“I sing my sorrow, and I paint my joy”
An intermedial analysis of selected songs of the 1960s and 70s by Joni Mitchell

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The arts at their best... They make people look at things they wouldn’t ordinarily look at and maybe plant the seeds of difference, like a different way of looking at things...

That’s my optimism... that art could change somebody’s course, change the way they look at things.

Joni Mitchell
# Table of Contents

1 Introduction ................................................................................................................. 1

2 Popular Music Analysis ............................................................................................. 4
   2.1 Singer-Songwriter: Between High and Low Art .................................................. 6
   2.2 Terminology .......................................................................................................... 8
      2.2.1 Song Sections ................................................................. 8
      2.2.2 Song Forms ................................................................. 10
      2.2.3 Hook Line ........................................................................... 10

3 Introducing the Artist ............................................................................................... 11
   3.1 Early Life and Career ......................................................................................... 11
   3.2 Joni Mitchell’s Musical Aspirations ................................................................. 12
      3.2.1 Musical Style and Influences ......................................................... 14
      3.2.2 Poetic Style ...................................................................................... 19
   3.3 Painting .............................................................................................................. 20

4 The 60s: Folk Breakthrough ...................................................................................... 22
   4.1 “Both Sides, Now” .............................................................................................. 24
      4.1.1 Ambivalence of life ........................................................................... 26
      4.1.2 Freedom ............................................................................................ 28
      4.1.3 Form ................................................................................................. 29
      4.1.4 Music ............................................................................................... 30
      4.1.5 Versions ............................................................................................ 31
   4.2 “Woodstock” ....................................................................................................... 32
      4.2.1 The Hippie Movement ........................................................................ 34
      4.2.2 “Back to the garden” .......................................................................... 36
      4.2.3 Form ................................................................................................. 36
      4.2.4 Music ............................................................................................... 38
      4.2.5 Versions ............................................................................................ 38

5 The Early 70s: Blue Period ....................................................................................... 42
   5.1 “California” ........................................................................................................ 44
      5.1.1 The Storyteller ....................................................................................... 46
5.1.2 “Will you take me as I am?” ................................................................. 47
5.1.3 Form ........................................................................................................ 48
5.1.4 Music ...................................................................................................... 49
5.2 “Blue” ........................................................................................................... 49
5.2.1 Love and Loss ...................................................................................... 50
5.2.2 Vulnerability ....................................................................................... 51
5.2.3 Maritime Imagery ............................................................................... 52
5.2.4 Hippie Lifestyle ................................................................................... 52
5.2.5 Form ........................................................................................................ 53
5.2.6 Music ...................................................................................................... 54
5.2.7 Versions ................................................................................................. 55

6 The Late 70s: Jazz Explorations .................................................................. 56
6.1 “Court And Spark” .................................................................................. 59
6.1.1 Seduction ............................................................................................. 61
6.1.2 Vulnerability ....................................................................................... 61
6.1.3 Form ...................................................................................................... 62
6.1.4 Music ...................................................................................................... 63
6.1.5 Versions ................................................................................................. 63
6.2 “Hejira” .................................................................................................... 64
6.2.1 Travel ..................................................................................................... 66
6.2.2 Ambivalence of Love and Life ............................................................. 67
6.2.3 Form ...................................................................................................... 69
6.2.4 Music ...................................................................................................... 70
6.2.5 Versions ................................................................................................. 71

7 Conclusion .................................................................................................. 72
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................ 74
Bibliography .................................................................................................. 75
1 Introduction

I was only a folk singer for about two years, and that was several years before I ever made a record. By that time, it wasn't really folk music anymore. It was some new American phenomenon. Later, they called it singer/songwriters. Or art songs, which I liked best. Some people get nervous about that word. Art. They think it's a pretentious word from the giddyap. To me, words are only symbols, and the word art has never lost its vitality. (Mitchell, quoted in Crowe 1979)

Joni Mitchell, as she specified in this Rolling Stone interview in 1979, sees herself as a singer-songwriter, or rather, a writer of art songs. Yet, the opinions on what is seen as art diverge. The singer-songwriter genre is generally considered a part of the broader category of popular music. Popular music, however, has not been taken as a serious field of study for so long (cf. Tagg 1982: 71). Many artists in the popular music genre, though, do have high artistic ambitions, both musically and lyrically. Especially singer-songwriters like Joni Mitchell put a considerable part of their focus on their lyrics and regard them as poetry, as the publication of Joni Mitchell: The Complete Poems and Lyrics (1997) indicates.

Pop songs are experienced via several dimensions, usually the lyrical and the musical being the most prominent ones. Thus, they are an intermedial phenomenon. If the analysis of a pop song considers only the lyrical or only the musical dimension, it neglects that there exists an interplay between the dimensions. Mitchell herself points out: „My words and music are locked together” (quoted in Mercer 2012: 96). However, musicologists tend to focus on the music, while literary scholars primarily analyze the lyrics (cf. Pirotl 2014: 7-9).

Acknowledging the intermediality of pop songs, this thesis will attempt to investigate the interplay between the lyrics and the music in songs by Joni Mitchell. In this process, Lloyd Whitesell, author of The Music of Joni Mitchell (2008), will serve as an inspiring example. He is an associate professor of music history at McGill University who also received a B.A. in Music and German Literature and thus, is able to consider the lyrical and the musical dimension. Whereas Whitesell puts more weight on the musical analysis, this thesis focuses
on the lyrics to a greater extent, without neglecting how the music illustrates the verbal message.

The 1960s and 70s were Joni Mitchell’ most formative phase. She is one of the most outstanding singer-songwriters with regard to her great body of work, stylistic diversity and poetic expression. Joni Mitchell’s need to discover new things is expressed in the following quote from a Rolling Stone interview: “Well, the thing is, I never wanted to turn into a human jukebox” (Wild 1991). She is always innovating and never lets herself be pinned down to one particular style. This thesis will look at Mitchell’s musical output in the 1960s and 70s and depict how she developed and re-invented her style during these two decades.

Joni Mitchell is known for writing highly autobiographical songs and is often referred to as a ‘confessional songwriter’. Her songs are indeed full of self-revelation and unveil her innermost feelings, as her well-known quote in the title of the thesis refers to (“I sing my sorrow, and I paint my joy”, quoted in Gerry 2011). Therefore, the thesis will illustrate Mitchell’s most prominent and recurring themes and investigate how they are connected with her life.

In the first part of my thesis, the terms ‘popular music’ and ‘singer-songwriter’ will be discussed and the theoretical tools for analyzing pop songs will be presented. The second part will investigate six songs by Joni Mitchell, which are put into three periods. The first period is Mitchell’s folk breakthrough, with “Both Sides, Now” and “Woodstock” chosen to exemplify her musical and lyrical style in the 60s. Although she did not see herself as a folk singer anymore, when she started writing her own material (as quoted above), she still became known through her appearances as a folk singer and the selected songs are two of her most folk-influenced songs. The second period is Mitchell’s Blue Period, the period of her most personal and confessional songs, for which the songs “California” and “Blue” have been chosen for analysis. Finally, the third period depicts Mitchell’s jazz explorations and will take a closer look at “Court And Spark” and “Hejira”.

2
Because to Joni Mitchell, the listeners’ personal response to her songs is more important than the autobiographical elements that inspired her writings\(^1\), I suggest listening to the six selected songs before reading the thesis.

\(^1\) “If you listen to that music and you see me, you’re not getting anything out of it. If you listen to that music and see yourself, it’ll probably make you cry and you’ll learn something about yourself and now you’re getting something out of it.” ("The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013")
2 Popular Music Analysis

In order to analyze popular music, the term ‘popular music’ must first be defined. Most commonly, ‘popular music’ refers to all musical genres that appeal to a large audience. Thus, it is often a commercial category. However, what is most popular changes from time to time: In the early 20th century, genres such as film music fell into the category of popular music (cf. Wicke 1997: 390). In the middle of the 20th century, popular music (in the United States) was mainly dominated by Tin Pan Alley, a collection of music publishers and songwriters. The term ‘pop music’ is often used as a short form for ‘popular music’, or it refers to a specific musical genre. For reasons of simplification, in this thesis the term ‘popular music’, as well as ‘pop music’, will be used interchangeably for analyzing Joni Mitchell’s songs, which were not designed to be categorized anyway, as Joni Mitchell often mixes and experiments with different genres. ‘Pop(ular) music’ will be used as an umbrella term for all popular music genres such as rock, folk, country, dance or even jazz, as opposed to classical music.

Even more difficult than defining the term popular music is to decide on an approach to analyzing pop songs. The study of popular music has not long been taken seriously, as Philip Tagg points out while describing how the first International Conference on Popular Music Research in 1981 was met with skepticism by the press (cf. Tagg 1982: 71). Meanwhile, it seems that popular music is gradually being taken as a more serious field of study, as suggested by academic programs such as “Music Industry” (with courses such as “Commercial Songwriting”) at the Middle Tennessee State University and by the existence of a separate institute for popular music at the University of Arts in Vienna.

When looking for approaches to popular music analysis, opinions seem to differ in what dimensions of pop songs should be the focus. In the thesis “Between Commerce and Intermedial Masterpiece”, Pirolt (cf. 2014: 7-9) points out the problem of musical analysis of popular music, on the one hand, and the problem of literary analysis, on the other. He states that musicologists tend to focus on a very detailed analysis of the music, but lack the analysis
of the lyrical dimension. In the field of literary studies (Pirolt names scholars such as Eckstein and Day), however, the musical dimension mostly plays a rather small role, and thus, the analysis is rather text-focused (cf. 2014: 9-10). However, when listening to a pop song, neither do we focus only on the music, nor do we just listen to the words, but rather it is a combination of both. In addition, there is a visual dimension to a song when it is performed live in a concert or when a music video exists. Most pop songs, thus, consist of several dimensions, the musical and lyrical being the most prominent ones, and the performative or visual being of relevance in certain situations such as a live concert. As Keiper put it in his essay “The Windmills of Your Mind: Notes Towards an Aesthetic of the Pop Song”, “The experience of pop songs is intermedial by definition” (in print: 14). One cannot listen to the lyrics or the music alone; indeed, we automatically perceive both. Thus, to analyze only one dimension of a song (e.g. to look at the words of a song alone), would not unveil as much of the meaning as the combination of words and sound would. To fully grasp a song’s meaning, its intermediality has to be acknowledged and all dimensions have to be taken into account – the musical, lyrical and performative.

In the present thesis, it is of special interest to investigate the interplay of words and music\(^2\) (i.e. how the music interacts with the lyrics). The music can either mirror or contradict the verbal message and even change the meaning of the words. Acknowledging that the writer of the thesis is not trained in musicology, the complexity in the music of Joni Mitchell will be analyzed only to the extent that her knowledge of music (gained from the studies for becoming a music teacher) will allow her. Thus, the main focus will be put on the lyrical dimension, without subscribing to any particular model for analysis, but employing approaches as they figure in the chosen songs.

\(^2\) Mitchell herself emphasizes, “My words and music are locked together” (quoted in Mercer 2012: 96).
2.1 Singer-Songwriter: Between High and Low Art

Basically, singer-songwriters are musicians who write and perform their own songs. Mostly, they appear as solo artists, accompanying themselves with a guitar or a piano. The term ‘singer-songwriter’ was introduced in the 1950s or 60s. The 1960s and 70s were the heyday of the most influential first generation of singer-songwriters, with Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Neil Young and Joni Mitchell being some of the most well-known. However, singer-songwriters, in their most basic definition, have existed earlier. The blues troubadours of the early 20th century could be compared to singer-songwriters, as well as (or even more) the North American folk musicians of the fifties, such as Woody Guthrie or Pete Seeger (cf. Graf 2001: 5-7). The influence of folk is also apparent in the fact that many singer-songwriters, like Joni Mitchell, started their career as acoustic folk musicians. Singer-songwriters differ from traditional folk music in that their focus is more on individual expression and original material.

Stylistically, singer-songwriters cannot easily be put into one category, as their music ranges from pop, rock, folk, country to rhythm and blues. In this thesis, the singer-songwriter genre has been put into the broader category of popular music because it shares its basic features. Singer-songwriters write songs to appeal for a large audience and thus bear in mind the commercial aspect. Especially in the 1960s and 70s, their songs were ranked in the charts and played on the radio.

Whitesell makes a good point of putting the singer-songwriter genre in between high and low, or popular art, without labeling one as superior to the other (cf. 2008: 8-9). He presents a list of features that are usually connoted with high art (left column), as opposed to low art (right column):
Joni Mitchell’s songs are especially marked by their complexity and subtlety while still appealing to a wider audience, sometimes simple, but still carefully constructed. Singer-songwriters often have high artistic ambitions and emphasize that they are not writing for the mainstream public, but writing poetry, thus attempting to be of artistic and lyrical value. Leonard Cohen, for example, started his career as a poet and only later turned his poems into songs. Joni Mitchell’s publication, *Joni Mitchell: The Complete Poems and Lyrics* (1997), also suggests that she thinks of her lyrics as poetry.

Song lyrics of singer-songwriters such as Joni Mitchell clearly share commonalities with poetry, especially romantic poetry, as Reinfandt suggests. He argues that craftsmanship is not as important for singer-songwriters as subjective experience, individual expression and romantic authenticity (cf. 2003: 337ff). Songwriting, however, can also be compared to “pre-Romantic traditions of composing poetry which regarded writing as the expression of perfect craftsmanship rather than of mere genius or authentic emotion, or indeed, as a happy marriage of both,” as Keiper points out (in print: 22). Mitchell wrote such a wide variety of songs that arguments for both views surely may found.

However, songs are different from poetry in one crucial factor: They are delivered together with music. In fact, the origin of the Greek-derived word ‘lyric’ lies in the lyre, an instrument used to accompany those songs referred to as ‘lyric’. This fact indicates that there is a historical relationship between poetry and music (cf. Nünning 2009: 49).

Considering all the different views brought forward, song lyrics are perhaps best described as poems designed to be sung (cf. Ettl 2010: 30).
2.2 Terminology

2.2.1 Song Sections

2.2.1.1 Verse

A song typically begins with the verse, which is “the section of a song in which the melody and harmony repeat, but the lyric changes” (Josefs 1996: 9). It introduces the listener to the characters, tone and setting of a song and basically tells the story (cf. Ettl 2010: 7). A verse normally appears several times in a song.

