emerged, constituting a stellar generation of writers who remain primarily Canada-based.

If the Yorkville coffee-house scene in Toronto where Mitchell began to establish her career is set against Greenwich Village as documented in Dylan's *Chronicles* (23–104), it does not emerge badly from the comparison. There is a similar late Beat influence, and a network of performance venues catering to comparatively prosperous younger consumers.[19] Even after moving to Detroit with her first husband, touring seemed to involve the same cross-border circuit (she met the better-established Chuck Mitchell while he was gigging in Toronto).

Mitchell herself remarks, 'I think I feel in a way beyond nationalism at this point. I'm proud of my background. Canada has a different character.

It has a lot of character. Unfortunately, it also has this huge inferiority complex. And if I'm around Canadians in a foreign country I get very nationalistic' (Marom 131). If far from moving 'beyond nationalism', Mitchell remains Canadian throughout, how does this 'different character' influence the music of her great early period?[20] One can juxtapose contrasting statements easily enough. Mitchell may at times claim that 'I'm a mutt. I belong to nothing, and sometimes that's lonely. I don't belong to a school of music. I don't belong to a race. I don't belong to a nation', yet, as part of the province's centenary celebrations in 2005, as the guest of honour, she declared that 'Saskatchewan is in my veins, that stark beauty and the smell of it, the sages and so on I'm a flatlander, period' (Mercer 67, 51). For the same anniversary, she selected a retrospective compilation, *Songs of a Prairie Girl*.[21] The early 'Urge for Going' (1966) is included in this collection; it had previously only been released as the B-side of 'You Turn Me On, I'm a Radio' (1972). In its original form, it offers an explicit refusal of provincial constraint: 'And all that stays is dying /And all that lives is gettin' out'. In this new context, it serves as a paradoxical declaration of homecoming.

> I awoke today and found
> the frost perched on the town
> It hovered in a frozen sky
> then it gobbled summer down
> When the sun turns traitor cold
> and all the trees are shivering in a naked row
>
> I get the urge for going
> But I never seem to go

'I awoke today' employs the convention of medieval dream-vision (or perhaps Rip van Winkle) with 'the frost perched' as a demon or vulture. Initially, it seems that a lover has departed, and the narrator is uncertain whether to follow or not: 'He got the urge for going /And I had to let him go'. There is a characteristic shifting of pronouns, identi cation with a male persona, and implicit competition with other women: 'and not another girl in town/My darling's heart could win'. 'Turns traitor cold' introduces a more public dimension of imperial motifs: standing in a row, as if on a parade ground, links to later references to the 'bully winds', 'warriors of winter' and 'empires falling down'. To 'see the geese in chevron flight' suggests a V-formation of aircraft; 'chevron' is also the

insignia of a non-commissioned of cer's badge (OED 4; supported by 'wings'). Mitchell, in contrast to the prevalent ethos of anti-war activism, performed without qualms at 'military bases like Fort Bragg in North Carolina'. Thus, these aspects of the song could be regarded as an expression of patriotic pride in her father's Royal Canadian Airforce background (O'Brien 63–64).[22]

The 'urge' dramatized in the song combines elements of sexual, biological, and political impulse with seasonal migration, which, as with the salmon, is a 'going' both to and from. Mitchell's pervasive dramatization of movement can be referred back to both older settler narratives of transatlantic crossing (her paternal grandparents' emigration from Norway in the nineteenth century (Mæland)), and arguably, forward to newer models of post-colonial identity (though she shows a notable reticence not only towards the originary Quebecois but also other more recent immigrant groups). Cartographic aerial perspectives are frequently adopted, perhaps most famously in the 'vapour trails' across the 'bleak terrain' in 'Amelia'. The song opens with 'driving across the burning desert', but the landscape rapidly acquires the 'geometric farms' characteristic of the Canadian prairies,[23] and its American aviator-heroine is similarly transformed into the protagonist of a doomed Franklin-style Canadian quest-myth.[24]

