> The transition from peacetime to a state of war must be facilitated.
> Comparative statistical tables have been published in order to clarify how the increased effective force of the army will affect conscripts of different age groups.

Just after that comes Enzensberger's free version of a ribald black street song, recorded in Philadelphia: "The eighth of May was one hell of a day/ when the *Titanic* was sinking away...." And everywhere, his delight in allusion recurs:

> *Man's struggle against man,*
> *according to reliable sources*
> *close to the Home Office,*
> *will be nationalised in due course,*
> *down to the last bloodstain.*
> *Kind regards from Thomas Hobbes.*

Enzensberger himself once said in an interview:

> It's just a superstition that writers have to compose their texts themselves. I really do think that's a bourgeois superstition. It's based on a notion of originality which I find especially questionable.

That was in 1971, but I hope he would still stand by those words today. It's a method that, in his case, has allowed him to unload the phenomenal wealth of his reading and scholarship directly and successfully into his verse. Enzensberger is not the first to do this, of course: Hugh MacDiarmid was one of several great figures of Modernist poetry who kidnapped sonorous scientific texts for their echo as well as for their meaning (geology and petrology, in his case).

Writing with the Words of Others is, for the most part, a helpful and intelligent book, exploring Enzensberger's sometimes recondite allusions and subtle techniques. But Clayton has his limits, political rather than aesthetic. He is puzzled and pained by his subject's engagement with Marxist theory and practice, although it's impossible fully to appreciate the spellbinding *Blindenschrift* poems (1964) without a sense of the illuminating power of the ideology in that time and place. A patronizing comment rejoices that "the Marxist terminology thankfully disappeared and even the word socialism eventually gave way to democracy... a blessing for the reader."

Enzensberger, for all his smiling imperturbability, might well be irritated by that. His life has shown that to change one intellectual position for another can be a change of chapters in a story, not a blunder requiring apologies and remorse. It's with dignity, and with some respect for those he leaves behind, that Hans Magnus Enzensberger has turned away from Utopia. In the future, he may well be best remembered for what he wrote in *Tumult* about the Garden of Eden:

> The apple was the greatest pleasure the Garden had to offer.... Without the forbidden fruit, the place would have been a prison. One requirement of a paradise is that you can leave it when you've had enough.

□

She Shampooed & Renewed Us

Mark Ford

Reckless Daughter:
A Portrait of Joni Mitchell
by David Yaffe.
Sarah Crichton Books/
Farrar, Straus and Giroux,
420 pp., $28.00

In an interview with Gene Shay for the "Folklore Program" broadcast on March 12, 1967, Joni Mitchell revealed the improbable origins of one of her best-known and most frequently covered songs:

> 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."

In the event, Joni would never finish Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*, a novel she had been instructed to read by her soon-to-be-ex first husband, Chuck Mitchell, a college graduate who, it seems, had only derision for his wife's ditty; but virtually everyone else who heard the song was rapidly conquered by it. Later that spring the irrepressible Al Kooper, famous for not being an organ player and yet coming up with the greatest organ riff in all rock history for Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone," met a girl in a bar:

> She and I were talking and she told me she wrote songs. She's good-looking and I figured I could follow her home, which couldn't be a bad thing no matter how you look at it.

Back at her apartment on West Sixteenth Street, the newly met singer-songwriter played him "Both Sides, Now," and although it was 3 o'clock in the morning Kooper at once telephoned Judy Collins, a major participant in the folk music scene of those years, with news of his discovery. Joni repeated her performance over the phone to a sleepy Collins, who instantly woke up:

David Gahr/Getty Images

Joni Mitchell and Leonard Cohen at the Newport Folk Festival, July 1967

> Absolutely mind-boggling. I had an album that was being recorded right then and I wanted to record the song right away. That night, I went crazy and said, "I must have this song."

And her instinct wasn't wrong; Collins's version was not only a hit but won a Grammy.