2.2.1.2 Refrain

The refrain is “the central idea, either the title or a line containing the title, or a very important lyric that occurs as part of each verse” (Perricone 2000: 87). It is sometimes used interchangeably with the term ‘chorus’ (cf. Perricone 2000: 87). However, in this thesis the term ‘refrain’ will refer to this specific part of the verse which often is the hook line of the song as well. A good example for a refrain is “Help Me”, a song from the album Court and Spark by Joni Mitchell, where the refrain occurs at the end of each verse:

(…)

Help me
I think I’m falling
In love too fast
It’s got me hoping for the future
And worrying about the past
’Cause I’ve seen some hot hot blazes
Come down to smoke and ash
We love our lovin’
But not like we love our freedom

Didn’t it feel good
We were sitting there talking
Or lying there not talking
Didn’t it feel good
You dance with the lady
With the hole in her stocking
Didn't it feel good
Didn't it feel good

Help me
I think I'm falling
In love with you
Are you going to let me go there by myself
That's such a lonely thing to do
Both of us flirting around
Flirting and flirting
Hurting too
We love our lovin'
But not like we love our freedom

(http://jonimitchell.com/music/song.cfm?id=126)

Here, the second and third verses (in between is a bridge) both end with exactly the same two lines, the refrain³.

2.2.1.3 Pre-Chorus

The pre-chorus, also referred to as a “transitional bridge” or “climb” (Perricone 2000: 87), “is a linking section, usually between verse and chorus. Its function is to lead up to or build up a monumentum to the chorus” (Perricone 2000: 87). Its melody is different from the verse and chorus and the lyrics often repeat, but sometimes change (cf. Ettl 2010: 10).

2.2.1.4 Chorus

The chorus is “the section of the song that repeats musically as well as lyrically” (Josefs 1996: 9). Thus, it is the central part of the song, often containing the basic message, or hook line, of a song (cf. Ettl 2010: 10). Sometimes, the lyrics or part of the lyrics of the chorus change slightly (cf. Josefs 1996: 9). As opposed to the refrain, which is musically and harmonically part of the verse, the chorus is a “complete, closed musical section” (Whitesell 2008: 151).

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³ Note: In the first verse, the pronoun “you” instead of “we” is used. Thus, the lyrics of the refrain can sometimes slightly change.
2.2.1.5 Bridge

The bridge is best “defined as a section that appears only once in a song, both musically and lyrically” (Josefs 1996: 10). When it appears in the AABA song form, section B is the bridge. When it appears in a song form with verse and chorus, it is often put after one of the last choruses in the song (cf. Perricone 2000: 87). The latter is also referred to as a “primary bridge” (Perricone 2000: 87). In the above mentioned song “Help Me” by Joni Mitchell, the bridge can be found between the second and third verses.

2.2.2 Song Forms

The above explained song sections appear in different ways in pop songs. Below is a list of the most common song forms. Of course, variations exist, especially in the songs of Joni Mitchell (e.g. through-composed songs with an unpredictable form). The list is taken from Josefs (1996: 10-14) and Perricone (2000: 88).

- AAA (or verse) form
- AABA (or verse-verse-bridge-verse) form
- Verse-chorus form
- Verse-chorus-bridge form
- Verse-pre-chorus-chorus form

2.2.3 Hook Line

The hook, or hook line, is a very central part of a song and especially of pop songs. It is defined as “the part of the song that is repeated frequently and therefore tends to remain in the mind of the listener” (Josefs 1996: 15). It usually carries the central statement of a song (cf. Perricone 2000: 86) and is placed often in the chorus, thus repeated several times in the song. In song forms without a chorus, e.g. the AABA form, the hook line is often found at the beginning or end of a verse, sometimes being the refrain (cf. Josefs 1996: 16).
3 Introducing the Artist

3.1 Early Life and Career

Joni Mitchell is surely a remarkable personality. To better understand her, it is worth taking a look at her life and some events that influenced her character and, consequently, her writing and composing.

Joni Mitchell was born on November 7, 1943 in Alberta, Canada. For the greater part of her childhood, she lived in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, together with her father, who was an Air Force flight officer, and her mother, who was a teacher. The landscape she grew up in, the flat prairie, had an impact on her music, as she said herself: “Nature is always there in the sound of music, and in mine it’s the prairie, where I’m from” (quoted in Mercer 2012: 53). In 1952, at the age of nine, Mitchell became ill with polio. Thanks to her strong-mindedness and determination, she learned to walk again, although slight impairments did persist. It most affected the versatility of her left hand, which is one major reason for her using and developing alternative tunings, mostly open tunings, on the guitar. Although her illness affected her disposition and isolated her, she remained an open-minded child who loved to dance.

In school, she was introduced to the world of poetry and encouraged by her English teacher Mr. Kratzman to write poems (cf. Mercer 2012: 67). However, painting has always been her first passion, as she pointed out in several interviews: “I'm a painter first, and a musician second” (Bresse and Denberg 1998). She began studying at the Alberta College of Art and Design in 1963, which she quit because there was too much conformity and no room for individual stylistic expression (cf. “The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). Additionally, she became pregnant with the child of a fellow student, Brad MacLath. At that time, she was already performing as a folk singer in small folk clubs and bars (cf. Weller 2008: 132). She eventually started writing her own songs in 1964 (“Day by Day” being her first) during her pregnancy, which encouraged her to express herself through songwriting (cf. Weller 2008: ...)
145). Sadly, she had to give up her daughter for adoption in 1965 because of financial hardship, of which she later wrote about in some of her songs, especially in “Little Green”, although the public was not aware of the allusions when it was released. In interviews, she confirmed that she did not give up her daughter because of her career as a musician. In the same year, she married Chuck Mitchell, with whom she toured as a duo. However, a breakup soon followed and she moved to New York City to pursue a solo career. In 1968, she released her first album, *Song to a Seagull*. She gained popularity through covers of her songs by the famous Judy Collins (who popularized “Both Sides Now”), Tom Rush and Buffy Sainte-Marie, among others (cf. Graf 2001: 278). From 1968 to 2007, she released in total 18 studio albums, 2 live albums and 5 compilations. In the late 80s and 90s, the number of releases and public performances decreased because she wanted to devote more time to painting, her primary passion (cf. Graf 2001: 279), and because of her various illnesses that made it painful to perform (cf. Wild 1991).

### 3.2 Joni Mitchell’s Musical Aspirations

As Joni Mitchell’ personality is reflected in the music and themes of her songs, this subchapter will take a closer look at Mitchell’s character and how it has influenced her music.

Joni Mitchell is a very headstrong character. She usually knew exactly how she wanted to have her music and would re-record her songs until she was content. She was not competing against others, but with herself (cf. Wild 1991). In order to avoid compromising her artistic vision for a record label, she produced all of her albums, except for the first\(^4\), herself. According to her first husband Chuck Mitchell and a friend of his, Armand Kunz, she always had a very disciplined and focused work ethic (cf. Weller 2008: 222).

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\(^4\) Her first album, *Song To A Seagull*, was produced by David Crosby, who allowed her “creative control” (Weller 2008: 247).
However, in addition to this strong, determined side, there is also a softer, more introverted side. Her deep feelings and emotions and her vulnerability and loneliness are reflected in many of her songs. In her first albums, her main theme was love, especially lost love. She had several relationships, but never seemed to find that partner, whom she was so desperately searching for. This changed around the time she settled for bass player Larry Klein, whom she was married to from 1982 to the early 1990s (cf. Wild 1991). The themes of her songs in the 80s and 90s no longer primarily dealt with love, but with social and political themes.

She sees herself as different, as she stated in an interview where she described herself in the words “I’m not a herd animal” (“The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). She was referred to as a recluse and thought of herself that way (cf. “The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). After recording Blue in 1971, she bought a piece of land on the Sunshine Coast in British Columbia where she lived in a small cabin (cf. Mercer 2012: 129f). Moreover, she did not perform many shows or give many interviews, partly because she did not seek to become a star, and partly due to her various illnesses, as for example her polio relapse when she was around forty years old (cf. “The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”).

Joni Mitchell regularly emphasizes that she does not want to be labeled. As mentioned before, she sees herself as fluid and holds the opinion that no person can be really understood and described. Accordingly, she does not like formulations such as “you’re just like” (“The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). For example, she has been called the ‘Hippie Folk Goddess’, although she did not think highly of most of the hippie ideals (cf. “The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). A reason for this tag may be the song “Woodstock”, which is a song about the famous hippie festival that she wrote after not being able to perform there.

Authenticity is something Joni Mitchell holds in high esteem. She always wants to stay true to herself, writes about very personal themes and does not play a role on stage. To her, a performer is a method actor, who draws on memory for his or her performance (cf. “The Joni
Mitchell Interview 2013”). She holds the opinion that “the art of art is to be as real as you can within this artificial situation” (“The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”).

With regard to Joni Mitchell being a confessional songwriter or not, there have been opposing views. She strongly rejects being labeled as confessional. In Romantische Kommunikation, a confessional song is defined as a song dealing with individual subjective experience including autobiographic references, without losing its transferability to the audience (‘romantischer Relevanzanspruch’) (cf. Reinfandt 2003: 353f). Regarding this definition, Joni could be labeled as a confessional songwriter: on the one hand, the audience can see itself in her songs, while on the other, she writes about deeply personal themes, almost always keeping certain situations in mind. Joni herself, however, does not want her songs to be analyzed autobiographically because in her view, listening to her songs should not become an “exercise in code cracking” (Mercer 2012: 164). On the contrary, she states, “If you listen to that music and you see me, you’re not getting anything out of it. If you listen to that music and see yourself, it’ll probably make you cry and you’ll learn something about yourself and now you’re getting something out of it” (“The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). Joni Mitchell does not like the word ‘confessional’ by itself because she associates it with the confession of sins as in church. To her, it is more of a revealing of her innermost feelings, her experience being her “innermost resource” (Mitchell, quoted in Mercer 2012: 46). Her songs are telling stories, and revealing or confessing is just a necessary byproduct (cf. Mercer 2012: 47). The only exceptions she admits are certain lines in “Man to Man”, where she sings, “I don’t like to lie, but I sure can be phony when I get scared”, and in “River”, where she states, “I’m selfish and I’m sad” (cf. Mercer 2012: 204).

3.2.1 Musical Style and Influences

You have two options. You can stay the same and protect the formula that gave you your initial success. They’re going to crucify you for staying the same. If you change, they’re going to crucify you for changing. But staying the same is boring. And change is interesting. So of the two options, (...) I’d rather be crucified for changing. (Mitchell, quoted in Crowe 1979)
Joni Mitchell’s great body of work stands out due to her constant stylistic changes. She always kept re-inventing herself and experimented with different musical styles and instrumentation, covering genres such as folk, pop, jazz and rock, never letting herself be pinned down to one particular genre. She compares her songs to plays, for which she is the playwright and the actress. She feels “miscast in [her] early songs” now (Mitchell, quoted in Denberg 1998).

Joni Mitchell neither keeps to one instrument nor to one musical style and never repeats herself within her own songs. She describes herself as being “fluid” and “an original” (“The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). In the same interview, she states that her reasons are, on the one hand, that she has the need to discover things and wants to create originals like a painter, and on the other hand, that she does not want to be a copycat.

When Joni Mitchell composes, she experiments a lot with sounds and the emotions the song should convey. Usually, she composes the music first and writes the lyrics afterwards, which are influenced by what the music conveys (cf. “The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”).

The following examples serve to illustrate her wide range of styles, highlighted in the present thesis. At the beginning of her career she composed the most clearly folk-influenced songs (e.g. “Both Sides Now”, “Big Yellow Taxi”) although she would never have called herself a folk musician. “I was only a folk singer for about two years, and that was several years before I ever made a record. By that time, it wasn’t really folk music anymore. It was some new American phenomenon. Later, they called it singer/songwriters. Or art songs, which I liked best” (Crowe 1979). Nevertheless, she won a Grammy Award for Best Folk Performance for her album *Clouds* (1969). With her album *Court and Spark* (1974) her style moved towards a jazz-influenced style, as can be heard in the songs “Trouble Child” or “Twisted”. With *Hejira* (1976), she moved even further towards jazz and away from a style fit for mainstream. *Mingus* was produced in collaboration with jazz musician Charles Mingus. The project was Mingus’ last musical production before his death in 1979. Afterwards, she departed from jazz
to a more 80s pop sound with *Wild Things Run Fast* (1982) (cf. Graf 2001: 279). With *Turbulent Indigo* (1994), she partly returned to her earlier style, and in the albums *Both Sides Now* (2000) and *Travelogue* (2002), she mostly presented re-recordings of songs from previous albums and covers of jazz standards. *Shine* (2007), inspired by the war in Iraq, introduces new songs once again. Thus, the great diversity in her work can be seen. Not only was she elected into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame in 1981 and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1997, but she has also won several Grammy awards and has been covered by many other artists such as jazz pianist Herbie Hancock, who has released the cover album *River: The Joni Letters* in 2007.

However, while highlighting her originality, one must add that she has not reinvented the wheel. Of course, she has been influenced by the music and works of others. In her childhood, she loved to listen to Rachmaninoff’s “Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini” and Edith Piaf’s “Les Trois Cloches” (cf. Mercer 2012: 110). She names Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen as “points of departure” (Wild 1991). From the former she learned that there are no boundaries in the choice of themes for songs. The latter introduced her to the world of literature (cf. Mercer 2012: 97f). Musicians she admires include Stravinsky, Duke Ellington, Debussy and Marvin Gaye (later works) (cf. “The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). The classical impressionist Debussy especially influenced her piano sound (cf. Mercer 2012: 110).

### 3.2.1.1 Instruments

Joni first started to take piano lessons at the age of seven, but she soon quit because of her restrictive piano teacher who scorned her improvisations (cf. Weller 2008: 64). She started playing the ukulele at the age of 14 and later also learned to play the guitar, both as an autodidact. As polio had left her left hand impaired, she had to find alternative ways to play the guitar. All in all, she uses over fifty tunings (cf. Mercer 2012: 109), frequently open tunings, where the open strings, when strummed, are tuned to form a chord. They not only allow her to play with more simple fingerings, but also sound differently. They convey a
special feeling, and thus, the music supports the message and emotions of the song. Joni Mitchell herself says about her chords:

> For years everybody said ‘Joni’s weird chords’ and I thought, how can they be weird chords? Chords are depictions of emotion. These chords that I was getting by twisting the knobs on the guitar until I could get the chords that I heard inside that suited mm [sic!]—they feel like my feelings. You know—I called them—not knowing (technical names)[sic!]—‘chords of inquiry’—they have a question mark in them. There were so many unresolved things……those chords suited me, and …. I’d stay in unresolved emotionality for days and days. (Mitchell, quoted in Moeller 2011: 233)

She started out with more conventional open tunings, like the open-G tuning in “Little Green”, and became even more experimental with tunings in “This Flight Tonight”: G-G-D-G-B-D. The deep and rough sound of the lowest-pitched string makes an interesting soundscape throughout the song (cf. Mercer 2012: 108). What she tries to do with her guitar is to sound like an orchestra\(^5\).