Mitchell's lyrics may be regarded as 'poems of our climate', to borrow Wallace Stevens' phrase. Her own painting, notably the album covers, remain very much within Canadian landscape conventions, and her entire work resonates with a distinctive sense of seasonal change.[25] However, such an approach seems to infer a directly mimetic quality from a fairly loosely de ned phenomenology of place. Mercer stresses that 'the land is part of her. Where does it end and she begin?' (52). Yet, if the 'midwestern, prairie texture of her music' (53) is supported by testimony based on Mercer's own 'growing up on a Kansas farm' (55; see also 4), the sense of scale, spaciousness, and isolation ceases to be distinctively Canadian. Furthermore, despite the emphasis of the album title, the settings of 'Songs of a Prairie Girl' are at least as much urban as rural. 'Raised on Robbery' deals with a pick-up in a bar; 'Song for Sharon', a trip to a shopping mall.

The most influential set of de nitions of Canadian identity appeared nearly half a century ago, in Frye's magisterial 'Conclusion to the First Edition of *Literary History of Canada*' (1965). One might argue that, particularly from the 1970s onwards, these observations would necessarily

have diminishing relevance in light of multiculturalism having become government policy, and an increased diversity of immigrants bringing different moral and political priorities. It could be countered that Mitchell was reared in the Canada that Frye comes from and writes of, and the music of her first decade necessarily shares and reflects its ambience. I would not wish to underestimate the extent to which Frye's comments on 'long-range perspective' and 'nomadic movement over great distance' in a 'vast country sparsely populated' ('Conclusion' 348–349) illuminate a directly mimetic element of Mitchell's music. However, it is perhaps of more interest to examine how her work has continued to resist any ready assimilation to a composite North American identity, and I now wish to analyse the 1969 song 'Both Sides, Now'[26] in terms of such a distinctively Canadian perspective.

III

The clouds invoked throughout 'Both Sides, Now' undoubtedly form Mitchell's most famous sky-scape. The track was selected for the Prairies segment of the aerial ballet staged as part of the opening ceremony of the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics.[27] Such pageants always run the risk of bombast and bathos; nevertheless, in this instance, the elaborate choreography dramatizing a rite of passage from child to adult and innocence to experience seems highly appropriate to the network of oppositions structuring the song.

'Both Sides' could refer to the original LP, *Clouds*, on which the song appeared, after numerous previous covers, including Judy Collins' Grammy-winning version. It could be viewed in terms of the double colonization thesis, whereby an earlier predominantly British heritage has been displaced by post-war American domination. More specifically, it may refer to 'both sides' of the Canada/US border which Mitchell crisscrossed in her early career, or to the constitutive historical split between Anglophone and Francophone cultural identities.[28] Other obvious contenders would be man/woman (referring to the marriage/divorce with Chuck Mitchell) and parent/child (clearly relevant to the decision to allow her daughter Kelly to be adopted), both of which could easily be mapped on to give/take and love/hate.[29]

The temporal division of before/after is used to structure the tripartite schema of the stanza progression (conforming to the pattern of the classical syllogism). It is not difficult to translate the analogies into formal

terms: clouds are to love as love is to life (a is to b as b is to c), with the equivalence suggested, but never made explicit, of c to a, 'as life is to clouds'. Seeing 'both sides' of the argument contrasts with any such formal demonstration of the necessary outcomes. 'Now' lays claim to a simultaneous dimension of apparent self-contradiction. In a literal sense, it is impossible to play 'both sides' of the album 'now', at once; one has to be chosen first in preference to the other.[30]

The binary distinction between truth/lie is dissolved into the tripartite categories of 'clouds', 'love', and 'life'. The opposition between reality and falsehood is similarly suspended as 'every fairy tale comes real'. 'Dreams and schemes' become life-enabling fictions, rather than simply foolish and avoidable mistakes.[31] The cumulative power of the verb 'recall' lies in its sense not only of look at or remember (OED 3a, b, c), but also summon back (OED 1a, 1b) in order to replace the absence represented by what 'I really don't know'. It can also be linked to a series of powerful usages in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, such as, 'But past who can recall, or don undoe?' ((IX.926), perhaps echoed in 'So many things I would have done').[32]