The passage in Bellow that caught Mitchell's attention might serve as an epigraph to her checkered career, which now, alas, may be nearing its close (she suffered brain trauma from an aneurysm in March 2015, although she has since made significant progress toward what is to be hoped will be a full recovery, and—who knows?—she may yet be lured back on stage or into the studio): "We are the first generation to see clouds from both sides," muses an airborne Henderson. "What a privilege! First people dreamed upward. Now they dream both upward and downward."

For those who dreamed upward in the late 1960s, there was not only Woodstock, there was also its commemoration by Mitchell in her optimistic paean to the festival's significance in her song of the same name. Despite its use of the first person plural ("By the time we got to Woodstock/We were half a million strong"), Mitchell's "Woodstock" was in fact written in New York while she followed live coverage of the sets of The Who, Joe Cocker, Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, Jimi Hendrix, and others on television. Mitchell had been booked to perform, but it was feared by her management team that she might not make it back in time for a scheduled appearance on Dick Cavett's TV talk show the following day.

Present in spirit although absent in person, Mitchell set about composing a song that would vividly capture the sense of communal possibility and the hopes for change that Woodstock came to symbolize: "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." The song's chorus unashamedly celebrates the countercultural visionaries who gathered in the mud of Max Yasgur's dairy farm in upstate New York that historic weekend in 1969 as "stardust" and "golden," as angelic children of nature taking the first vital step that will lead us "back to the garden."

But how about this for dreaming downward, from "Sex Kills" on *Turbulent Indigo* (1994)—the album whose cover features a Mitchell self-portrait in the style of Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear*:

> *All these jackoffs at the office*
> *The rapist in the pool*
> *Oh and the tragedies in the nurseries*

Little kids packin' guns to school
The ulcerated ozone
These tumors of the skin
This hostile sun beating down on
This massive mess we're in!
And the gas leaks
And the oil spills
And sex sells everything
And sex kills
Sex kills
Sex kills
Sex kills . . .

It's difficult to imagine this bleak jeremiad being well received at the hippie lovefest of a quarter-century earlier.

Although Mitchell was just twenty-three when she composed "Both Sides, Now," and still performed her material in clubs and coffee shops in a winsome, girlish soprano, she had much right to claim that she had already experienced life's ups and downs. She was born Roberta Joan Anderson in Fort Macleod, Alberta, in 1943, the only child of conservative Canadian parents who would view with skepticism, and on occasion dismay, their reckless daughter's career and views, and well-publicized love life. At the age of nine she fell victim to the same outbreak of polio that partially paralyzed Neil Young; it weakened her left hand, and was in part responsible for her "open tunings," which helped reduce the amount of fingering needed to play the guitar.

The Andersons tried their luck next in Maidstone ("When we were kids in Maidstone, Sharon/I went to every wedding in that little town," as she recalls in the glorious "Song for Sharon" on *Hejira*, largely written, I was surprised to learn from this biography, while Mitchell was revved up on cocaine), then moved to nearby North Battleford. Finally, after Joan's year-long battle with polio, much of it spent in a harrowing sanatorium that seriously restricted visiting hours and was far from home, the Andersons settled in the city of Saskatoon.

Bright but unengaged by school, Joni (she changed her name when she was thirteen) developed into something of a rebel. She secretly began smoking at the age of nine, eventually reaching a steady eighty cigarettes a day, and while in eleventh grade was caught shoplifting. Her teenage years were spent hanging with kids from the wrong side of the tracks, and it was in order to perform at the boozy parties they held that she bought a ukulele for $36, a guitar being too expensive. Only Arthur Kratzmann, her first English teacher in Saskatoon, made an impression, but it was a deep one: her first album, *Song to a Seagull*, is gratefully dedicated to him for having "taught me to love words."