Joni Mitchell is a multi-instrumentalist. She not only sings and plays the ukulele and the guitar, but also plays the piano and dulcimer and experiments with the synthesizer. Since the early nineties, she has owned a Stratocaster guitar and a digital Roland VG8 unit which allow her to pre-program her numerous tunings for concerts (cf. White 1995). Being acquainted with so many instruments and with electronics adds to her wide range of stylistic expression. She always uses what most supports the message and feeling of the song. For example, in “Carey”, a song she composed when she lived in the seaside cliff caves in Mátala, she plays the dulcimer and uses the ‘Mátala tuning’ that she discovered there (cf. Mitchell in Mercer 2012: 85). What is most remarkable about her musical performance is that she is not knowledgeable in music theory (intentionally). Jazz musicians like saxophonist Wayne Shorter appreciated her expressionistic style, which is based on feeling and not on academic training (cf. Mercer 2012: 109).

\(^5\) When jazz drummer John Guerin, who started collaborating with Joni Mitchell for the album Court and Spark, first heard her songs, he found that “she was the whole orchestra in one guitar!” (Guerin, quoted in Weller 2008: 413)
3.2.1.2 Vocals

It always seemed to me that a great singer – now we’re talking about excellence, not popularity – but a great singer would sing closer to his or her own speaking voice. (Mitchell, quoted in Crowe 1979)

As statements like this one suggest, it is important to Joni Mitchell that her voice has a natural sound. She admires singers such as Billie Holiday or Maria Callas (cf. Crowe 1979). Ephland points out in an interview with Joni Mitchell and Cassandra Wilson, “You each ask the listener to get closer as opposed to what belters do with their singing” (1996). This describes exactly what Joni Mitchell wants: to create a close, intimate setting, not a theatrical show as is being done in music theatre (cf. Ephland 1996).

Joni Mitchell started singing at the age of nine when she was in the hospital recovering from polio. It was around Christmas time, so she sang Christmas carols out of a book she was given (cf. White 1995). In 1962, she started singing publicly, accompanying herself with her ukulele (cf. Weller 2008: 131). When she sang at an open mic show, the Louis Riel’s Sunday night hootenanny, “everybody thought she sounded very weird and off-key” (D’Arcy Case, quoted in Weller 2008: 132). However, she developed a really soft, natural sound as can be heard on her first album Song to a Seagull. She had a light soprano in her younger years, ranging three octaves. In her later records, she has lost her range and her voice deepened due to her age, illnesses and heavy smoking.

Joni Mitchell is admired especially for her phrasing. As Cassandra Wilson put it in an interview:

There’s something about your phrasing that implies space. It’s the most unique phrasing. When I first heard the way that you would say all the things you would say, and when try to do that [sic!]. I would try to write poetry and sing it and I would just sort of - I couldn’t get it all in! That’s a special art. Not everybody has that. (quoted in Ephland 1996)
3.2.2 Poetic Style

As with her musical style, Joni Mitchell cannot be pinned down to one particular poetic style; there is no ‘typical Joni Mitchell poem’. However, the trend of her earlier to her later songs goes from simple to more sophisticated as she matures. She wrote songs with a simple form and more obvious meaning (e.g. “Both Sides, Now”), as well as complex songs that evoke several interpretations (e.g. “Hejira”). As we have seen, her most prominent themes are love and loss of love, loneliness, freedom, traveling, duality and spirituality, as well as social and political themes, especially in her later works. Whitesell even sees a thematic thread in the theme of personal freedom that runs through all her albums (cf. 2008: 78ff).

Joni Mitchell’s songs are full of imagery – she indeed likes to “paint with words”, as her English teacher Mr. Kratzmann put it (quoted in Weller 2008: 72). Ever since seventh grade, she has been writing poetry. She thinks she has inherited her talent for writing poetry from her great-grandmother, Sadie Henderson (cf. White 1995).

In her poems, Joni Mitchell is often experimenting, for example with structure, speech situations or mode. She has written poems in simple strophic form (e.g. “Car On A Hill”), as well as in through-composed forms with no specific structure (e.g. “Blue”), like a stream-of-consciousness or interior monologue. The speakers in her poems – sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit – are not only in first person, which would be typical for a singer-songwriter, but also in second or third person. Sometimes, more than one speaker occurs (e.g. “Woodstock” or “The Pirate Of Penance”). In “Trouble Child”, it is not even clear whether she is addressing herself or somebody else through a second-person speaker (cf. Whitesell 2008: 55). Many of her songs have a romantic, Wordsworthian character, often evoking images of nature, such as the clouds that are like “ice-cream castles in the air” (“Both Sides, Now”), and using phrases like “I’ve spent my whole life in clouds at icy altitudes” (“Amelia”) (cf. Whitesell 2008: 46).
3.3 Painting

Oh I am a lonely painter
I live in a box of paints
I'm frightened by the devil
And I'm drawn to those ones that ain't afraid

(“A Case Of You” http://jonimitchell.com/music/song.cfm?id=181)

As mentioned in chapter 3.1, Joni Mitchell’s primary passion is painting. In school, she took additional classes in abstract art and figurative realism and was complimented on her drawing by her English teacher Mr. Kratzmann (cf. White 1995). In the early 1960s, before she pursued her career as a folk musician, she studied at the Alberta College of Art and Design for one year.

Most of the album covers were painted by Joni Mitchell herself. In the 1990s, she decided to dedicate less time to music in order to have more time for painting, and eventually, in June 2000, she opened her first art exhibition, entitled “voices: Joni Mitchell”. Brooke (2000) reviews the show in an article published in The New York Times. The 87 exhibited pieces are different and experimental in style, just like her music.

Those line drawings were done at the time when my first records were basically music and guitar. At the time, I started overdubbing my music. I added color to the line drawings, sometimes after the fact. Then as my music got jazzier, I painted abstractly. Now that I am going through a neo-classical style, the painting goes through a neo-classical style. (Mitchell, quoted in Brooke 2000)

Mitchell repeatedly compares painting with making music. Her paintings influence her music and vice versa. She says herself that she “applies painting principles to music” (“The Joni Mitchell interview 2013”). However, there are certain crucial differences between painting and the performing arts, as Mitchell points out on her live record Miles of Aisles in 1974:

That's one thing that's always, like, been a difference between, like, the performing arts, and being a painter, you know. A painter does a painting, and he paints it, and that's it, you know. He has the joy of creating it, it hangs on a wall, and somebody buys it, and maybe somebody buys it again, or maybe nobody buys it and it sits up in a loft somewhere until he dies. But he
never, you know, nobody ever, nobody ever said to Van Gogh, 'Paint a Starry Night again, man!' You know? He painted it and that was it.

Apart from the necessity to reproduce a work of art as a singer-songwriter in live performances, Mitchell highlights another difference she sees between painting and songwriting in the famous quote, “I sing my sorrow and I paint my joy” (Mitchell, quoted in Gerry 2011). In “The Joni Mitchell interview 2013”, she explains that poetry and painting are “different mental processes”. From a Buddhist view, she mentions, “writing is more neurotic” because you are watching and analyzing your thoughts. Painting, however, is more meditative; it “calms down the synapses”. Another reason why Mitchell might say that she sings her sorrow is that her texts deal with hard times in her life, such as loneliness and having to give up her daughter for adoption, which marked the beginning of her career as a singer-songwriter, as mentioned before in chapter 3.1.

Joni Mitchell admires painters such as Picasso and Van Gogh. The latter one most obviously inspired her album cover for *Turbulent Indigo*, which refers to the famous self-portrait of Van Gogh with the bandaged ear painted in 1889. Mitchell feels she resembles him in his impulsivity (cf. Brooke 2000).
4 The 60s: Folk Breakthrough

This period starts when Mitchell wrote her first song, “Day to Day”, in 1964 and includes the first three albums, Song to a Seagull (1968), Clouds (1969) and Ladies of the Canyon (1970). Like many singer-songwriters, Joni Mitchell started out as a folk singer in small clubs, singing covers and accompanying herself with her guitar or ukulele. When she wrote her first song, she was pregnant with a girl she would give up for adoption. The adoption impacted her whole future life, often filled with regret, although Mitchell knew she would not have managed her career if she had kept the child; because at the time that she became pregnant, she had no financial security living solely off of the money she earned performing in small clubs.

Joni Mitchell’s duo with Chuck Mitchell, which they started in 1965, served as a springboard for her career, and she soon realized that she could venture to pursue a solo career and moved to New York City. Before she released her first album, Chuck remembers an incident when Joni said to him, “It’s gonna happen, Charlie. I’m scared, but I’m gonna be a star” (quoted in Weller 2008: 244). When she did release Song to a Seagull in 1968, she was already known by covers of (at that time) more popular singers such as Judy Collins, who popularized “Both Sides, Now” (published in 1967 on her album Wildflowers). However, it was not to be one of her best-selling albums, hitting only #189 on the Billboard chart. Mitchell dedicated Song to a Seagull to her English teacher “Mr. Kratzmann, who taught me to love words” (album liner notes). It is a concept album with two parts – part 1 subtitled “I Came to the City” and part 2 subtitled “Out of the City and Down to the Seaside”, “a celebration of nature and countryside” (Bogdanov 2002: 746). The cover was designed and painted by Joni Mitchell. The album’s production is kept simple and Mitchell plays the guitar and piano on the ten songs that include themes like love and freedom. The first song, “I Had A King”, is about her marriage to Chuck Mitchell, and the last song, “Cactus Tree”, about her recurring theme of personal freedom versus being bound to someone (“she’s so busy being free”). Her first album’s style is more classical than folk – she even compared it to Schubert
(cf. “The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). She already did not see herself as a folk musician anymore, but was ambitious in writing art songs (cf. chapter 3.2.1).

As opposed to the first album, Mitchell describes the second album *Clouds* as being more similar to folk because she was influenced by musicians friends like Neil Young, Stephen Stills or Graham Nash (cf. “The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). She even regarded the sound of her voice as influenced by their nasal singing (cf. White 1995). The album is dedicated to her grandmother Sadie J. McKee (cf. album liner notes), who was also talented in writing poetry (cf. chapter 3.2.2). The cover was again painted by Mitchell, showing a close-up self-portrait where she holds a red flower, with the Saskatchewan River in the background. On this album she uses the guitar as the only form of accompaniment, except for one song, “The Fiddle And The Drum”, which is totally unaccompanied. It is one of the few protest songs among her work in the 60s and 70s, in which she otherwise only dealt with more personal themes – atypical for a singer-songwriter at that time. Mitchell finally included the song “Both Sides, Now” as the last song on the album.

Mitchell’s third album, *Ladies of the Canyon*, gets more experimental. She added new instruments: cello, percussion, clarinet, flute and baritone saxophone. Her popularity rose, hitting #27 on the *Billboard* chart. The biggest hits on the album are “Big Yellow Taxi”, “Woodstock” and “The Circle Game”. “Big Yellow Taxi” is another of her few political protest songs, bringing forward environmental concerns. “The Circle Game” dates back to 1965, shortly before the birth of her child. It is a song about “the value of age”, inspired by Neil Young’s song “Sugar Mountain” (Weller 2008: 151). It was recorded by Tom Rush, who also recorded Mitchell’s songs “Urge for Going” and “Tin Angel”.

In the following subchapters, the songs “Both Sides, Now” and “Woodstock” will be analyzed as representatives of Mitchell’s period in the 60s, in which she wrote her most folk-influenced songs and made her breakthrough as a folk singer.
4.1 “Both Sides, Now”

Rows and flows of angel hair
And ice cream castles in the air
And feather canyons everywhere
I've looked at clouds that way

But now they only block the sun
They rain and snow on everyone
So many things I would have done
But clouds got in my way

I've looked at clouds from both sides now
From up and down, and still somehow
It's cloud illusions I recall
I really don't know clouds at all

Moons and Junes and Ferris wheels
The dizzy dancing way you feel
As every fairy tale comes real
I've looked at love that way

But now it's just another show
You leave 'em laughing when you go
And if you care, don't let them know
Don't give yourself away

I've looked at love from both sides now
From give and take, and still somehow
It's love's illusions I recall
I really don't know love at all

Tears and fears and feeling proud
To say "I love you" right out loud
Dreams and schemes and circus crowds
I've looked at life that way

But now old friends are acting strange
They shake their heads, they say I've changed
Well something's lost, but something's gained
In living every day

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
I've looked at life from both sides now
From up and down and still somehow
It's life's illusions I recall
I really don't know life at all

(40) (http://jonimitchell.com/music/song.cfm?id=83)

Definitely one of Joni Mitchell’s best-known songs, “Both Sides, Now” was ranked #171 on Rolling Stone’s list of the “500 Greatest Songs of All Time”. It has been covered by a number of other artists, such as Judy Collins, Dave Van Ronk (who renamed it “Clouds”), Frank Sinatra, Pete Seeger, Dianne Reeves and Herbie Hancock. Many people can see themselves in the song and relate to the “theme of thoughtful indecisiveness and of the shifting, illusory nature of truth” (Weller 2008: 221).

“Both Sides, Now” was released in 1969 on the album Clouds, but Joni Mitchell had written it earlier, in 1967, shortly after her break-up with Chuck Mitchell and after giving her child for adoption. She was inspired by Saul Bellow’s Henderson the Rain King, as she told the audience in conversation with Gene Shay during an airing of “Folklore Program” on March 12, 1967.

I'll play that one first. It -- I should tell people a little bit about it. I was reading a book, and I haven't finished it yet, called "Henderson the Rain King." And there's a line in it that I especially got hung up on that was about when he was flying to Africa and searching for something, he said that in an age when people could look up and down at clouds, they shouldn't be afraid to die. And so I got this idea 'from both sides now.' There are a lot of sides to everything, and so the song is called "From Both Sides, Now."

Joni Mitchell herself thought of the song that she “just skimmed the surface of what [she] was contemplating” (Smiley 2014). She did obviously not expect the song to become one of the most famous in her career. “I considered it kind of a failure and then other people started to see something in it. In its vagueness it was very interpretable” (Smiley 2014). In “The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”, Mitchell talked about how she “grew into” the song and how it suited her better when she re-recorded it for the 2000 album Both Sides Now. In her early twenties, she felt she “was too young to take that role” of the mature woman looking back.
on her life and contemplating how she has looked at it from both sides, sharing her wisdom in the song.

In the following subchapters, I will explain how Joni Mitchell’s life experience led her to share her wisdom in a song and how the thematic thread of freedom that Whitesell pointed out (as noted in chapter 3.2.2) is to be found in this song.

4.1.1 Ambivalence of life

Each verse of “Both Sides, Now” is divided into two parts: The first one looks at something in a positive way, the second in a negative. The chorus in between each draws a conclusion to the preceding view in the verse. The speaker thus shares her wisdom about the duality of life with the recipient.