The advice, 'Don't give yourself away', becomes an injunction not to betray one's inner self or lose control of one's social persona; never to offer oneself unconditionally or undervalue oneself. Mitchell was famously shrewd on professional contracts, for example in keeping publishing rights to her songs in somewhat painful contrast to her feckless former husband.[33] Here again, the precise nature of the calculation becomes ambiguous; the simple condition of renunciation (of naïve attachment, sense of belonging, automatic loyalty) allows certain kinds of reward (career estimation, financial rewards, sublimation into creativity). 'Something's lost, but something's gained/In living every day', in a temporality whose moments prove isolated, discrete, and impossible to recapture. The line is haunted by its opposite, 'dying every day'.[34] 'Just another show', as well as recalling 'circus', suggests apparition, placing the song in the genre of revenant lyric, with its characteristic haunting by a deceased lover. 'Leave 'em' could refer to a performer exiting the stage, or a farewell to lovers (emphatically plural), but also alludes to the final leave-taking of mortality.[35]

I now wish to assess this unresolved network of fluctuating oppositions in the context of two precursor texts, one by Saul Bellow,[36] explicitly cited by Mitchell herself, the other by W. B. Yeats.

> And I dreamed down at the clouds, and thought that when I was a kid I had dreamed up at them, and having dreamed at the clouds from both sides as no other generation of men has done, one should be able to accept his death very easily. However we made safe landings every time. Anyway, since I had come to the place under the circumstances described, it was natural to greet it with a certain emotion. Yes, I brought a sizeable charge with me and I kept thinking, 'Bountiful life Oh, how bountiful life is'. (Bellow 42–43)

The narrator of Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* gazes down, but his perspective does not necessarily map onto a simple win or lose. The zone 'dreamed up' is one of precarious exposure, the one below 'dreamed down' allowing the possibility of return: 'we made safe landings every time' (as in the delicate touch-down choreographed in the Vancouver Olympics ballet). Here the conclusion reached is that 'one should be able to accept his death very easily', whereas in Mitchell the implicitly opposed term to 'knowing life' remains unvoiced.

'Feather' suggests the movement of propeller blades (OED 11c) through the cloud-canyons. These 'ice-cream castles in the air' may be quixotic windmills but also chivalric fortresses, as envisaged in Yeats' 'An Irish Airman Foresees his Death' (58).

> I know that I shall meet my fate
> Somewhere among the clouds above;
> Those that I ght I do not hate,
> Those that I guard I do not love;
> My country is Kiltartan Cross,
> My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
> No likely end could bring them loss
> Or leave them happier than before.

Placing 'Both Sides, Now' in this genealogy suggests the possibility of a masculine narrator (similar to Mitchell's own father, the pilot). The ballet accompanying the song was performed with a male dancer, and there is no apparent gender restriction in cover-versions (among which are those by Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra). In Yeats, the imperative to ' ght' or 'guard' is simultaneously asserted and disavowed, in favour of an ethic of stoic ataraxia, in which 'I do not hate'/'I do not love'. 'Bring them loss' parallels Mitchell's 'something's lost'; 'happier than before' matches 'something's gained'.

Nor law, nor duty bade me ght,
Nor public man, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

The public imperatives, 'Nor law, nor duty', are invoked through their denial. In Yeats, 'A lonely impulse of delight' is haughtily preferred to the 'tumult' of 'cheering crowds', whereas, in Mitchell, there is a degree of delighted participation in 'circus crowds'. What Yeats dismisses as mere 'waste of breath' becomes in Mitchell a medium of civic appeal, offering itself as a new kind of anthem inviting a new kind of communal belonging: 'O Canada, we stand on guard for thee'.[37]

Such an emphasis on collective address contrasts sharply with Whitesell's view that 'Both Sides, Now' offers only the 'monochromatic spectrum' of a 'dejected performance' with an 'incredibly limited palette', whose 'tonal homing' becomes 'a repetitive despondent gesture' expressing a 'dispirited course downwards' with 'generally drooping contours'. The 'high spirits at the outset' are undermined when the initial 'elated gesture' is repeated, resulting in an ultimate mood of 'tedium and disenchantment' (143–145). Mercer, a jazz specialist with a previous study of Wayne Shorter to her credit, similarly nds the track 'fairly standard - with few harmonic pinwheels', concluding that 'her static x on the same harmonic path captured a basic mood of disillusionment' (49–50).