But it was as a painter that Joni Anderson initially intended to make her name. In 1963 she enrolled in the Alberta College of Art in Calgary, but she dropped out after a year, unimpressed by the faculty's doctrinaire insistence that Abstract Expressionism was the only game in town. She found more inspiration at musical evenings in Calgary coffeehouses, performing herself in one called the Depression for $15 a week. Yet Alberta College did have a decisive effect on her life, for it was there she met Brad MacMath, a fellow art student. That spring she found herself pregnant. At the end of the academic year the penniless couple moved to Toronto, until, as *Blue*'s "Little Green" poignantly recalls, "He went to California/Hearing that everything's warmer there/So you write him a letter and say 'her eyes are blue.'" Joni gave birth to her blue-eyed daughter in February of 1965, naming her Kelly. No word of her situation was to find its way back to her parents in Saskatoon: "To be pregnant and unmarried in 1964," she later recalled, "was like you killed somebody."

Casting around for a solution to her dilemma, Joni deposited Kelly in a foster care home yet delayed putting her up for adoption. Since she was unable to afford the $150 required for musicians' union membership fees, she could play at only a handful of Toronto venues. At one of these, however, the Penny Farthing, she met an American folksinger called Chuck Mitchell, who liked to perform his own "improved" version of Bob Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man." After a whirlwind romance of a few weeks they married in Chuck's hometown of Rochester, Michigan, then settled in Detroit, where they began appearing as a duo, mixing folk songs with a few Brecht/Weil numbers, and even Flanders and Swann.

Haunting their courtship and early weeks as a married couple was the question of what to do with Kelly. The heartbreaking "Little Green" recreates the moment when Joni finally decided to surrender her:

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

Mitchell's parents would not learn of the lies she was sending home until they were in their eighties, when tabloids broke the story that Joni was searching for the daughter she had given up for adoption thirty years earlier.

The first song on Mitchell's first album is called "I Had a King," and it's pretty mean about Chuck. He is figured as a "king in a tenement castle" who has taken "to painting the pastel walls brown." While he sweeps the rooms with "the broom of contempt," he is far from cool, for he dresses in "drip-dry and paisley" and seems marooned in folk music's past: "Ladies in gingham still blush/While he sings them of wars and wine/But I in my leather and lace/I can never become that kind."

Although warbled in her highest, sweetest register, it's a somewhat cutting divorce song, and reveals the influence of Dylan's "Positively 4th Street," a track Mitchell credits with helping kick-start her compositional career. "You got a lotta nerve/To say you are my friend/When I was down/You just stood there grinning," Dylan's vitriolic single opens. It struck Mitchell with the force of a revelation: "I realized that this was a whole new ballgame; now you could make your songs literature." For both Dylan and Mitchell (who, although she discarded Chuck, opted to keep her married surname), making songs literature often involved getting them to deliver unpalatable truths, even ad hominem denunciations.

As it had for Dylan earlier in the decade, the Newport Folk Festival helped make Mitchell known to an audience beyond the cliques and coteries of the coffeehouse scene. Judy Collins persuaded its reluctant board to offer Mitchell a slot at the 1967 festival, where her set was rapturously received. Also on the bill was fellow Canadian Leonard Cohen, author of four books of poetry and two novels, and, at the age of thirty-three, poised to make his musical debut. Their brief affair is charted in *Blue*'s "A Case of You," whose opening again reveals Mitchell's gift for puncturing male pretension:

Just before our love got lost you said
"I am as constant as a northern star"

Jack Robinson/Jack Robinson Archive LLC

Joni Mitchell, New York City, November 1968

And I said "Constantly in the darkness
Where's that at?
If you want me I'll be in the bar."

Nevertheless, "A Case of You" frankly acknowledges the powerful effect Cohen had on her ("Oh you're in my blood like holy wine") while also insisting on her ability to survive exposure to his potent, if contradictory, energies, his mix of bitterness and sweetness—"Oh I could drink a case of you darling/And I would still be on my feet." Cohen, like Chuck, furnished her with reading lists, but Mitchell was nonplussed, when she got around to reading the likes of Lorca and Camus and Rilke, to discover that Cohen had lifted a number of lines from them for his songs.