The first verse starts out with a view on clouds in an innocent, childlike way, with fantastical images, almost like a fairy-tale. Clouds are compared to ice cream castles and angel hair. In the second part, however, clouds are looked upon in a negative way, blocking the sun and the things one could do. In the chorus, the singer states that, although having looked at clouds from both sides, she still does not know them at all. The second verse looks in a similar way at love. It first describes infatuation, a state of naïve glorification of love like it were in a fairytale, then realizing that reality is different. The speaker seems to give the listener the advice to not show being hurt by one’s ex-lover. Again, she realizes in the chorus that she does not know love (line 24). In the third verse, the view goes, like before, from a narrower to a broader theme, in this case looking at life first in a more naïve way (e.g. “feeling proud / To say ‘I love you’ right out loud”, lines 25-26) and then in a disillusioned way, being judged by friends for changing (lines 29-30). However, she realizes that if she

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6 As the songs analyzed in this thesis are all delivered by a female voice (Joni Mitchell’s), a female speaker/singer will be assumed for a better readability. Note that the speaker does not necessarily have to be the same as the author of the song.
wants to stay true to herself, she will eventually lose the friendship of some of her acquaintances, but this is just the way it goes and there is a reason for everything. Thus, she returns back to a positive view in this part of the verse.

Although at the age of 24, she seemed far too young to create and sing such a song that shares wisdoms of life, she had gained life experience that made it possible to sing “Both Sides, Now” with an understanding. As mentioned above, Joni Mitchell wrote “Both Sides, Now” after her failed marriage with Chuck Mitchell and after surrendering her girl for adoption. Thinking of these circumstances and her illnesses in childhood, she indeed faced challenges not many other people had at that stage of life. In the 1960s, although sexual liberation being one of the major accomplishments of the decade, it was still highly disgraceful to have a child out of wedlock. Therefore, Joni tried as hard as she could to hide the pregnancy from her family. The marriage to Chuck Mitchell gave her hope that she could keep the child that she had put in a foster home for the first few months. It is unclear whether she surrendered her child because Chuck Mitchell would not raise it together with her or whether it was Joni’s decision alone (cf. Weller 2008: 146). There are different statements by Chuck and Joni, but clearly, Joni did feel like she had no choice because of financial hardship. As far as her career is concerned, she definitely would not have published as many songs if any if she had kept her child. Thus, she had seen life “from up and down” (line 10), had been in the position of “win and lose” (line 34) and “clouds got in [her] way” (line 8) when she was hoping to be able to raise her daughter. She had also “looked at love from both sides” (line 21) and the failed marriage clearly inspired her to write “Both Sides, Now”, as she stated in an interview: “If you make a good marriage, god bless you. If you make a bad marriage, become a philosopher” (Smiley 2014).

Weller compares “Both Sides, Now” in her book Girls Like Us with “Natural Woman”, presenting “the young middle-class woman as soulful risk taker” (2008: 223). In the second part of the third verse, the speaker sings about friendships broken apart because she lives in a way that others do not accept. However, this is a necessary part in being true to herself.
She takes risks and acknowledges that “something’s lost” (line 31), knowing that at the same time, taking the risk of losing something will eventually make her gain something new.

The metaphor of the clouds serves to introduce the theme of looking at life from both sides and it links the whole song-poem. Nature, the sky and thus, clouds, played an important role in Joni Mitchell’s childhood as a friend of Mitchell remembers: “I remember us […] looking at the clouds and figuring out what we could see in them” (Mercer 2012: 51). The first part of the first verse, is a meditation on clouds how a child sees them. In the second part of the first verse, however, she sees them in a way many adults do: as a sign of rain or bad weather. Clouds are often a subject for painting and in this song Mitchell uses them for painting with words. At the end of the song, she takes up the metaphor again in a very subtle and ingenious way: The last of the two choruses repeats line 10 (“From up and down and still somehow”) in line 38, while the rest of the lyrics stay the same as in the previous chorus.

4.1.2 Freedom

I would like to point out two ways the thematic thread of ‘freedom’ can be found in “Both Sides, Now”. Firstly, the semantic field of the sky (which re-occurs in the song “Amelia” on Hejira) can be found with the “clouds” (e.g. line 4), the “ice-cream castles in the air” (line 2) and the view from “up and down” (line 10). The unlimited sky and the view from up above evoke the notion of freedom and boundlessness. Secondly, the singer does not want to be restricted by the opinion of others, as it comes out in the second part of the third verse (lines 29-32). She sings that friends “shake their heads” (line 30) because she has changed, but then she muses about how losing something or someone has a good side and that one can grow with it. This reflects the part of Mitchell’s character that does not want to be pinned down or bound to something or somebody. As the singer in the song, she has taken many risks in her life, accepted many changes and dealt with unforeseen events, especially during her pregnancy when she was completely on her own and destitute.
4.1.3  Form

“Both Sides, Now” has a clear verse-chorus form. The verses are divided into two parts, each four lines long, and the chorus is four lines long, only being repeated twice after the last verse. The song is a good example of the points Ettl makes in her thesis: The verses “explain the hook line” and make “the chorus [appear] in a new light each time it resounds” (2010: 7-8). Each verse gives a positive and negative view on either clouds, love or life, and the chorus presents the conclusion of it, containing the hook line which is made up of lines 1 and 4 of each chorus: “I’ve looked at [clouds/love/life] from both sides now / [...] / I really don’t know [clouds/love/life] at all”. As opposed to most songs, the chorus’ lyrics change slightly, referring to the previous verse. Mitchell links the first and the second parts of the verses by an internal refrain: “I’ve looked at [clouds/love/life] that way / But now...” (cf. Whitesell 2008: 149). In addition, she creates structure by a similar construction of each verse. The first three lines all lead up to the fourth line of each part of a verse, e.g. lines 1-3 describing the view on clouds, line 4 revealing that it is about clouds. Whitesell points out that this model of “statement/restatement/continuation/closure” (2008: 165) is used repeatedly by Mitchell. This model is also supported by a tail rhyme with the rhyme scheme aaab in the verse. Interestingly, the last line of each part of a verse all end with the same phoneme, partly even the same word, thus, being an identical rhyme.

Mitchell adds color to her painting with words by starting each verse with an internal rhyme and making use of alliteration in each second line. The listener, thus, knows from the first words that this is not simply a narrative being told, but that we are listening to a fairy-tale like poem. The explicit first person speaker addresses the audience in the lyric mode⁷, speaking mostly in iambic tetrameter.

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⁷ Whitesell presents four modes in how a speaker can address its audience: the dramatic, narrative, lyric and political (cf. 2008: 44-47).
4.1.4 Music

The music, by Mitchell’s standards, is held rather simply and the song’s key is F# major. Both parts of the verse, the positive and the negative, have the same music, harmonically and melodically. The sole accompaniment by the guitar adds to the song’s simplicity and directness. The tuning is open D (D-A-D-F#-A-D / D-7-5-4-3-5) with a capodastro on the fourth fret, resulting in an F# major chord (F#-C#-F#-A#-C#-F#) on the open strings. This is a good example of Mitchell’s guitar playing described earlier in chapter 3.2.1. She uses an alternate tuning in order to simplify the playing: “What opened the door for me was that my left hand couldn’t get at the chords that I heard in my head. So I tuned the guitar to the chords that I heard in my head. (Folk musician) Eric Anderson showed me open G and D modal tuning. After that, I never played in standard tuning” (Mitchell, quoted in Ephland 1996). The open D tuning is one of her more standard alternate tunings. However, with a few simple fingerings, she adds color to the harmonies (e.g. adding a major 7 in the intro). In addition, she plays a bluesy lick with the lower strings of the guitar after line 4 and right before the chorus:

![Fig. 1: Melody in guitar at the end of the first and second part of the verse of “Both Sides, Now” (my transcription)](image)

This melody is played over a C# major chord and thus, the note E is the flatted third of the chord, part of the blues scale.

One defining and prominent element of the song is the pedal point that resounds throughout the whole song. It is the tonic F# that resounds on the first, fourth and sixth string on the open strings. One or more F# notes can be heard at all time in the song, most prominently in

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Joni Mitchell developed a “shorthand system for identifying distinct tunings, specifying the number of half steps separating the pitches of adjacent strings” (Whitesell 2008: 244).
the bass range. Lukas Höfler (personal communication), a student of jazz- und popular guitar, pointed out that it seems like there is an additional pedal point sounding like an organ on either the note C# or F#. Producers sometimes add this psychoacoustic element to acoustic songs, which is not being perceived consciously, but only on close listening. Although the pedal point is never fully relinquished, at the beginning of the chorus it is pushed more into the background due to the dominant’s (C#5(7)) dominance and the voice’s singing in a higher range and rarely touching the tonic (cf. Whitesell 1008: 45). However, it falls back quickly to a lower range in the second part of the chorus and the pedal point wins back its dominance, just like the text falls back into the disillusioned state (“I really don’t know [clouds/life/love] at all”), which is a good example of the music mirroring the words.

4.1.5 Versions

As mentioned above, “Both Sides, Now” is probably the most covered song by Joni Mitchell. The most famous and first cover was published by Judy Collins on her album *Wildflowers* in 1967, even before Joni Mitchell herself published it. It furthered Mitchell’s career enormously and was also the biggest hit of Judy Collins herself when she released it as a single in 1968, reaching #8 on the U.S. pop singles charts. The major difference to Mitchell’s version lies in the music. Collins’ version is simplified and more conventional in the use of mainly the tonic, subdominant and dominant without the strict pedal point. Though Joni Mitchell basically uses the same chords, the pedal point in her version and the color she adds through tensions make the difference. It exemplifies how Joni Mitchell on the one hand produces a simple song, but on the other hand carefully and subtly adds some flavoring ingredients that make the song more complex and worth examining deeply, which again supports the point made in chapter 2.1 to put singer-songwriters like Joni Mitchell in between high and low art.

In 2000, Joni Mitchell published a re-recording of “Both Sides, Now” on the album *Both Sides Now*. In “The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”, she talked about how this song is one of the few songs she “grew into”. She felt it was more appropriate to her at that older age than in her
early twenties, when “it’s too young a girl to pull off that role” (“The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). The album *Both Sides Now* was recorded with the London Philharmonic orchestra and has therefore an almost symphonic sound. Mitchell was impressed by the musician’s openness and their not looking down on her music (cf. Mercer 2012: 214). She recounted that “They played especially on ‘Both Sides, Now’ and ‘A Case of You’ with great emotion” (Mercer 2012: 214).

The song is a major third lower, thus in D major because Mitchell’s voice turned into an alto and she does not have her three octave range anymore (cf. “The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). On this recording, her voice would best be described as warm and mature, she looks back at her life and it sounds like there is a great sadness behind it. Her vocal performance is not as polished in timbre as in the 1969 version, but very intense in expressivity (cf. Whitesell 2008: 61-62). The song has also matured in its tempo which is much slower in the later version. In the intro and the first verse, the orchestra sets up a spherical atmosphere, playing around the tonic. Only in the first chorus, the drums and the bass are introduced and set up a clear meter. As opposed to the 1969 version, the pedal point is sometimes relinquished in both the verse and the chorus. The last chorus is not being repeated fully, but only the second part (lines 39 and 40), with a saxophone solo in between. The harmonies at the end of the song and in the coda take the song to a different place at first, but in the end the song goes to rest completely when it arrives at the tonic, a beautiful, calm D major chord.

### 4.2 “Woodstock”

I came upon a child of God
He was walking along the road
And I asked him where are you going
And this he told me
I'm going on down to Yasgur's farm
I'm going to join in a rock 'n' roll band
I'm going to camp out on the land
I'm going to try an' get my soul free

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

Then can I walk beside you
I have come here to lose the smog
And I feel to be a cog in something turning  (15)
Well maybe it is just the time of year
Or maybe it's the time of man
I don't know who I am
But you know life is for learning

We are stardust  (20)
We are golden
And we've got to get ourselves
Back to the garden

By the time we got to Woodstock
We were half a million strong  (25)
And everywhere there was song and celebration
And I dreamed I saw the bombers
Riding shotgun in the sky
And they were turning into butterflies
Above our nation  (30)

We are stardust
Billion year old carbon
We are golden
Caught in the devil's bargain
And we've got to get ourselves  (35)
back to the garden

With “Woodstock”, I introduce a song that exemplifies Mitchell’s stylistic range, especially when looking at her different versions. She first performed the song at the Big Sur Folk Festival in September 1969, one month after the Woodstock festival took place, and released it in March 1970 on her album *Ladies of the Canyon*. The song is clearly about the famous festival Woodstock Music & Art Fair – 3 Days of Peace and Music, held on August 15-17, 1969 in the town of Bethel, New York, on Max Yasgur’s farmland. Instead of the 60.000 people that were expected, a number of 400.000 visited the festival, which resulted in chaotic circumstances. Still, no crimes of violence were reported and the festival rightly could be called three days of peace.
Joni Mitchell’s song became an anthem for the hippie generation and again, it was popularized by a cover (this time by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young) before she released it in 1970. David Crosby’s comment about the song is said to be that Joni did “capture that moment better than anybody who was actually there” (“The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). Joni had to cancel her performance at the festival because she had another appearance the next day on The Dick Cavett Show and her manager David Geffen worried that she would not be able to return from the festival on time because of the roads being blocked. Her friends Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, including her then boyfriend Graham Nash, however, were taken to and from the festival by a helicopter. Joni Mitchell felt like “the deprived kid that couldn’t go” and could only watch the television transmissions about the festival (“The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). These circumstances allowed her to write “Woodstock” from the point of view of the audience, a perspective she would not have had if she had not cancelled her performance.

“Woodstock” is narrating the story of a person meeting a festival visitor on his way there. They join together and walk to the festival, being “half a million strong” (line 25) at the time they arrive. The song portrays the hippie movement with its ideals and dreams, generally painting a positive image of the festival and its attendants. However, the ending prevents the song from taking a too naïve view by stating that we are “caught in the devil’s bargain” (line 34).

4.2.1 The Hippie Movement

With “Woodstock”, the experience of one person became representative for a whole community (‘collective individuality’) (cf. Reinfeldt 2003: 354-5). Mitchell’s subjective experience was true for the community established through performance. The song appealed to her listeners that made the same experience and still appeals to those who today make the same experience of the deprived child not being able to go there (cf. “The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”).
As mentioned above, the song sums up the Woodstock festival and the feelings of a whole generation. It is about making love, not war and the concern for a better world. In the hippie philosophy, personal spiritual experience is sought. Thus, the “child of God” (line 1) tells the speaker that he is going to do what many hippies did: “try an’ get my soul free” (line 9). He tells her that we are all part of the universe, even made of the same material, “billion year old carbon” (line 32). Lines 26-30 point to the utopian dream of living together in peace, the bombers “turning into butterflies” (line 29) and “song and celebration” (line 26) everywhere. Hippies were especially concerned with the Vietnam War that was fought at that time. Line 16 (“the time of year”), line 17 (“the time of man”) and the reference to the stars in the chorus point to the hippies’ interest in astrology. The position of the planets at that time were interpreted as indicating change, transformation, revolution and the need for freedom (cf. hipplanet.com).