In response, it is tempting simply to cite not only the use of the song as a centrepiece of the Vancouver Winter Olympics ceremony, watched by a global audience estimated at over one billion viewers, but also the sheer number of cover versions. Mitchell herself, when asked, 'how do you feel when people sing your songs?' replied, 'I think it's great. I feel honoured. I like the idea of songs being sung', for the way in which 'so many people are emotionally engaged simultaneously' (Makom 154). The analyses of both Whitesell and Mercer seem a reaction against this popular reception history. Perhaps a slightly different point should be made. Undoubtedly the song is comparatively devoid of Mitchell's characteristic complex tunings and vocal pirouettes. Yet this does not necessarily mean it is predicated on an inside/outside model of confession, which emphasizes

exposure, vulnerability, the making public of private torment. In this view, lyric poetry involves the overhearing of an intense re-enactment of erotic loss and yearning. The apparent lack of musical progression becomes analogous to emotional claustrophobia, an attempted therapeutic introspection leading to eventual relapse into melancholia: 'before Prozac there was you'.[38]

Yet Mitchell herself resists the way in which her audience 'wanted me to stay in that tortured way: I peeled myself down to the bone, there was no place left to go', and prefers to stress possible modes of inclusion: 'You start with yourself, then you extend yourself to your family, you extend yourself to your community, then you extend yourself to the world – depending how much energy you have' (qtd. in Mercer 6). Mercer herself makes a distinction between confessional poetry and popular music in the way that 'poems twist and turn public language to reveal interior truths, while songs unite audiences in collective truths' (94).[39] To 'extend yourself' allows not only participation in but also the active creation of the ideal of a renewed public sphere. In this context, confession always implies a degree of withholding: 'don't let them know/Don't give yourself away' – that is, undervalue, reveal or betray yourself.[40] 'And if you care' has obvious senses of resentment or feeling vulnerable but also draws on a whole ethical heritage of Caritas, to show concern through active intervention: 'and if you care, don't let them know' may be akin to the gospel advice, 'But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly' (Mt 6:3–4). Such a love need not be de ned exclusively through Tin Pan Alley romantic formulae of 'Moons and Junes', but can be 'extended' towards parents, friends, community and into broader forms of patriotism. The declaration, 'feeling proud/To say I love you right out loud', might be interpreted not only as an expression of personal commitment but also as a ceremonial oath of national allegiance. 'Something's lost', including 'life's illusions', among them any naïve idealism of organic community, 'but something's gained', as renouncing such illusions allows transformation: 'old friends shake their heads, they say I've changed'. The friends may shake their heads in disapproval, or perhaps in incomprehension, or even in impressed amazement. That the transformation could be positive is suggested by comparable metamorphoses also tinged with illusion: 'And I dreamed I saw the bombers/ turning into butterflies/Above our nation' ('Woodstock'), and 'Only a dark cocoon before I get my gorgeous wings and fly away'

('The Last Time I saw Richard'). The 'dark cocoon' and the 'gorgeous wings' can be seen as simultaneous possibilities when Mitchell, resplendent as a ball-gowned diva performing the song with the London Philharmonic Orchestra in 2000, is touchingly humanized by her greeting the (equally opulently attired) audience as 'old friends'.

Thus, 'Both Sides, Now' articulates not only personal isolation (as highlighted in the solitary figure of the Vancouver dancer) but also collective solidarity. As such, it may be interpreted in terms of the geo-historical archetype expounded by Northrop Frye:

> Small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological 'frontier', separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources: communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that hold them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing and formidable physical setting – such communities are bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality. ('Conclusion' 350–1)

I now wish to examine the way in which, confronted by geographical vastness, the localized community is threatened by indeterminate space, and how the process of contraction is dramatized in the closed space of the 'bar' in 'A Case of You'.[41]

IV

'A Case of You' was selected as one of only two of Mitchell's own compositions included on her 2000 orchestral album, *Both Sides, Now* (along with the title track).[42] 'Case' has numerous possible senses: there is the logical or legal sense of unique example, contrasting with a medical diagnosis of disease (which could be applied to symptoms of erotic passion). Similarly, 'case' as receptacle can be regarded as a single object, or as containing multiple individual items (wine-bottles): one unique love or a history of promiscuity.