Mitchell's finest albums were made in the 1970s, before developments in studio technology tempted her, most disastrously on *Dog Eat Dog* (1985), into various experiments with synthesizers and computers that tended not to suit her voice or material. Her first contract with Warner Brothers, signed in 1968, granted her pretty much complete artistic control over the production of her records, and she fiercely defended her right to independence from the industry's suits and moneymen in all subsequent deals. The two highest points in her recording career, it is generally agreed, are *Blue* (1971) and *Hejira* (1976), but for Prince, an early fan and later ardent friend, it was *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (1975) that stood out as her greatest achievement.

Although her first three albums include some durable and famous songs, such as "Chelsea Morning" (which inspired Bill and Hillary Clinton to name their daughter Chelsea), "Both Sides, Now," "Big Yellow Taxi" (the one with the chorus "Don't it always seem to go/That you don't know what you've got/Till it's gone/They paved paradise/And put up a parking lot"), as well as that staple of campfire sing-alongs, "The Circle Game," it was not until she entered Studio C at A&M Studios in Hollywood to record *Blue* in January 1971 that Mitchell's voice, music, and words meshed to create a record that people still find they want to listen to again and again. Many of the songs had been written the year before, during a tour of Europe, which included five weeks living in a cave with a hippie community in the coastal village of Matala in Crete—which is why her fingernails are dirty and she has beach tar on her feet in the song "Carey" (based on one Cary Raditz, whom she met during her sojourn there). This groovy scene is revisited in "California," which features a snapshot of a "redneck on a Grecian isle/Who did the goat dance very well."

But while *Blue* deftly channels the alternative lifestyles of the counterculture's pioneers and crazies, it avoids celebrating them with the kind of dewy-eyed hopefulness that buoyed "Woodstock." The mélange of dangers lurking beneath the hedonistic petals of flower power are succinctly captured in the album's title song: "Acid, booze, and ass/Needles, guns, and grass." Mitchell's own self-figurations in these songs often radiate melancholy and indecision, a longing to find the key that will set her free. The intimacy of her revelations on the songs of *Blue* is enhanced by the subtlety and originality of her phrasing, and by her discovery of a new melodic range and intensity. Her voice is almost unbearably soft and poignant on "Little Green," but can also be bracing and energetic, as on, say, "Carey."

"I was at my most defenseless during the making of *Blue*," she later confided. "And when you have no defenses, the music becomes saintly and it can *communicate*." Undoubtedly *Blue* does communicate, but along with her defenselessness it conveys a wide-ranging curiosity and a resonant delight in ordinary pleasures, such as the prospect of sharing a bottle of wine with Carey at the Mermaid Café. As well as confessing that she's selfish and sad and wants to skate away on a frozen river, *Blue* celebrates the urge to get up and jive in a jukebox dive, even to indulge in some sweet romance. It's the inventiveness of the songs and the vigor of their performance, rather than the cris de coeur they occasionally emit, that make it feel like such a startlingly effective leap beyond her first three albums.

"I am on a lonely road and I am traveling," opens *Blue*, "Traveling, traveling, traveling/Looking for something, what can it be." As proved the case for nearly all those who cut their musical teeth in the 1960s American folk scene, at some point the lonely traveler ends up realizing that, to make it big, what he or she most desperately needs to find is a band; also, that a great deal depends on finding the right one. The likes of Stephen Stills and James Taylor had made guest appearances on early Mitchell albums, but as the ideal of the folk troubadour receded ever further into the past, Mitchell began scouting for a group that might enable her to reach a wider audience. *Court and Spark* (1974), her highest-charting album, featured LA Express, an ensemble of versatile jazz musicians who were unfazed by her eccentric tunings.

A single from the album, "Help Me," reached number seven in the US charts (her one and only appearance in the Top Ten).

Mitchell's gifts, it seems to me, reached their fullest and most efflorescent in the albums and concerts of her LA Express years. Particularly wondrous is her voice, somewhat roughened and lowered by her indefatigable consumption of cigarettes, which soars and swoops like the black crow in the song of that name included on *Hejira*, an album that came out the year after Bob Dylan's *Blood on the Tracks* and Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run*, thus completing a mid-1970s holy trinity.