In spite of the revolution initiated by the hippie generation, Joni Mitchell does not think highly of the hippie ideals and her generation’s accomplishments. In a Rolling Stone interview, she talked about an encounter with someone romanticizing the 60s:

He and I had an argument kind of late at night, because he was really praising us. And I kept saying to him, "Yeah, but we failed." And he kept saying: "Yeah, but at least you did something. Like, we did nothing." I said: "Look, the thing is, don't just ape our movement. Don't do hippie poses. Look at us. Admit to yourself that we only took it so far. Build from where we left off." I know my generation -- a lot of them, they're getting old now, and they want to think back fondly, they want to kid themselves. A lot of them think, "Yeah, we were the best." That's the kiss of death. That's nongrowth. And also that's very bad for the world. (Wild 1991)

Seen in this light, it seems more than ironic that Joni Mitchell was attributed the tag Hippie Folk Goddess. Besides, she does not like to be labeled at all (cf. “The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). However, some of her views and attitudes overlap with the hippie philosophy. For example, she is concerned with the future of our planet, favors personal spiritual experience over institutionalized religion and shares the hippie’s need for freedom and individuality.
4.2.2 “Back to the garden”

“Woodstock” is repeatedly referring to religion (e.g. “child of God”, line 1), and the garden that “we’ve got to get ourselves back to” (lines 11-12) is clearly a biblical reference to the Garden of Eden. The desire to get back to this garden could help us find ourselves again (not knowing “who I am”, line 18). The Garden of Eden represents paradise and innocence, an original state in which we could live in harmony with nature, one major concern for hippies.

The song offers a way to get back to the garden: by joining together “in song and celebration” (line 26) and thereby “turning [the bombers] into butterflies” (line 29). However, after depicting this utopian state of freedom and happiness up to the third verse, the last chorus reveals the problem: we are “caught in the devil’s bargain” (line 34). This refers to the story of the expulsion of paradise. The devil’s bargain keeps us from getting back to the garden. Thinking about the hippie philosophy, the devil could be equaled with society. Society’s norms and restraints keep us from finding ourselves and living in a state of innocence and purity by putting standards and expectations on us. A glimpse of this state of freedom that we could have in the garden was felt by many Woodstock festival attendants where they felt free of society’s restrictions. Joni Mitchell’s need for freedom and authenticity, pointed out in chapter 3, probably made the festival even more impressive to her.

Interestingly, Mitchell mixes religious references with cosmological images, as Whitesell points out: “religious impulse may take the form of a highly personalized reinterpretation of traditional symbols, such as the garden in ‘Woodstock’ (set against cosmic stardust and psychedelic warplane/butterflies)” (2008: 103).

4.2.3 Form

“Woodstock”, as “Both Sides, Now”, has a verse-chorus form and at the end of the song, Mitchell sings a wordless, improvisation-like melody. The last chorus consists of six lines
instead of four, which creates a surprising effect. The listener expects the anaphora of the former choruses (“We are stardust / We are golden”), but instead, the lines “Billion year old carbon” (line 32) and “Caught in the devil’s bargain” (line 34) are interjected. In addition, the two lines are supported by background vocals, which highlight them even more. Reinfandt (cf. 2003: 356) suggests that through this arrangement, with the lines 34 and 36 sung by background vocals, it seems like, independently from the solo voice, they pronounce an insight by the collective unconscious, reasoned world-historically and metaphysically.

As “Woodstock” tells a story, it is a ‘narrative song’ (cf. Whitesell 2008: 45). The speaking persona is the ‘mystic bard’, one to whom “the phenomena of the physical world are keys to a cosmic reality” (Whitesell 2008: 68). Whitesell suggests this to be one of the recurring types in Mitchell’s songs, such as in “The Dawntreader” (Song to a Seagull) or “Shadows And Light” (The Hissing of Summer Lawns) (cf. 2008: 68-69). With regard to the speaker, Mitchell introduces two speakers in this song: the narrator and the child of God. It is unclear from the original whether the chorus is spoken by the narrator, the child of God or in a collective. However, in live versions such as on Shadows and Light (1980) and in her re-recording on Travelogue (2002), she sings “he said” before the chorus begins, which clearly marks that it is spoken by the child of God.

Compared to “Both Sides, Now”, Mitchell already experiments with irregularities in the form, as far as the line length of the three verses (8-7-7) and the chorus (4-4-6) or irregularities in the rhyme scheme are concerned. She does not relinquish rhyme altogether, but she has no consistent rhyme scheme. However, Reinfandt (2003: 356) points out one extremely cunning rhyme in the chorus: “We are stardust / We are golden / And we’ve got to get ourselves / Back to the Garden”. This connects the lines of the chorus and emphasizes the words “stardust”, “golden” and “garden” even more than they would be by their position in line.

The hook line is either “We are stardust / we are golden” or “And we’ve got to get ourselves back to the garden” and there are arguments for both of them. To opt for the former would
be supported by the fact that the melodic highpoint is at “garden”. However, the latter is such a clear invitation, pronouncing the utopian dream of getting back to paradise that it sticks to the mind of the listener, which is part of the basic definition of the hook line (cf. chapter 2.2.3).

4.2.4 Music

Whitesell (2008: 121) identifies “Woodstock’s” key being an Eb Dorian. For the first time on her records, she uses an instrument different than the guitar, namely a Wurlitzer electric piano.

As a good example of the song’s intermediality with its interplay of word and music, the general mystical language is reflected in the music by “creat[ing] a special mystical aura through extreme vibrato in the electric piano, pentatonic harmony, dirge-like rhythms, and sobbing, sibylline backup vocals at the end of every refrain” (Whitesell 2008: 34).

In the following subchapter, there will be more information about the music of Mitchell’s different versions of “Woodstock”.

4.2.5 Versions

As mentioned above, “Woodstock” was popularized by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young who had performed at the festival and thus, took the point of view of the performers. It hit #11 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 1970. They turned the song into a more light-hearted, driving rock song in the key of blues G major (cf. Whitesell 2008: 34). They inserted the line “Billion year old carbon” in all of the choruses and after the second chorus they play a guitar solo. Compared to Mitchell’s mystic and lamenting original, it is comprehensible that this catchy version had more public appeal.
Joni Mitchell herself has published several versions of “Woodstock” throughout her career. Thus, this song has accompanied her on her musical development. On *Miles of Aisles* (1974), Mitchell features a full band including a drum set which makes the song much more rhythmic. The harmonies are simpler and the key is a third lower (cf. Whitesell 2008: 36-37).

On *Shadows and Light* (1980), Mitchell chose to use only a solo guitar for accompaniment. Her style of playing is more percussive and rhythmic as in her early recordings, thus marking the general development of her style. The key is now a C Aeolian (cf. Whitesell 2008: 36) and the melody has changed considerably compared to the original version, especially in the second part of the chorus.
Fig. 2: Chorus from “Woodstock” on *Ladies of the Canyon* (1970) (Whitesell 2008: 35)
After the word “golden” is sung, she stops her rhythmic playing and strums two flageolet chords, sounds that shimmer and shine like a golden object does.

On *Travelogue* (2002), Vince Mendoza made the orchestral arrangement. It does not deviate too much from the original, but it is, like all re-recordings at that time, much lower due to her lower voice.

The different versions all have a different effect on the listener, although the words stay the same, which displays the interplay between the words and the music (as discussed in chapter 2). For example, Mitchell’s original version is more melancholic and lamenting than the 1979 version. Whitesell points out what effect this has: “In Mitchell’s new, chilly ‘Woodstock’ the ideals of spiritual and earthly renewal are not abandoned, but they take on an ironic poignancy in light of the intervening evidence of all-too-human failings” (2008: 38). Thus, Mitchell’s view about the failings of the hippie generation (cf. 4.2.1) is communicated in an ironic way in her 1979 version.
5 The Early 70s: Blue Period

The albums *Blue* (1971), and *For the Roses* (1972) constitute Joni Mitchell’s ‘Blue Period’, a term taken from Mercer’s book “Will you take me as I am. Joni Mitchell’s Blue Period” (2012). Mercer also includes the albums *Court and Spark* (1974) and *Hejira* (1976). However, in this thesis they are put into the next chapter due to Mitchell’s musical development towards jazz.

During the Blue Period, Mitchell had a difficult time in her life, she was highly vulnerable and easily brought to tears (cf. Mercer 2012: 120). Her famous quote “I sing my sorrow, and I paint my joy” (Gerry 2011) holds true especially for this period. The early seventies brought two of her most personal albums, revealing a lot about her life. As she stated in an interview: “When I realized how popular I was becoming, it was right before Blue, and I went, oh my God, a lot of people are listening to me. Well, then they better find out who they are worshipping. Let’s see if they can take it” (“The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). She was becoming popular and wanted to show the audience who they were admiring. In response, they were idolizing her even more, so she retreated to a piece of land she bought on the Sunshine Coast to take a break in 1971. She did not like that people were not seeing themselves, but her in the songs (cf. “The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). Mitchell’s focus on personal experience and individualism rather than politic and social rebellion also corresponds to the general trend in the seventies, a decade that is also called the Me Decade.

The album *Blue* marked a turning point in Mitchell’s career. She took an honest look on herself and integrated her insights into her lyrics as well as her music. Mitchell told Mercer (2008: 110) that on this album, she started incorporating the music she liked into her own musical productions. Her admiration for Miles Davis, Chopin, Debussy, Rachmaninoff and Edith Piaf influenced her songs. The album *Blue* is a song cycle and thus, a thematically and aesthetically unified work of art (cf. Starr and Waterman 2003: 323) with the recurrent motif
of color imagery (cf. Whitesell 2008: 196). The songs are simple and direct in style and production, and exemplify her “artistry in transferring the personal into the universal” (Mercer 2012: 165). The album’s main theme is love and loss, but she also addresses freedom and traveling repeatedly. The first song, “All I Want” starts with the words: “I am on a lonely road and I am traveling / Traveling, traveling, traveling” (JoniMitchell.com). She addresses several of her past relationships with Chuck Mitchell, Graham Nash or James Taylor in songs like “The Last Time I Saw Richard”, “My Old Man” or “Blue”. The song “Little Green” she later reported to be about giving up her daughter for adoption in (cf. Mercer 2012: 173f). “Carey” and “California” are about her time in Mátala, Greece in 1970. “River” is a soliloquy that is set around Christmas time and has an instrumental introduction quoting the song “Jingle Bells”. It is also her most quoted example of a confessional song. The songs in general are pensive in mood, not lighthearted, and full of statements people could identify with and relate to. The title Blue and the cover were certainly not chosen without reason. The association with the blues as a musical genre is apparent. The cover resembles Otis Redding’s album Otis Blue: Otis Redding Sings Soul. On both covers, a blonde-haired woman can be seen from a similar angle (cf. Hamilton 2013). To have the blues means being in a depressed mood and melancholy. Blues songs often deal with a lost love or hard times. In this sense, Blue can be seen as an album with blues elements.

Originally, Joni Mitchell wanted to retire after Blue. However, in November 1972, she already released her next album, For the Roses, with songs mainly written during her break. In “For the Roses”, she sings that she “really can’t give up just yet” and she remembers her fame in the lines “I heard it in the wind last night / It sounded like applause”. In this album, the number of musicians and instruments increased and she keeps experimenting further, for example with polytonality on “Let The Wind Carry Me” (cf. Whitesell 2008: 140). This already points to her next period, which will take her into the world of jazz. Mitchell herself again only plays the piano and guitar, the dulcimer she used only for several songs on Blue. The main themes are basically the same as on Blue, for example dealing with love in “Lesson in Survival” and “Woman of Heart and Mind”. The album tends to be overlooked or
underestimated, being in between her commercially successful albums *Blue* and *Court and Spark*. One of the most known songs are “Your Turn Me On, I’m a Radio”, reaching #25 on the US *Billboard* Hot 100, and “Judgement of the Moon and Stars (Ludwig’s Tune)”, inspired by Ludwig van Beethoven (cf. “For the Roses”).

5.1 **“California”**

Sitting in a park in Paris France    (1)
Reading the news and it sure looks bad
They won’t give peace a chance
That was just a dream some of us had
Still a lot of lands to see    (5)
But I wouldn’t want to stay here
It’s too old and cold and settled in its ways here
Oh but California

California I'm coming home
I'm going to see the folks I dig    (10)
I'll even kiss a Sunset pig
California I'm coming home

I met a redneck on a Grecian isle
Who did the goat dance very well
He gave me back my smile    (15)
But he kept my camera to sell
Oh the rogue the red red rogue
He cooked good omelettes and stews
And I might have stayed on with him there
But my heart cried out for you California    (20)

Oh California I'm coming home
Oh make me feel good rock 'n' roll band
I'm your biggest fan
California I'm coming home

Oh it gets so lonely    (25)
When you're walking
And the streets are full of strangers
All the news of home you read
Just gives you the blues
Just gives you the blues    (30)
So I bought me a ticket
I caught a plane to Spain
Went to a party down a red dirt road
There were lots of pretty people there
Reading Rolling Stone reading Vogue (35)
They said "How long can you hang around?"
I said a week maybe two
Just until my skin turns brown
Then I'm going home to California

California I'm coming home (40)
Oh will you take me as I am
Strung out on another man
California I'm coming home

Oh it gets so lonely
When you're walking (45)
And the streets are full of strangers
All the news of home you read
More about the war
And the bloody changes
Oh will you take me as I am? (50)
Will you take me as I am?
Will you?

“California” is track six on the album Blue and comes after the song “Blue”. In this thesis, it is nonetheless analyzed before because it states the main question Mitchell asks her audience with her album: “Will you take me as I am?” Besides, it has probably been written earlier or at least refers to incidents in her life that had happened earlier.9

The song tells the audience a lot about Mitchell’s life before she released the album in 1971, narrating incidents of her trip to Europe in 1970, the people she met and how she longed to get back to California. She also introduced a new instrument she learned to play during her trip, the dulcimer. “California” is not one of her most melancholy songs, but it still has a sentimental and self-revealing side and thus, fits well as a representative of her Blue Period.

9 “California” is mostly about her trip to Europe, “Blue”, however, most probably refers to James Taylor, with whom she had a romance afterwards. In addition, “Blue” sees the hippie lifestyle in a more disillusioned way, which could suggest that she has written it after she tried the hippie lifestyle.
In the same year, Led Zeppelin released a song about the same U.S. state: “Going to California”. This song is referring to Joni Mitchell in the lines “To find a queen without a king / They say she plays guitar and cries and sings”. The queen refers to the Mitchell’s “I Had A King” and in some live versions, Robert Plant (the lead singer of Led Zeppelin) sings “Joni” after the lines quoted above (e.g. on their live album *How the West Was Won*). The acoustic, almost folk-style sound of the song might also be referring to Mitchell.

5.1.1 The Storyteller

Joni Mitchell often narrates stories through her songs, as for example in “Conversation”, “Cherokee Louise” or “Woodstock” (cf. Whitesell 2008: 46). In “California”, it is her own story as she told the audience in a concert in London in 1970: “This year I took some time off from touring and I went off on some adventures of my own and this is kind of a letter back home. (...) The first verse I wrote in Paris and the... and the next verse I wrote in Spain and then... the last verse I wrote once I got home again” (“Joni Mitchell In Concert). Thus, “California” is a travelogue, taking up the traveling motif the album starts with in “All I Want”.