> Just before our love got lost you said
> 'I am as constant as a northern star'
> And I said 'Constantly in the darkness
> Where's that at?
> If you want me I'll be in the bar'

'Just before' situates the anecdote at a moment which is prior to the auditory present of the song, necessarily enunciated retrospectively. The vocal address presupposes this prior narrative, but simultaneously attempts to disavow and annul it, implying 'I am no longer the person who enters into such pointless and futile exchanges'. There also seems a judicial context, of appeal for justice (supported by the legal sense of 'bar'(OED 22a)), but it remains an open question of who might be judging whom.

There are equally many possible candidates for 'our love [which] got lost'. In Canada, the early 1970s witnessed potential schism, notably the separatist movement in Quebec. An increasingly evanescent af liation to the older British imperial heritage was matched by disillusion with all-pervading US culture in the late throes of Vietnam. The song endorses the capacity of acting 'constantly', not merely in romantic love, but as commitment over time, even as the exchange seems to contradict such a possibility. In classical Roman ethics, the values of *constantia et virtute* signify not only perseverance, but also military prowess. To be constant 'in the darkness' might involve maintaining a vow of sexual delity, but also ghting on the barbarian frontiers, or indeed simply surviving the Canadian winter.

Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, before entering the Senate on the ill-fated Ides of March, refuses to commute a sentence of exile on the grounds that his decree must be regarded as immutable:

> I am constant as the northern star,
> Of whose true- x'd and resting quality
> There is no fellow in the rmament. (III.i.60–62)

In the play, this gesture of hubris (implicitly boasting of his campaigns in Gaul, Germany, and Britain) leads to his rapid assassination, but in Mitchell, the 'northern star' retains its quality of transforming radiance if linked with other stars, such as the refrain of 'we are stardust, we are golden' ('Woodstock') and 'Oh starlight, star bright/You've got the lovin' that I like all right' ('This Flight Tonight' on *Blue*). The sublime vacancy of the arctic night is reduced to 'I'll be in the bar', a protective space reiterated in the images of con nement in 'case' and the 'box of paints' the singer claims to 'live' in. 'Where's that at?' can be seen as an echo of Frye's famous de nition of Canadian identity as 'less perplexed by the question, "Who am I?" than by some such riddle as, "Where is here?"' ('Conclusion' 345).

There is an eerie sub-aquatic feel to the 'blue TV screen light' of the 'bar' which seems to radiate out onto the cobalt album cover. Its title, as well as referring to 'blue note' as a technical jazz term,[43] seems an invitation to enter an underworld, comparable to the 'smoking blueness' envisaged in D. H. Lawrence's 'Bavarian Gentians' (2.697).

> torch-flower of the blue-smoking darkness, Pluto's dark-blue daze,
> black lamps from the halls of Dis, burning dark blue,
> giving off darkness, blue darkness, as Demeter's pale lamps give off light,
> lead me then, lead me the way.

Such descent 'down, down, down the dark ladder'[44] obviously invites comparison with imagery of dangerous descent and mythic rebirth in such contemporary texts such as Plath's 'Lady Lazarus', Rich's 'Diving into the Wreck', MacEwan's 'Dark Pines Under Water', or Atwood's *Surfacing*.

The admission that 'I'm frightened by the devil/And drawn to those ones that ain't afraid' may express a wish that the lover, or the song itself, might perform a kind of exorcism of a malign spirit identi ed with the threatening landscape outside the enclosed 'garrison' of the 'bar'.[45] The singer's other habitual surroundings are similarly isolated: 'Oh I am a lonely painter/I live in a box of paints'. 'I live in a box': 'a place of shelter for one or more men, as a sentry's, signalman's or watchmen's box' (OED 13a; also note the judicial sense, abbreviated 'jury-box' or 'witness-box' (10a), and religious sense of 'confessional' (10b); as well as the slang usages of 'cof n' (3 k)). The rhyme of 'ain't' and 'paints' implies but represses the acknowledgement of 'pain', and 'afraid' becomes sharply isolated on the line, even tautologous after 'frightened'.