Dylan's Rolling Thunder Tour was, if only obliquely, a catalyst for the first song on *Hejira*, "Coyote." Mitchell was not among those originally recruited for Dylan's ten-week cavalcade through the northeastern states. She joined halfway through in late November, fascinated both by the carnivalesque shows and by the behavior the tour elicited from those involved ("everybody was so insane, I mean insane"). Despite her misgivings, and her acute dislike of the reigning queen of the troupe, Joan Baez, she was not prepared to miss out as she had at Woodstock. "Coyote" is "allegedly," as her website puts it, about Sam Shepard, who was along to work on the script of the film *Renaldo and Clara* (which Dylan would release, to little acclaim, a few years later). Rumors that she and Shepard had hooked up were soon swirling through the tour buses, despite his preexisting commitments—or as "Coyote" puts it, "Now he's got a woman at home/He's got another woman down the hall/He seems to want me anyway." Shepard, for his part, saluted in his *Rolling Thunder Logbook* the "uncanny" nature of Mitchell's "word maneuverings," citing a line from "Don't Interrupt the Sorrow": "I've got a head full of quandary/And a mighty mighty thirst."

Eager not to be considered a puritanical, drug-averse party-pooper like Baez and keen to get with the spirit of the tour, Mitchell asked to be paid in cocaine for her appearances. Some lines from "Coyote" memorably capture the prevailing *Geist* of life on the road with Cap'n Bob:

> *And peeking thru keyholes in*
> *numbered doors*
> *Where the players lick their*
> *wounds*
> *And take their temporary lovers*
> *And their pills and powders to get*
> *them thru this passion play*

"Coyote" also initiates Mitchell's presentation of herself as a restless seeking wanderer on *Hejira* as a whole—the album's title, meaning "journey or flight," alludes to Muhammad's departure from Mecca to Medina in the Koran. The chorus of "Coyote" subtly illustrates, however, her ability to examine the myths of the road in the same spirit as Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* from both sides now: "You just picked up a hitcher/A prisoner of the white lines on the freeway." Does the freeway offer escape or just a different kind of entrapment?

Up until *Hejira* America's open road seemed invariably to have been the imaginative province of men, from Walt Whitman to Woody Guthrie, from Jack Kerouac's Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty to the footloose narrator of Dylan's "Tangled Up in Blue" (written, incidentally, after Dylan spent a weekend listening to Mitchell's *Blue*). The courage required to reconfigure so boldly and brilliantly such a well-worn trope may have owed something to the effects of cocaine, described by Mitchell as "a warrior's drug," and one which made her feel as indestructible and aggressive as Scarface. Yet *Hejira* is not an aggressive album; its exploration of the "strange pillows of [her] wanderlust," of the "refuge of the roads," is at once exacting and beautiful, as haunting and fragile as the vapor trails she observes while driving across the burning desert in "Amelia," and compares to both the hexagram of the heavens and the strings of her guitar.

Mitchell's "head full of quandary" and her "mighty thirst" have propelled her music in all manner of directions in the four decades since *Hejira*. She has never been afraid to experiment, as was perhaps most dramatically proved when *Mingus*, her avant-garde tribute to the irascible jazz bassist Charlie Mingus, was released in 1979.

The album had mixed reviews and undoubtedly alienated a segment of Mitchell's fan base. But her collaborations with a number of other jazz musicians, such as the gloriously innovative, if somewhat unstable, Jaco Pastorius, whose deep, thrumming bass guitar provides an exquisite counterpoint to Mitchell's voice and open tunings, and with the genius saxophonist Wayne Shorter (who was part of Miles Davis's quintet in the 1960s, and like Pastorius, a member of Weather Report in the 1970s), have resulted in wholly successful fusions of Mitchell's words and sound with the idioms of post-bebop jazz.

Although her lyrics are often full of self-questioning and self-criticism, her belief in her talent and judgment seems never to have wavered. Perhaps the most striking testimony to this comes from her Rolling Thunder rival, Joan Baez, who in an interview with David Yaffe for his new biography observed: "She's a really strong woman who doesn't give a fuck about what anybody thinks, and we all wish we could be that way, but we can't."