The first verse starts out in Paris, France, but the storyteller “wouldn’t want to stay here” (line 6) because life is too conservative. She longs to get back to California, which she addresses directly repeatedly throughout the song. She would even “kiss a Sunset pig” (line 11), probably referring to a Sunset Boulevard Police officer, as someone in a forum points out (cf. genius.com).

In the second verse, the singer narrates incidents of her stay in Mátala, a village on the Greek island Crete. There, hippies from all over the world were living in the seaside cliff caves and Mitchell was one of those who tried the hippie lifestyle (cf. Mercer 2012: 172). She tells us about Cary Raditz, a “redneck” (line 13) “who did the goat dance very well” (line 14). He is also the “bright red devil” and the “mean old Daddy” from her song “Carey”. They had a love affair and she describes that he “gave [her] back [her] smile” (line 15). She describes him as “the red, red rogue” (line 17) and how “he cooked good omelettes and stews” (line 18).
line 19, she muses about staying there with him, but again, the apostrophe to California reveals that she longs for coming home and enjoying its music and atmosphere (“I’m your biggest fan”, line 23).

In the third verse, the singer is in Spain where she met “lots of pretty people” (line 34) whom she “went to a party down a red dirt road” (line 33) with. According to Weller (2008: 302), she was in “Ibiza, which in 1970 was the international capital of rich hippie swagger”. However, the “news of home” (lines 28 and 47) she sings about in the bridge, make her feel bad and longing to get home to California.

At the end of the third verse, the singer asks “Oh will you take me as I am / Strung out on another man” (lines 41-42). The choice of the words “strung out” suggest an addictive relation to the man she is in love with, similar to “A Case Of You”, as Scott (2011) points out:

The song 'A Case of You' from the 'Blue' album is built on this analogy of love as an addictive substance, both a positive and a negative force:

But you are in my blood like holy wine
You taste so bitter and so sweet
Oh, I could drink a case of you, darling
And I would still be on my feet.

5.1.2 “Will you take me as I am?”

The question “Will you take me as I am?” is asked three times in the song (lines 41, 50 and 51). As stated above, it can be seen as the underlying question Mitchell asks the audience with this album. She tried to be honest with her audience to “see if they can take it” (“The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”).

In the lyrics of “California”, conclusions to several of Mitchell’s character traits can be drawn. Of course, the speaker does not necessarily have to represent the author herself, but in the
case of “California”, the connection seems apparent, as she openly talked about the inspiration to writing her song in “Joni Mitchell In Concert” (1970).

Whitesell (2008: 71-73) sees in several songs the recurring type of the ‘free spirit’. He gives some examples, especially songs from Mitchell’s Blue Period like “California”, “Let The Wind Carry Me”, “Barangrill” or “Lesson In Survival”. In “California”, she sings about how she “wouldn’t want to stay here / It’s too old and cold and settled in its ways here” (lines 6-7) and about her pleasurable experiences in Mátala and Spain. In addition, her numerous relationships and love affairs also point to her need to be free. She seems to strongly dislike being tied down or bound to someone. However, there is a melancholy side in “California” that Whitesell also draws attention to. The singer still yearns for the familiar and feels lonely in the streets “full of strangers” (line 27). Similarly, she sings how she thinks about settling down to family live in as opposed to feeling like “a wild seed” in “Let The Wind Carry Me”.

Mitchell’s fascination of Cary Raditz, who lives this unorthodox life, shows her attraction to a bohemian lifestyle. He lives this life she yearns for, “unencumbered by routine or the pressure to conform” (Whitesell 2008: 90). She is drawn to him because she sees herself as different too (as pointed out in chapter 3.2), but she nevertheless does not want to be bound to him and his lifestyle. Whitesell notes, “Her desire to move freely between social groups and milieus, while maintaining a distinct identity within each, entailed a certain aloofness” (2008: 92). This desire makes her indeed different to others, and is also reflected in her keenness on not being labeled.

5.1.3 Form

This song has a verse-bridge form. It could also be seen as having a verse-chorus-bridge form, lines 9-12, 21-24 and 40-43 being the choruses because of the formal division of the lyrics on Joni Mitchell’s official homepage. However, as Whitesell explains comprehensibly, these lines are rather a refrain at the end of each verse because it “begins in the middle of a cadential progression and is completely dependent on its context for formal coherence” (2008: 149). A
chorus, on the other hand, would be a harmonically separate, closed unit. Lines 25-30 are the bridge, which introduces new harmonic and melodic material. Mitchell, always being different and innovative, repeats the bridge in lines 44-52, but this time adding three lines that take up line 41 in the third refrain. The hook line marks the beginning and end of the refrains: “California I’m coming home”\(^{10}\). In between, the text changes each time the refrain resounds, similar to “Both Sides, Now”, which would in turn be an argument for the song to have a verse-chorus-bridge form. The way Mitchell tells her story resembles a stream of consciousness, a technique she also uses in songs like “Blue” or “Carey”.

5.1.4 Music

The song’s key is E major (cf. Whitesell 2008: 121). Its most prominent musical feature is the unfamiliar instrument Mitchell uses, the dulcimer, made by Joellen Lapidus. It is a string instrument of the zither family, looking like a “stretched-out fiddle”, as Mitchell explained in her live performance (“Joni Mitchell In Concert” 1970). In addition, there are a pedal steel and drums heard on the record.

Joni Mitchell is known for her “unique phrasing” (Ephland 1996), as noted in chapter 3.2.1.2. She fits many words into one phrase, also called ‘recitative phrasing’ by Estrella Berosini, who compared her to Laura Allan (cf. Weller 2008: 304). In “California”, this singing style is best heard in the first part of the verses, as opposed to the refrain/chorus, which has a clearer rhythm (cf. Whitesell 2008: 186-187). This is also reflected in the metrical pattern, which is not consistent, but rather sounds like natural speech.

5.2 “Blue”

Blue songs are like tattoos (1)
You know I’ve been to sea before
Crown and anchor me
Or let me sail away

\(^{10}\) Whitesell calls this type of refrain a „split refrain” (2008: 150).
Hey Blue, here is a song for you
Ink on a pin
Underneath the skin
An empty space to fill in
Well there're so many sinking now
You've got to keep thinking
You can make it thru these waves
Acid, booze, and ass
Needles, guns, and grass
Lots of laughs lots of laughs
Everybody's saying that hell's the hippest way to go
Well I don't think so
But I'm gonna take a look around it though
Blue I love you

Blue here is a shell for you
Inside you'll hear a sigh
A foggy lullaby
There is your song from me

The song “Blue” is the title track of her most personal album Blue. It is a perfect representative of the album itself, as it exemplifies the character and themes of the whole song cycle. It is mainly about love and loss and vulnerability, which will be explained in more detail in the following subchapters. Her recurring theme of freedom is not so much directly addressed in this song, but her free spirit shows up in her free use of rhythm and her flexible melody lines as well as the general open-endedness of the song.

5.2.1 Love and Loss

In the songs of the album Blue, as mentioned before, many autobiographical elements can be found. “Blue” is most probably about Joni Mitchell’s relationship with James Taylor\(^\text{11}\), possibly also about Graham Nash or past romances with Leonard Cohen or Bob Dylan. However, to Joni, it does not matter which person she was singing about because to her, it is more important what conclusions the listeners draw for themselves. (cf. Mercer 2012: 112).

\(^\text{11}\) The seashell that the singer offers the lover in line 19 strongly suggests that the song is indeed about James Taylor to whom she supposedly has given a seashell once, as John Fischbach recalls (cf. Weller 2008: 314).
“Blue”, thus, could be addressed to somebody called Blue, or she addresses her love through this symbol, the word blue standing for melancholy love in general.

In “Blue”, love is like the sea, unpredictable, but one can overcome its hardships (cf. lines 9-11). In lines 15-18, the speaker’s commitment is pronounced: She would even go through hell for her lover, although she does not approve of his lifestyle.

5.2.2 Vulnerability

As noted above, “Blue” was written during Joni Mitchell’s most vulnerable period of her life. She had a depressive phase and thus, felt ‘the blues’, maybe even referring to the failure of the hippie generation. The frailty in her voice, the simplicity of the piano accompaniment, the long-drawn-out melody lines and the lyrics all convey vulnerability. In line 7, she sings that there is “An empty space to fill in” and in line 14, “lots of laughs” is sung twice, the music slows down and the second time she sings the words, her voice fades and a great sadness can be heard in the tone of her voice. When she sings “Blue-hue-hue-hue-hue” in line 18, it sounds almost like she is sobbing. In live versions, such as on her album Miles of Aisles (1974), she is even more emotional in her performance. The “shell” she is singing about in line 19, could be her, and the “sigh” inside (line 20) could be her suffering made audible. It depicts the emptiness inside her. In 1979 she said, talking about the Blue album: “At that period of my life, I had no personal defenses. I felt like a cellophane wrapper on a pack of cigarettes. I felt like I had absolutely no secrets from the world and I couldn’t pretend in my life to be strong” (Crowe 1979).

The album Blue is full of self-revelation and when Mitchell was writing it, she was “taking a hard look at herself” (Mercer 2012: 175). However, as she sings “There is your song from me” (line 22), she not only means to reveal herself to her fans, but also addresses her lover or the audience. It is not a song about herself only, but she sings about something that can apply to everyone. As she often emphasizes, for example in an interview in 2013: “You’re not gonna get anything out of it if you look at me, you got to see yourself in it – otherwise it has no
value” (“The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013”). She wants the listeners to make it their song. It can help them and give solace whenever they feel alone or vulnerable because they are not the only ones in the world that have to go through these feelings and experiences.

5.2.3 Maritime Imagery

Especially the first lines of the song “Blue” are full of maritime imagery. She sings about tattoos, the sea and the crown and the anchor, typical tattoo motifs.

“Songs are like tattoos” (line 1), they get under the skin and you carry them with you for life. It could also be a statement about the relationship of a song and the listener. The songwriter is the tattooer and the listener the wearer (cf. online 3).

The sea is a metaphor for love and relationships. Mitchell sings: “You know I’ve been to sea before” (line 2), which is a statement about free love. She had already experienced being in love several times, of which the audience was informed, and she will experience it again. For a woman, however, free love meant something different than for a man, as Joni tries to express in line 3: “Crown and anchor me” (cf. Mercer 2012: 138f). Women “were supposed to be tied down” (Mitchell, quoted in Mercer 2012: 139), as she herself pronounced. For a listener, however, lines 3 and 4 could also be the demand, “commit to me or release me”.

5.2.4 Hippie Lifestyle

As we have seen, Joni Mitchell tried the hippie lifestyle when she stayed in Mátala in the seaside cliff caves in 1970 (cf. Mercer 2012: 172). However, in “Blue”, it seems she is criticizing this lifestyle that ended tangled up in hedonism: “Acid, booze, and ass / Needles, guns, and grass / Lots of laughs lots of laughs” (lines 12-14). The ‘downside’ of the hippie lifestyle is also reflected in the downward-pointing melody line of these lines. Drugs are a way many people were trying to “make it thru these waves” (line 11), but this method obviously failed and what was left was sadness, expressed in line 14, when “lots of laughs” is
sung twice with a ritardando in the music. Joni sings this line in a way that it is obvious that she does not sing of laughs that convey happiness, but of shallow, even bitter laughs with a deep sadness behind them, laughs to forget the problems of life. The needles and reference to drugs, however, could also refer to James Taylor’s drug addiction.

5.2.5 Form

This song is not typically structured into verses and a chorus that is being repeated, but it has a through-composed form. Like “California”, the lyrics resemble a stream-of-consciousness, and the words appear like thoughts that also do not come in a certain clear-cut structure.

However, there are some ways she creates structure. There is no consistent rhyme-scheme, but she rhymes, for example, lines 6-8 and 12-14, through which she creates little units of meaning. Looking at the harmonies and the style of accompaniment, the following structure could be seen:

```
A   Blue songs are like tattoos
    You know I’ve been to sea before
    Crown and anchor me
    Or let me sail away

A   Hey Blue, here is a song for you
    Ink on a pin
    Underneath the skin
    An empty space to fill in

B   Well there’re so many sinking now
    You've got to keep thinking
    You can make it thru these waves
    Acid, booze, and ass
    Needles, guns, and grass
    Lots of laughs lots of laughs

C   Everybody's saying that hell's the hippest way to go
    Well I don't think so
    But I'm gonna take a look around it though
    Blue I love you
```
Blue here is a shell for you
A’ Inside you’ll hear a sigh
A foggy lullaby
There is your song from me

Joni creates structure harmonically. The last section of the song, A’, starts with the same harmonies as the first A section. As it sounds familiar to the listener, this sets up some kind of structure and oneness. In addition, the word blue comes four times and is always accompanied by the same chords: Bm7 and A/B.

In the center of the song stands line 18, “Blue I love you”, which could be seen as the hook line. This supposition is supported by the fact that she repeats this line in the live version on her album *Miles of Aisles* in 1974, to put even more emphasis on it.

5.2.6 Music

“Blue” is a polymodal song, which means that she does not stay in one mode, but uses Aeolian, Dorian and major for the last chord (cf. Whitesell 2008: 121, 131-137). The song is accompanied only by a piano. This conveys simplicity and immediacy and makes it a private and personal song. It could be played not only in a big concert hall, but also in a small room with close contact to the audience.

This song is influenced by the musicians she admires, namely jazz musician Miles Davis with regard to her vocals and impressionist composers like Chopin, Debussy and Rachmaninoff with regard to the piano accompaniment (cf. Mercer 2012: 110). Joni said about the beginning of the song, “I think the first few notes (...) sound like a muted trumpet tone” (Mitchell in Mercer 2012: 110), which clearly refers to Miles Davis’ stylistic sound.

As we have seen in chapter 2, in Mitchell’s songs, the music and the words have a strong connection and influence on each other. Mercer refers to the music representing the meaning, as ‘musical onomatopoeia’ (cf. 2012: 104f). In “Blue”, several examples of this
onomatopoeia can be found. In line 4, for example, the lyrics “Or let me sail away” are followed by several major chords, sounding as if somebody is sailing away on the sea (cf. Mercer 2012: 85). In line 9, when she sings, “so many sinking now”, the melodic line is also pointing downwards, like a sinking ship:

![Fig. 4: Melody in line 9 of “Blue” (my transcription)](image)

The last chord interestingly is a major B7 chord. Major chords convey a positive mood; the song, however, is full of sadness about love and loss. The fact that the last chord in the song is not a minor chord, might point to a positive outlook for the future, a kind of liberation she gets by the release of her sadness through singing the song.