> I met a woman
> She had a mouth like yours
> She knew your life
> She knew your devils and your deeds
> And she said
> Go to him, stay with him if you can
> But be prepared to bleed

In Mitchell, there is frequent accentuation of the role of victimhood: female desire is regularly equated with a sacri ce to the point of overt

masochism. Obviously, there are many precedents of the Philomela myth of female inspiration achieved through and synonymous with suffering, from Sappho through to Billie Holliday, Janis Joplin, and Amy Winehouse. 'Bleed' also suggests the link between suffering and fertility (menstruation and birth), while it recalls the recurring line, 'You're in my blood like holy wine', spiritualizing suffering through reference to wine as Christ's blood, but also spiritualizing sexual communion.

> 'Love is touching souls'
> Surely you touched mine
> 'Cause part of you pours out of me
> In these lines from time to time

The 'Part of you' that 'pours out of me' could be semen; 'touching souls' could spark the soul of a child; but the result of this commingling is 'these lines', lyrical and musical creativity.

Whitesell contends that 'the idea of confessional outpouring is thematized in the song What is being poured out is her unrequited emotion as well as its embodiment in art and alcohol', and nds a continual 'motif of being boxed-in for which the antidote is the outpouring of the soul' (71).[46] Again the model is of boundaries between inner and outer being dissolved in a therapeutic utterance, with which the auditor is invited to identify. Yet the 'map of Canada' which has been sketched suggests that the song is addressed on one level to the nation, offering itself, like 'Both Sides, Now', as an alternative anthem. The potential audience is addressed not only as hypothetical past or future lover but also as fellow-citizens. The political context implied by Mitchell invoking 'O Canada' is a history of events and 'deeds', made explicit in the French version of the anthem: 'ton histoire est une épopée /Des plus brillants exploits'. This can be related to the tendency of the British military to use colonial forces as shock troops and cannon fodder. To 'be prepared to bleed' is the willingness to struggle and die. Frye observes that 'Canada has in its military history a long list of ferocious conflicts against desperate odds' ('Conclusion' 362). According to the 'garrison mentality', the survival of 'a closely knit and beleaguered society' is a similarly 'perilous enterprise' in which, in Frye's terse summary, 'one is either a ghter or a deserter' ('Conclusion') 351.

In this essay, I hope to have contested the assumption that Mitchell may be assimilated to a composite North American identity, and

alternatively proposed that her career follows a cyclic (or anadramous) pattern, whereby she returns to the landscape of her early childhood. Looking back a few decades after both Frye's seminal work and that early period in her career, there is a further question, which can perhaps be raised if not fully addressed in conclusion, of how her work might relate to the consequences of the policy of multiculturalism implemented from 1971 onwards. The United States' foundational narrative is aspirational, even messianic; Mitchell's could be seen as distinctively Canadian. Eden is invoked in the context of inevitable loss and longed-for reparation: 'We've got to get ourselves back to the garden'.[47] Frye observes 'the pastoral myth is associated with childhood or with some earlier social condition – pioneer life, the small town, the habitant rooted to his land The nostalgia for a world of peace and protection, with a spontaneous response to the nature around it, with a leisure and composure not to be found today, is particularly strong in Canada' ('Conclusion' 362). 'Paradise' has always already been 'paved', thus, 'Don't it always seem to go/That you don't know what you've got/Till it's gone'.[48] The song becomes a form of a promise that must contain within itself the possibility of future betrayal. The continual dispersal of the lyric voice prevents the formation of any uni ed or homogeneous identity; its internal differentiation allows forensic detachment as well as empathetic re-enactment. Yearning is preferred to ful llment; there is a paradoxical empowerment through loss. Mitchell's 1980s albums *Dog eat Dog* (1985) and *Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm* (1988) are explicitly engaged, but at the cost of introducing a kind of relentless stridency, losing what Sean Nelson terms the 'bond of trust' with her audience (100). New models of a distinctively Canadian identity are perhaps more likely to emerge from the lyrics of her great decade from the late 1960s to the late 1970s, where personal introspection always implies the political sphere. Terms such as 'love', 'care' and 'constancy' are not exclusively or even primarily erotic/romantic, but presuppose complex networks of social af liation, and an ethical astringency that underpins all gestures of communal af rmation: 'We love our lovin'/But not like we love our freedom'.[49]

Notes

1. On alternate possibilities for hemispheric division, see Adams, 'Imagining North America', in *Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America* (1–28).