Undoubtedly she can be somewhat cantankerous. In Yaffe's copiously quoted interviews with Mitchell she vividly denounces the music industry, complaining at length of the short straw she feels it has given her in the years since her heyday. Many times she has quit in disgust, only to return with a new album, and eventually a wholly new voice and act. In 2000 *Both Sides Now* appeared, and two years later *Travelogue*, both of which presented her as a throaty torch singer backed by a full orchestra. Whether she was covering standards such as "You're My Thrill" or "Answer Me, My Love" or "Stormy Weather," or hits from her own by now vast back catalog, the results were often spine-tingling. Her independence and audacity were also strongly in evidence in her adaptation for *Night Ride Home* (1991) of W.B. Yeats's poem "The Second Coming," retitled "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" and including many extra lines penned by Mitchell herself, while her last studio album, *Shine* (2007), closes with a reworking of Rudyard Kipling's "If." Clearly she couldn't sing Kipling's original conclusion ("And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!"); instead Mitchell's oeuvre to date ends with lines twinning the pugnacious and the visionary: "Cause you've got the fight/You've got the insight/You've got the fight/You've got the insight."

Yaffe conducted two sets of interviews with Mitchell: one in 2007 for a profile in *The New York Times* (which she hated), and the second eight years later (by which time she'd forgiven him). These form the core of his contribution to Mitchell studies, for as a biography *Reckless Daughter* is definitely not to be preferred to Karen O'Brien's much better written *Shadows and Light: Joni Mitchell* (2001). Still, the excerpts from his extensive interviews are revealing in a range of ways: there is much settling of old scores—with Dylan, for instance, who fell asleep when Mitchell first played him *Court and Spark* back in 1974, getting accused by her of plagiarism. Ex-lovers and ex-husbands also have their cards harshly marked. But why, I found myself wondering, should one expect Mitchell, alone on her pedestal as the grande dame of North American singer-songwriters, to have mellowed? For how could she have achieved what she did had she not both trusted her insights and been full of fight? □

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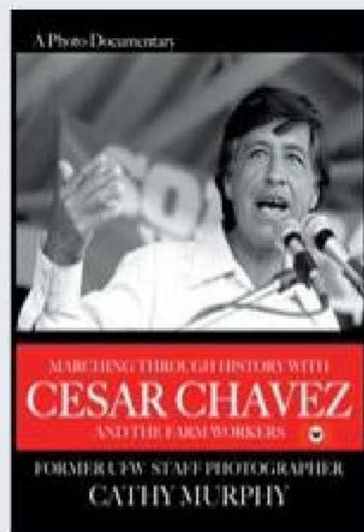

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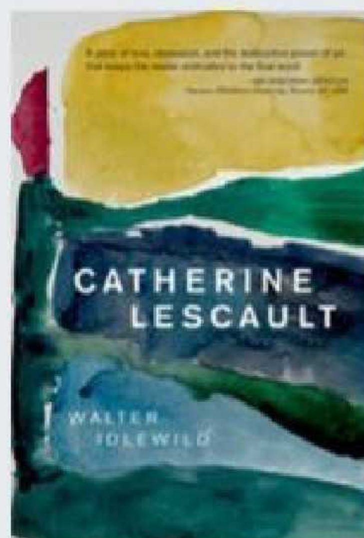

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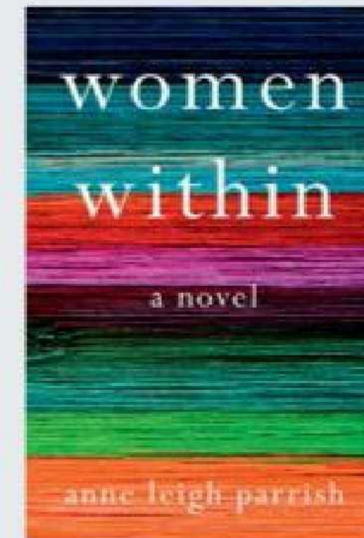

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