5.2.7 Versions

Sarah MacLachlan contributed a version of the song “Blue” on A Tribute To Joni Mitchell, released in 2007. It is partly sung and accompanied very close to the original version, partly deviating from it. The open-endedness of the song is even more emphasized in the ending, which does not end with a clear B7 major chord as the original, although it is in the same key. The last note the voice sings is even an F, which is the tritone of B, an interval that creates extra tension and uneasiness.
6 The Late 70s: Jazz Explorations

Joni Mitchell started her jazz explorations with her sixth studio album, *Court and Spark* (1974), and reached the climax with the album *Mingus* (1979). Thus, this period also includes the albums *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (1975), *Hejira* (1976) and *Don Juan’s Reckless Daughter* (1977). As mentioned before (cf. chapter 5), the first three albums of this period could also be put in the Blue Period (as Mercer does) because they share the confessing, self-revealing side with the previous albums. However, Whitesell (2008: 16) agrees with my division and puts the same albums in a separate period. *Court and Spark* was a turning point in Mitchell’s career in several ways. Firstly, it marked her departure towards jazz, especially in the songs “Trouble Child” and “Twisted” (which is a cover of the Lambert, Hendricks & Loss song). Secondly, it was her first record with a full band, namely members of the L.A. Express, a jazz-rock fusion group Mitchell discovered in an L.A. jazz club (cf. Crowe 1979). Thus, Mitchell went further away from the image of the original singer-songwriter who would perform as a solo artist. Thirdly, Mitchell experimented even more with sounds than in the previous albums, made possible by the additional instruments the band provided. For example, in “Car On A Hill”, the horns create a Doppler effect at the end of the song (cf. Whitesell 2008: 22). *Court and Spark* was also the most commercially successful album (cf. “Court and Spark”).

*Court and Spark* was a turning point in Mitchell’s career, but the albums that followed did not repeat the same style but rather developed and carried on what she had started. She kept innovating and re-inventing herself within this period, which exemplifies Joni Mitchell’s character. In an interview, she stated: “I thrive on change. That’s probably why my chord changes are weird, because chords depict emotions. They’ll be going along on one key and I’ll drop off a cliff, and suddenly they will go into a whole other key signature. That will drive

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12 Graf (2001: 6), however, points out that a backup band for a singer-songwriter was not totally uncommon in the 70s. Mitchell was not the only singer-songwriter who performed with a band (Bob Dylan introduced a band even before her, in the late 60s).
some people crazy, but that’s how my life is” (Wild 1991). This quote holds especially true for this period, in which the music as well as the poetry is becoming even more complex than before.

The following examples serve to illustrate some trends that the albums of this period have in common. The main themes of the albums are love, loneliness, freedom and traveling, typical of Joni Mitchell’s recurring themes. However, some topics she addresses in her songs point towards the themes of social and political criticism in her later works (for example in “Paprika Plains” on Don Juan’s Reckless Daughter) and the theme of traveling becomes more prominent than before. Her musical style keeps up the recitative phrasing that she already applied in her Blue Period. Whitesell (2008: 184-187) points out that she develops this into almost abandoning melody at all. Thus, not the music but the lyrics are most prominent; the poet is favored over the singer. Not only the melodies, but also the form of the songs and the rhythm are freer and more complex (cf. Garbarini 1983).

The Hissing of Summer Lawns, the album that succeeded Court and Spark, moves even more towards jazz. For example, she does scat singing on the title track after the words “no color no contrast” (JoniMitchell.com). On “Harry’s House/Centerpiece”, she quotes the famous blues “Centerpiece” by Edison and Hendricks. It is a concept album, as the liner notes to her album suggest:

This record is a total work conceived graphically, musically, lyrically and accidentally - as a whole. The performances were guided by the given compositional structures and the audibly inspired beauty of every player. The whole unfolded like a mystery. It is not my intention to unravel that mystery for anyone, but rather to offer some additional clues. (JoniMitchell.com)

In her acknowledgements, she thanks “John Guerin for showing me the root of the chord and where 1 was” (JoniMitchell.com). Guerin was the drummer of the band to which she had to talk through metaphor because she was not trained in the language that professional musicians talk in (cf. Ephland 1996).
The succeeding album, *Hejira*, is also a concept album, but in a more implicit way, namely by the underlying theme of travel, recurring motifs and musical coherence (cf. Whitesell 2008: 204ff). The title ‘Hejira’ comes from the Arabic word ‘Hijra’ which means journey and refers to the flight of the Islamic prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina (cf. “Hejira”). Mitchell wrote most of the songs during a car journey. In Whitesell’s words, “Hejira is as confessional as *Blue*, but the cooler tone and consistently strong patterning in *Hejira* offset the cycle’s difficult, subjective self-questioning” (2008: 225). It is thus a highly autobiographical work of art on which Mitchell scrutinizes her character and her generation (the Me Decade). All songs on the album have a first person speaker and a strophic form (cf. Whitesell 2008: 204). The album’s sound is marked by Jaco Pastorius’ bass playing on four tracks, with whom Mitchell collaborated for the first time on this album. In some of her songtexts she makes references to earlier recordings, which links her whole body of work. For example, in “Amelia”, a song about the pilot Amelia Earhart, she refers to *Clouds* in the line “I’ve spent my whole life in clouds at icy altitude” or to *Blue* with the song “Blue Motel Room” (cf. Whitesell 2008: 209).

*Don Juan’s Reckless Daughter* is another very experimental and ‘reckless’ album, also a concept album, featuring Latin percussion ensembles and collaborating with jazz fusion band Weather Report and singer Chaka Khan. On the cover of the album, Joni Mitchell can be seen as a black man. In her lyrics, she makes some interesting quotes and references. For example, in “Talk To Me” (JoniMitchell.com), she quotes Shakespeare (“I stole that! / From Willy the Shake”) and in the title song, which resembles the sound of *Hejira*, one can hear parts of the American national anthem (cf. Whitesell 2008: 217-218). The reviews to album were mixed, and her distress about one rather negative review in *Rolling Stone* shows how important her fan’s reactions to her work are (cf. Weller 2008: 431). Although she is headstrong and determined about what she does, she is still concerned with how she is represented, as it also comes out in “The Joni Mitchell Interview 2013” when she talks about being mislabeled.

Mitchell’s tenth studio album *Mingus* was written and recorded in collaboration with jazz bassist Charles Mingus, who approached her, which was a great honor to her. It was
completed and released shortly after Mingus’ death in 1979. It marks the end, but also the climax of her jazz explorations. Although the album includes some marvelous jazz tunes, Mitchell said, it “pretty much cost me my airplay, my radio presence” (White 1995), even when her style changed again on the next album, *Wild Things Run Fast*, towards pop.

### 6.1 “Court And Spark”

Love came to my door
With a sleeping roll
And a madman’s soul
He thought for sure I’d seen him
Dancing up a river in the dark
Looking for a woman
To court and spark

He was playing on the sidewalk
For passing change
When something strange happened
Glory train passed through him
So he buried the coins he made
In People’s Park
And went looking for a woman
To court and spark

It seemed like he read my mind
He saw me mistrusting him
And still acting kind
He saw how I worried sometimes
I worry sometimes

"All the guilty people" he said
They've all seen the stain
On their daily bread
On their christian names
I cleared myself
I sacrificed my blues
And you could complete me
I’d complete you

His eyes were the color of the sand
And the sea
And the more he talked to me
The more he reached me
But I couldn’t let go of L.A.  
City of the fallen angels  
(http://jonimitchell.com/music/song.cfm?id=99)

The title track and opener of the album *Court and Spark* is a song about seduction. The album reached double platinum and thus, marked the highpoint of her career. *Rolling Stone* ranked it #111 on its list of the “500 Greatest Albums of All Time” in 2003. This song is also the opener of Herbie Hancock’s tribute album *River: The Joni Letters*, released in 2007.

The song was written in Canada on Mitchell’s land on the Sunshine Coast (cf. Crowe 1979). It refers to Berkeley and Los Angeles, though. There is a “madman” (line 3), “Looking for a woman / To court and spark” (lines 6-7). He is described as a busker who is “playing on the sidewalk / For passing change” (lines 8-9). This man is an unconventional and suspect character, not only did he “[come] to [the singer’s] door / With a sleeping roll” (lines 1-2), but also did “he bur[y] the coins he made / In People’s Park” (lines 12-13). People’s Park is a park in Berkeley, California, known for political demonstrations in the late 1960s when the park should be closed down and used for buildings of the University of California. One person was even killed in a riot. It is still today known for political activism and as a place for homeless (cf. JoniMitchell.com). The “madman” in the song could refer to one of those homeless people living in the park. He tries to seduce the speaker by convincing her that he would be a perfect match for her (cf. lines 27-28). Indeed, the singer feels like “he read [her] mind” (line 16) and although she is worried and mistrusts him (cf. lines 17 and 19), she states in the last verse, “And the more he talked to me / The more he reached me” (lines 31-32). However, the bottom line is that in the end, the singer cannot commit herself: “But I couldn’t let go of L.A. / City of the fallen angels” (lines 33-34). The fallen angels most probably refer to the people that went to Los Angeles in hope of becoming rich and famous, which ended in failure (cf. “city of fallen angels”). Besides, the origin of the city name Los Angeles derives from the Spanish language and means “the angels”. Line 33 could also be a reference to Mitchell not being able to let go of her musical success, similar to the reference in “For the Roses” (cf. chapter 5). Additionally, she wrote both songs in her cottage on the Sunshine Coast, which
further supports the argument that she felt a strong need to express herself musically or just appreciated the financial profits she made from her music.

6.1.1 Seduction

As we have seen, the busker is unsuccessfully trying to seduce (i.e. “court and spark”) the singer. The very first word of “Court And Spark” makes it clear that the song is somehow about love. Love is personified and enters through a door “With a sleeping roll / And a madman’s soul” (lines 2-3). Mitchell chose an insane busker to represent love, who is probably homeless because he carries a sleeping roll. This is an interesting and rather unconventional figure for someone to fall in love with. However, Mitchell’s inclination to fall for “rebel characters” (Whitesell 2008: 90) with an alternative lifestyle was already pointed out in chapter 5.1.2. In the course of the song, the singer starts to believe him – a lunatic – that he could fulfill her romantic longings to have someone to complete her. The turning point that comes in the last two lines touches on the recurring theme of personal freedom (cf. chapter 3.3.2). The speaker cannot fully commit herself to this seducer and she chooses to return home to Los Angeles over love.

The story behind the song was published in the press bio for Herbie Hancock’s album River: The Joni Letters, written by Michelle Mercer. In Will You Take Me As I Am (2012: 163ff), she recounts how Larry Klein, a former husband of Mitchell, told her how a fan tried to persuade Mitchell that some of her songs were actually about him. Line 5 refers to her song “River” (Blue) and how he believes she is singing about him. Line 8 refers to the song “For Free” (Ladies of the Canyon), which also features a sidewalk musician and therefore, makes the fan believe that Mitchell is singing about him, which she is not.

6.1.2 Vulnerability

The bridge is revealing the singer’s vulnerability, which points back to Mitchell’s Blue Period. She sings: “He saw how I worried sometimes / I worry sometimes” (lines 19-20). The
repetition of the statement, or rather, the polyptoton of the word ‘worry’ highlights the
message and the words stick to the listeners’ mind. Even more so, the change in the music
(as typical of a bridge), calls the listener’s attention that might have drifted off during the
course of the song. Thus, the lyrics of the bridge are a significant part of the song.

The singer’s insecurity is laid bare by the busker who “seemed like he read [her] mind” (line
16) in recognizing that she is “mistrusting him” (line 17). At the end of the song, she is almost
seduced, which shows her indecisiveness.

“Court And Spark” once more shows Joni Mitchell’s masterly skill in “transforming the
personal into the universal” (Mercer 2012: 165). People can see themselves in the characters
she portrays in her songs. The insecurity and vulnerability of the singer, the desire to be
seduced and having someone to complete her, someone to truly reach her, is quite personal
but something that many people experience. Joni’s angry reaction to the publishing of the
story behind the song underlines how important it is to her that she keeps the songs
universal. She does not want people to undertake an “exercise in code cracking” (Mercer
2012: 164; cf. chapter 3.2).

6.1.3 Form

“Court And Spark” has a verse-bridge form, with verses of irregular length. The first two
verses have the end refrain “Looking for a woman / To court and spark” (lines 6-7; 14-15).
The hook line, however, I would argue for being the last two lines of the song: “But I couldn’t
let go of L.A. City of the fallen angels” (lines 33-34). Although it is not being repeated, it still
carries a very important if not central statement of the song (cf. chapter 2.2). The refrain
carries the title, but as opposed to most songs with a refrain, it is not being repeated at the
end of each verse, but only two. This ambiguity and breaking of the norms is very typical of
Joni Mitchell, especially in this period. Drummer John Guerin’s statement about Joni
Mitchell’s music affirms her unconventionality: “You didn’t go whistling Joni’s tunes. They
were much more complicated; not A-A-B-A form, not Gershwin. Joni’s songs didn’t have the
usual hook; she would form the music to her lyrical thought and sometimes go across bars and in different time signatures – she didn’t care” (Weller 2008: 413).

Like in many of her songs, Mitchell does not stick to a consistent rhyme scheme in “Court And Spark”. I would like to point out one interesting rhyme in lines 9 and 10: “For passing change / When something strange happened”. The listener would expect line 10 to end after “strange”, but then indeed, something strange happens and line 10 goes on.

6.1.4 Music

As pointed out in the introduction to Mitchell’s third period, the album featured a full band for the first time. “Court And Spark”, in being the opening song, introduces the listener to the band. Mitchell does not start with the full band right away, but slowly introduces one instrument after the other, starting with a solo piano introduction. Thus, the song becomes more intense during the course of the song, very much like the feelings of the singer.

The song is polymodal, moving between E Dorian, Aeolian and Mixolydian (cf. Whitesell 2008: 133). Not only in the lyrics, but also in the music does Joni reject being tied down or committing to one mode, which underpins the arguments made on the previous pages.

“Court And Spark” is an example for Mitchell’s recitative phrasing and how she, as Cassandra Wilson pointed out, fits many words into one phrase (cf. chapter 3.3.1). For example, the first four bars cover the first four lines of the lyrics (cf. Whitesell 1008: 167).

6.1.5 Versions

Joni Mitchell’s flirtations with jazz on Court and Spark were certainly noticed by Herbie Hancock, who released a version of “Court And Spark” on his tribute album River: The Joni Letters (2007), featuring Norah Jones on the vocals. He had already collaborated with Joni Mitchell on Mingus, together with Wayne Shorter, who also appears on his tribute album.
Hancock and his fellow musicians reharmonized the song in a way that “emphasize[s] the danger of seduction and its sometimes menacing appeal to vulnerable people” (Mercer 2012: 164). This danger can be heard in the first notes of the piano introduction already, which creates the eerie atmosphere of the song.