2. I would slightly enlarge the boundaries from 1971–1975 of what Sean Nelson regards as Mitchell's major period, but otherwise concur in his valuation that these albums 'constitute a body of work that is as important and impressive as that of any artist of the twentieth century' (8).
3. 'California' on *Blue* (1971). In the song the description is presumably of 'Paris, France', where the speaker is situated in the first line, but 'cold' and 'settled' can apply to Canada.
4. 'River' on *Blue*. The song's evocation of her prairie childhood was prompted by celebrating Christmas in 'the 'strange and confining landscape' of Los Angeles (Mercer 86).
5. On *Hejira*. The upward motion of 'Icarus ascending' simultaneously prompts the precipitate descent of 'I crashed into his arms'.
6. Evocative place-names abound in her songs, such as 'The wind is in from Africa/ Maybe I'll go to Amsterdam/Maybe I'll go to Rome,' from 'Carey' on *Blue* (1971).
7. Compare 'I've always been a girl at home in a guy's world' (qtd. in Mercer 4), and 'I think women have an aversion to me I'm a thinking female and not a feminist' (qtd. in Marom 248–249).
8. On *Blue*.
9. O' Brien quotes her first husband Chuck Mitchell – 'Hustle, hustle. I could not believe she was so forward' (58) – who also claims his wife moved out the day that her green card arrived (62). On being sexually '*competitive*', see Mitchell's own account of seducing Tony Simon (in Mercer 138).
10. On SIQUOMB, see O'Brien (57) who also glosses Crosby's comment as affectionate (5).
11. On 'rejected sororities,' see O'Brien (34). Mercer also notes that praise for Laura Nyro represents 'one of her few flattering comments on fellow female musicians' (84).
12. On *Ladies of the Canyon* (1970).
13. On *Court and Spark* (1974). For Geffen's handsome tribute to both song and artist, see Sornverger and Sornberger (132–133).
14. On *Blue*.
15. On *Ladies of the Canyon* and *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (1975) respectively.
16. Typified by the pool languidly depicted on the inner cover of *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*.
17. 'Carey' on *Blue*.
18. As formulated by Nicholas Jennings (qtd. in O'Brien 40).
19. Some of the same protagonists feature in both contexts, such as Phil Ochs and Dave van Ronk (see O'Brien 48, 54–56).
20. The index to the (predominantly formalist) study by Whitesell, fellow Canadian and Associate Professor of Music at McGill University, gives 11

references to Canada (plus 3 footnotes). The first indexed reference to Canada in O'Brien's *Shadows and Light* occurs on page 98 (at which point Mitchell's upbringing and early career have already been covered).