6.2 “Hejira”

I’m traveling in some vehicle
I’m sitting in some cafe
A defector from the petty wars
That shell shock love away
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
In our possessive coupling
So much could not be expressed
So now I’m returning to myself
These things that you and I suppressed
I see something of myself in everyone
Just at this moment of the world
As snow gathers like bolts of lace
Waltzing on a ballroom girl

You know it never has been easy
Whether you do or you do not resign
Whether you travel the breadth of extremities
Or stick to some straighter line
Now here’s a man and a woman sitting on a rock
They’re either going to thaw out or freeze
Listen
Strains of Benny Goodman
Coming through the snow and the pinewood trees
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
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

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
In the church they light the candles
And the wax rolls down like tears
There's the hope and the hopelessness (40)
I've witnessed thirty years
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 (45)
White flags of winter chimneys
Waving truce against the moon
In the mirrors of a modern bank
From the window of a hotel room
I'm traveling in some vehicle (50)
I'm sitting in some cafe
A defector from the petty wars
Until love sucks me back that way

The title track of the album *Hejira* is one of Joni Mitchell’s most autobiographical songs. Although the speaker and the author of the song cannot generally be equaled, in “Hejira”, Mitchell probably pronounces her personal thoughts and feelings, as far as conclusions can be drawn from what we know about her. Besides, she was 33 years old when the song was published, and in line 41, she sings: “I've witnessed thirty years”. “Hejira”, thus, is a confessional song (although Mitchell does not like the word) in the sense of revealing her innermost feelings.

With 53 lines, “Hejira” is the longest song for analysis in this thesis. It is also one of her most complex and difficult songs for analysis. In an interview, Mitchell talked about studying her songs:

> The thing that I'm seeing now is a lot of these songs ["Both Sides Now", "Big Yellow Taxi", "The Circle Game"] are going into college texts for analysis. I'm appalled at what is being selected to be studied at the college level. I would say that those songs should be analyzed in grade 5. Songs like "Hejira" or "Furry Sings the Blues" or "Passion Play" are pieces that have more literary value and are more thought-provoking. Let them teach those at college level. (Wild 1991)
In the following pages, I will venture to analyze “Hejira”, but rather than covering all the numerous and complex themes and references, I will focus on the two most prominent themes that Mitchell addresses in the song: travel and the ambivalence of love and life, and how they are both connected with the recurring theme of freedom.

6.2.1 Travel

In the very first line of the song, it is made clear that the singer is “traveling in some vehicle”, very much like the first two lines of “All I Want” (Blue): “I am on a lonely road and I am traveling / Traveling, traveling, traveling” (JoniMitchell.com). Mitchell addresses quite a number of different themes, but the theme of travel stands behind the song as the connecting theme of the whole album. The first lines are being repeated at the end, which rounds up the song and pulls the listener back to the traveling theme. The last line, however, is different from line 4: “Until love sucks me back that way”. Whitesell notes that “After the single mention of home in the first verse of ‘Coyote’ (‘I’ll just be getting home’), all the songs on side 1 are outward bound (moving east). At exactly halfway through the album (at the end of the fifth song, ‘Hejira’), the traveler’s thoughts begin to turn toward home” (2012: 206).

The singer’s relation to traveling is ambivalent. On the one hand, she is “porous with travel fever” (line 26), “glad to be on [her] own” (line 27), on the other hand “the slightest touch of a stranger / Can set up trembling in [her] bones” (lines 28-29). A note on Mitchell’s official homepage, written by someone in the forum, says:

Albert Camus wrote, in 1963: "What gives value to travel is fear. It is the fact that, at a certain moment, when we are so far from our own country... we are seized by a vague fear, and the instinctive desire to go back to the protection of old habits. This is the most obvious benefit of travel. At that moment we are feverish but also porous, so that the slightest touch makes us quiver to the depths of our being... There is no pleasure in traveling, and I look upon it as an occasion for spiritual testing... Travel, which is like a greater and graver science, brings us back to ourselves.” (JoniMitchell.com)
Albert Camus was a well-known French author who was presumably also known by Joni Mitchell. Therefore, it is probable that Mitchell is referring to Albert Camus’ quote (which is supposed to be from his *Notebooks 1935-1951*) in lines 26-29. Mitchell undertook the car journey in 1976, on which she wrote most of the songs from the album *Hejira*. Weller (2008: 422) recounts that Mitchell took first part of the trip together with friends, but on her way back, she was traveling alone, under the pseudonym “Charlene Lattimer”. This solitary travel in a way could indeed have been “an occasion for spiritual testing” for Mitchell and might have brought her back to herself, when considering all the themes she contemplates in the song “Hejira” and the whole album. The singer even directly pronounces, “So now I’m returning to myself” in line 11. When she travels, she is free of other’s suppressions (cf. line 12), which touches on Mitchell’s recurring theme of freedom and her personal desire to be independent of other’s expectations and to control her own destiny.

Mitchell’s interest and desire for traveling might be traced back to her early childhood of which she recounts, “The only recreation I had was waving from our living-room picture window in Maidstone to the steam locomotive that blew its whistle at the bend in the track as it entered town - but at least that gave me a curiosity about going places” (White 1995).

6.2.2 Ambivalence of Love and Life

In “Hejira”, Mitchell highlights how love and life are ambivalent and takes a look at both sides, which inescapably reminds the listener (who is familiar with Mitchell’s songs) of “Both Sides, Now”. It is like a variation of one of her earliest songs, just very different in the way it is presented. Whereas “Both Sides, Now” clearly shows the positive side first and the negative side second, “Hejira” is interspersed with different images and statements.

First, let me turn to the ambivalence of love. The singer’s main issue seems to be the decision between commitment and freedom, which is a difficult situation because of the ambivalent sides of a relationship. Most of the references to love and relationships in the song are rather negative. In line 4 (“That shell shock love away”), Mitchell uses the term ‘shell shock’, usually
describing the trauma of war, for the traumatizing impact of a romantic relationship. The speaker is referred to as “A defector from the petty wars” (line 3) who finds “comfort in melancholy” (line 5). In the same verse, the singer sees how she is inhibited by “our possessive coupling” (line 9). In the second verse she states that she is actually “glad to be on [her] own” (line 27) which corresponds with Mitchell’s desire to be alone:

“I like to just kind of free-agent it. I always was a loner. I like walking around in cities by myself. I can see things better. I mean, I’ve had some companions that I’m comfortable enough or compatible enough that I enjoy that, but often I just see better . . . I observe better when I’m on my own” (Mercer 2012: 216).

In “Hejira”, the singer basically says the same in stating how her view is narrowed, “When [she is] always bound and tied to someone” (line 45). However, she still feels “trembling in [her] bones” (line 29) by “the slightest touch of a stranger” (line 28), which could not only refer to fear, but also to being sexually attracted and interested in the other sex (cf. Scott 2011). She also seems to acknowledge that “no one’s going to show [her] everything” (line 30). Furthermore, in the end it is love that “sucks [her] back that way” (line 53).

Additionally, the ambivalence of life in general is addressed, mainly in the second and third verse. In lines 17-20, she thinks about how to live life – “travel the breadth of extremities / Or stick to some straighter line” (lines 19-20). Either way she decides for, her life will never be easy (cf. line 16). In lines 42-43, she takes a broader view in describing humans, seen from a physical point of view, as “only particles of change / Orbiting around the sun” (line 42-43). This may be a reference to “Woodstock”, in which Mitchell compares humans with “stardust” and “billion year old carbon” (chapter 4.2). But whereas the “billion year old carbon” points to the unity with universe, the “particles of change / Orbiting around the sun” seem to show a much more pessimistic view. It looks on the absurdity of life and the interchangeability of a human being, driven by the forces of the universe. On the other hand, lines 42-43 could also

13 Whitesell sees in the “damage inflicted by life and relationship” a recurrent motif in the album Hejira (2008: 207).
be an enlightening and thus, desirable perspective for the singer who then laments not having “that point of view / When [she is] always bound and tied to someone” (lines 44-45).

The song has a cyclical structure which highlights the cycles of love and life. This can be seen best in the last four lines when the singer takes up the beginning of the song. Instead of causing ‘shell shock’, love is designated as a suction that pulls her back and from which she cannot withdraw. Another references to the cycles of life can be found at the end of the second verse, where she looks at her live from birth to death (“Between the forceps and the stone”, line 33), realizing that “We all come and go unknown” (line 31).

6.2.3 Form

“Hejira” has a verse form, even without a refrain. The verses are rather long, all 16 lines except for the last one that is a partial return to the opening that repeats the first three lines and then adds another one.

The lyrics are like a stream-of-consciousness, as in other songs such as “Blue” and “California”, but the thoughts wander even more and sometimes seem to digress or suddenly leap to another theme. For example, in line 24 the singer suddenly hears “Strains of Benny Goodman” and then goes back to the theme of traveling in line 26 (note that this contributes to the effect of constant motion). In lines 15-16, she withdraws into purely visual images of the “snow gather[ing] like bolts of lace / Waltzing on a ballroom girl”, as in lines 46-49, in which she pictures her perceptions while looking out of the window of a hotel room (which exemplifies Mitchell’s skillful use of imagery, pointed out in chapter 3.2.2). In these lines, Mitchell found what T.S. Eliot would term the ‘objective correlative’, which expresses the emotions that the singer feels but are not otherwise communicable than through these images.
6.2.4 Music

The song’s key is B major, but it ends in C# minor instead of B – Mitchell thus travels to another place musically within the song (cf. Whitesell 2008: 212). As mentioned before, the album was recorded in collaboration with Jaco Pastorius who plays the bass on several tracks, including “Hejira”. Mitchell highly praised his style of bass playing which in her view stands out from others:

Prior to Jaco, I was questioning the bass’s role in music. I would hum melodies to bass players and ask them to play them, and they’d refuse me and say, ”That’s not the root of the chord, Joni.” And then I’d say, ”Why does the base have to play the root of the chord?” In a way, I feel like I dreamed Jaco. I mean, he was exactly what I was waiting for, sonically: the big round sound and the different approach to the bottom end of music. (Ehrlich 1991)

He did not “go polka-dotting along on the bottom” (Mitchell, quoted in Ephland 1996) like others did, but also played melodies in mid-range\(^\text{14}\). Because of the other instruments (guitar, percussion and clarinet in some parts) being so subtle, “Hejira” seems like a “duet between voice and bass guitar” (Whitesell 2008: 211).

The floating atmosphere of the song derives not only from Jaco Pastorius’ bass playing, but also from the rhythm in the guitar:

![Guitar in the intro of “Hejira”](Whitesell 2008: 211)

\(^{14}\) However, compared to other jazz bassists (cf. Eberhard Weber’s “The Colours of Chloe”, released in 1974), his style of playing was not unusual in this genre.
The rhythm in the guitar stays the same throughout the whole song; thus the constant motion depicts the ongoing travel and the restlessness of the singer. Furthermore, there is a fade-out at the end of the song instead of an abrupt ending.

As far as the vocals are concerned, the variable length of lines of course affects the melody line and requires a certain flexibility of the singer. In line 23, Mitchell has to sing only two syllables (“Listen”), and in line 19, twelve (“Whether you travel the breadth of extremities”), which she sings in almost only one bar.

6.2.5 Versions

Mitchell published a live recording of “Hejira” on the live album *Shadows and Light* (1980). Without the technology of the recording studio, it is not possible to create such multi-layered bass and guitar tracks. The guitar therefore keeps more in the background and the bass has fewer appearances, but nevertheless takes liberties with the melody line. Thus, “Hejira” becomes even more a duet between voice and bass guitar. The clarinet is replaced with a saxophone, played by Michael Brecker, which is also the reason why Mitchell sings “Strains of Michael Brecker” instead of Benny Goodman, who is the clarinetist and “King of Swing” she refers to in the original version. There is another change in the text: in line 16, she sings “bridal girl” instead of “ballroom girl”, which could refer to the girl in the white dress on the back of the album cover.

The re-recording on *Travelogue* (2002) with the orchestral arrangement by Vince Mendoza features a full orchestra. On this version, the reference to clarinetist Benny Goodman is kept, but this time even several clarinets play a polyphonic line. The drums are more dominant than the percussion on the original version and the vocals are more rhythmic, similar to the way she sings on the *Travelogue* version of “Woodstock”. In this version, it seems, the constant motion and restlessness is attempted to be kept up, which can be heard in the drums especially. However, it also loses some of the steadiness and floating atmosphere of the original version by implementing this clear rhythm in the arrangement.
7 Conclusion

At the end of this thesis, I would like to summarize my findings resulting from the intermedial analysis of six selected songs by Joni Mitchell. I will briefly outline Mitchell’s development within the 1960s and 70s: how she kept innovating and re-inventing her style and which elements, such as her major themes, kept recurring. Furthermore, I will provide examples of how the music and lyrics interact in Mitchell’s music.

Joni Mitchell’s development in the 1960s and 70s is marked by the increasing complexity of both the music and the lyrics. Mitchell’s first three albums from the first period that I call her folk breakthrough were already clearly distinguishable from folk, but still folk-influenced, especially her second album, Clouds (1969). Even in her first period, Mitchell experimented with sound and style, but she did even more so in her following period, the Blue Period. In her third period, her innovative nature brought her to explore jazz. Within this period that comprises of five studio albums, not one album sounds like another, and her poetry and music become increasingly abstract. Musically, she experimented with polyrhythms, and her melody lines abandoned all limitations – at the peak of her jazz explorations, “everything [is] floating around” (Mitchell, quoted in Garbarini 1983). Her lyrics, likewise, became freer in their form and more complex in their meaning.

As this thesis has shown, Mitchell repeatedly addresses certain themes in her songs which are closely connected to her life. In the 1960s and 70s, she is mainly concerned with the themes of love, freedom, traveling and duality. Her desire for personal freedom is one of the most recurring themes that run through all the songs that were analyzed. It can be found, for example, in the traveling motif of “Hejira” or the indecisiveness regarding commitment in a relationship, as pronounced in “Court And Spark”.

The intermedial analysis of the selected songs of Joni Mitchell has resulted in many examples in which the music supports the meaning of the words and vice versa. For instance, the mystical aura in “Woodstock” is conveyed by the sound of the electric piano as well as by the
mystical language (cf. Whitesell 2008: 34). In “Blue”, the sinking line of the melody setting the words “so many sinking now” (JoniMitchell.com) shows how the music mirrors the words. The travel motif in “Hejira” does not only appear in the text, but it is also illustrated by the constant motion in the guitar. As a final example, I would like to point out that the theme freedom is not only found in the choice of Mitchell’s words and themes addressed in her songs, but also in the freedom she takes by disregarding norms in structure and music.

Studying the music of Joni Mitchell, one soon discovers the expanse of her great body of work and the complexity and depth of both the words and the music. I have tried to show how important it is to acknowledge the intermediality of songs, which would be interesting to apply to the songs of other singer-songwriters or pop music in general as well. Further investigation could be done in how Mitchell’s style developed after the 1960s and 70s, in how far she kept re-inventing herself and how she dealt with her recurring themes. To put it in the words of Dr. Prof. Hugo Keiper, “Joni Mitchell is a galaxy” (personal communication), and therefore, there are infinite possibilities for further research.
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... My family. We can’t return we can only look behind from where we came.

... Florian. I could drink a case of you.

... Isabella. We all come and go unknown.
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