21. As well as 'Urge for Going', the collection includes 'The Tea-Leaf Prophecy (Lay Down Your Arms)', 'Cherokee Louise', 'Ray's Dad's Cadillac', 'Let the Wind Carry Me', 'Don Juan's Reckless Daughter', 'Raised on Robbery', 'Paprika Plains', 'Song for Sharon', 'River', 'Chinese Café', 'Harlem in Havana' and 'Come in from the Cold'.
22. There is not a single reference to Vietnam indexed in O'Brien's entire biography. The aerial formation also prefigures 'the bombers/Riding shotgun in the sky' in 'Woodstock' on *Ladies of the Canyon*.
23. Compare Frye: 'Civilization in Canada, as elsewhere, has advanced geometrically across the country, throwing down the long parallel lines of the railways, dividing up the farm lands into chessboards of square-mile sections and concession-line roads' (348–349).
24. On Canadian cartography, see Berland, 'Mapping Space', in *North of Empire: Essays on the Cultural Technologies of Space* (242–272). On Franklin's doomed expedition, see Atwood, *Strange Things: the Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (7–34).
25. For example, 'Like the nights when the northern lights perform' ('Little Green' on *Blue*). For lengthy, if perhaps indulgent, discussion of Mitchell's art, see O'Brien (291–323).
26. On *Clouds*.
27. For a video of the ballet, see 'Complete Vancouver 2010 Opening Ceremony'.
28. 'Twisted', the Wardell Gray/Annie Ross cover that concludes *Court and Spark*, jokingly alludes to the issue of schizophrenic double identity, in its punch-line, 'Two heads are better than one'.
29. Compare the oscillation implied by 'I hate you some, I love you some/Oh I love you when I forget about me' ('All I Want' on *Blue*).
30. Hence the importance of the comma of apposition which implies logical aporia. O'Brien notes this was omitted from the title in the original pressing (74).
31. Similarly, the 'pretty lies' of 'The Last Time I Saw Richard' can be re-evaluated if 'When you gonna realize' is glossed as 'convert into real existence or fact' (OED 1).
32. Other usages in *Paradise Lost* include 'recall'd/To life prolongd and promisd Race' (XI.330–331); 'how soon/Would height recall high thoughts' (IV.94–95).
33. Chuck Mitchell spent the entire royalties from his share of the sale of Gandalf Publishing on a Porsche which he promptly proceeded to write off in a crash (O'Brien 62).

34. Compare Philip Larkin: 'Life is slow dying' ('Nothing to be Said', in *Collected Poems* 138).
35. Mitchell's daughter, Kelly was young enough to be imagined 'laughing' at the moment of separation for adoption: 'I've gone and lost the best baby/ That I ever had' ('River' on *Blue*). O'Brien stresses Mitchell's 'rare gift of remaining good friends with ex-lovers' (167; a point repeated in Mercer 140).
36. Bellow, incidentally, was born in Montreal.
37. 'Protegera nos foyers et nos droits' in Routhier's original French version, composed 1880. Mitchell's 'circus crowds' (plus 'ferris wheels' and 'another show') also seem to allude to Yeats' 'The Circus Animals' Desertion'.
38. A perhaps apocryphal quip by Mitchell, quoted by O'Brien (135) and Mercer (120), who both seem to assume a predominantly female audience, though gay Irish novelist Colm Toibin, for example, recalls 'I was a sad nerd when I was a kid, and I just used to sit in my room listening to *Blue* over and over again' (qtd. in O'Brien 330).
39. Frye also comments that 'Folk song is essentially a public and dramatic genre; the most subjective emotion it admits is sexual love' ('Turning New Leaves' 240).
40. 'Maybe I've never really loved/I guess that is the truth/I've spent my whole life in clouds at icy altitudes' ('Amelia'). Mitchell has commented that 'the cold (Canadian) winters and Scottish and Irish blood create an emotionally withholding people' (O'Brien 260).
41. On *Blue*. The album as a whole similarly opens spaciously with 'I am on a lonely road and I am travelling' ('All I Want') and progresses to nal entrapment: 'Only a phase, these dark café days' ('The Last Time I Saw Richard').
42. Though it was also included on her compilation album, *Misses* (1996).
43. 'The song's blue notes gives its sound a bluish cast that approaches synesthasia' (Mercer 113).
44. 'Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire', on *Court and Spark*.
45. Frye emphasizes the 'tone of deep terror with regard to nature' in Canadian poetry ('Conclusion' 350). In Atwood's account, the Wendigo similarly embodies the spirit of winter, privation, and the threat of starvation (*Strange Things* 62–86).
46. Whitesell does not engage with the latent bodily eroticism of the song. Mitchell's own critique of an Augustinian model of confession is quoted in Mercer (29–32).
47. 'Woodstock' on *Ladies of the Canyon*. Here she writes an anthem for an American cultural event par excellence, but from an outsider's perspective in more ways than one: she missed the festival. Her manager had instructed her not to risk missing a prior engagement on the Dick Cavett show (O'Brien 109).

48. 'Big Yellow Taxi' on *Ladies of the Canyon*.
49. 'Help Me' on *Court and Spark*.

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