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**A Gendered Musicological Study of the Work of Four  
Leading Female Singer-Songwriters: Laura Nyro, Joni  
Mitchell, Kate Bush, and Tori Amos**

**Levent Donat Berköz**

**Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**City University London  
Centre for Music Studies**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	2
LIST OF FIGURES .....	5
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	7
DECLARATION .....	9
ABSTRACT .....	10
INTRODUCTION .....	11
Aim of the thesis.....	11
Selection of case studies.....	12
Literature review.....	15
Methodology, sources and structure of chapters.....	19
Why French Feminism.....	23
Jacques Lacan, The Symbolic order, the phallus and <i>jouissance</i> .....	27
Research questions and an overview of the thesis.....	35
CHAPTER 1.....	39
Weaving the <i>Loom's Desire</i> : Laura Nyro in 'Timer', 'Once It Was Alright (Farmer Joe) and 'December's Boudoir' .....	39
1.1. Introduction.....	39
1.2. Kristeva and the semiotic.....	50
1.3. Words for a <i>Serious Playground</i> .....	54
1.4. Music for a <i>Serious Playground</i> .....	64
1.5. Nyro's 'Confession': The cover art for <i>Eli and the Thirteenth Confession</i> ....	79
1.6. Conclusion.....	84

CHAPTER 2.....	88
‘Out of the City and Down to the Seaside’: Joni Mitchell in ‘The Dawntreader’, ‘Ladies of the Canyon’ and ‘Shadows and Light’ .....	88
2.1. Introduction.....	88
2.2. Luce Irigaray and the multiplicity of the female body and text.....	95
2.3. ‘Something truthful in the sea’: Joni Mitchell the poet.....	100
2.4. ‘Songs like tiny hammers hurled at bevelled mirrors in empty halls’: Joni Mitchell the composer.....	114
2.5. ‘She weaves a pattern all her own’: Joni Mitchell the painter.....	124
2.6. Conclusion.....	135
CHAPTER 3.....	142
‘Swapping Places’: Kate Bush in ‘Wuthering Heights’, ‘Babooshka’ and ‘Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)’ .....	142
3.1. Introduction.....	142
3.2. Womanliness as a masquerade and <i>écriture féminine</i> .....	150
3.3. Writing the feminine.....	155
3.4. Composing the feminine.....	165
3.5. Visualizing the feminine.....	177
3.6. Conclusion.....	189
CHAPTER 4.....	197
Songs Under a <i>Black Sun</i> : Tori Amos in ‘Silent All These Years’, ‘Pretty Good Year’ and ‘Hey Jupiter’ .....	197
4.1. Introduction.....	197
4.2. Theorizing female melancholia.....	203
4.3. Writing the silence.....	212

4.4. Composing the silence.....	227
4.5. Visualizing the loss.....	241
4.6. Conclusion.....	254
CONCLUSION.....	265
APPENDIX A: THE LYRICS OF ‘TIMER’, ‘ONCE IT WAS ALRIGHT NOW (FARMER JOE)’ AND ‘DECEMBER’S BOUDOIR’.....	275
APPENDIX B: THE LYRICS OF ‘THE DAWNTREADER’, ‘LADIES OF THE CANYON’ AND ‘SHADOWS AND LIGHT’.....	281
APPENDIX C: THE LYRICS OF ‘WUTHERING HEIGHTS’, ‘BABOOSHKA’ AND ‘RUNNING UP THAT HILL (A DEAL WITH GOD)’.....	287
APPENDIX D: THE LYRICS OF ‘SILENT ALL THESE YEARS’, ‘PRETTY GOOD YEAR’ AND ‘HEY JUPITER’.....	293
APPENDIX E: THE MUSIC OF ‘TIMER’.....	298
APPENDIX F: THE MUSIC OF ‘DECEMBER’S BOUDOIR’.....	304
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	306

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 1.1.</b>	The opening page of ‘Timer’ .....	69
<b>Figure 1.2.</b>	The chord A + E + G# + B .....	74
<b>Figure 1.3.</b>	The chord C9 resolves to F .....	75
<b>Figure 1.4.</b>	The chord Cmaj9 in ‘Emmie’ .....	75
<b>Figure 1.5.</b>	The opening bars of ‘December’s Boudoir’ .....	77
<b>Figure 1.6.</b>	Bars 7-15 of ‘December’s Boudoir’ .....	77
<b>Figure 1.7.</b>	The front cover of <i>Eli and the Thirteenth Confession</i> .....	81
<b>Figure 1.8.</b>	The back cover of <i>Eli and the Thirteenth Confession</i> .....	83
<b>Figure 2.1.</b>	Bars 5-12 of ‘The Dawntreader’ .....	118
<b>Figure 2.2.</b>	Bars 31-35 of ‘The Dawntreader’ .....	118
<b>Figure 2.3.</b>	The opening bars of ‘Ladies of the Canyon’ .....	119
<b>Figure 2.4.</b>	Bars 5-8 of ‘Ladies of the Canyon’ .....	120
<b>Figure 2.5.</b>	Bars 1-16 of ‘Shadows and Light’ .....	122
<b>Figure 2.6.</b>	Bars 25-27 of ‘Shadows and Light’ .....	122
<b>Figure 2.7.</b>	The cover art for the album <i>Song to a Seagull</i> .....	125
<b>Figure 2.8.</b>	The cover art for the album <i>Ladies of the Canyon</i> .....	128
<b>Figure 2.9.</b>	The cover art for the album <i>Hissing of Summer Lawns</i> .....	131
<b>Figure 2.10.</b>	Joni Mitchell in the booklet of <i>Hissing of Summer Lawns</i> .....	133
<b>Figure 3.1.</b>	The opening line of ‘Wuthering Heights’ presented by the piano and celeste .....	167
<b>Figure 3.2.</b>	The chords A, F, E and C# repeated three times throughout the verse .....	168
<b>Figure 3.3.</b>	The chords E $\flat$ min7, G $\flat$ major and Fsus4 repeated three times throughout the bridge .....	168
<b>Figure 3.4.</b>	The coda of ‘Wuthering Heights’ .....	169
<b>Figure 3.5.</b>	Screenshots from Kate Bush’s video for ‘Wuthering Heights’ .....	180
<b>Figure 3.6.</b>	Screenshots from Kate Bush’s video for ‘Babooshka’ .....	183
<b>Figure 3.7.</b>	Screenshots from Kate Bush’s video for ‘Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)’ .....	186
<b>Figure 4.1.</b>	The opening line of ‘Silent all These Years’ presented by the piano .....	229
<b>Figure 4.2.</b>	The return to the opening line (after the chorus) in ‘Silent all These Years’ .....	229
<b>Figure 4.3.</b>	The use of four descending notes in the main melodic line of the verse (‘Silent all These Years’) .....	230
<b>Figure 4.4.</b>	The melodic line of the chorus in ‘Silent all These Years’ .....	231
<b>Figure 4.5.</b>	The single B of the middle eight in ‘Silent all These Years’ .....	232
<b>Figure 4.6.</b>	The opening line of ‘Pretty Good Year’ .....	233
<b>Figure 4.7.</b>	The accompaniment of the first verse .....	233
<b>Figure 4.8.</b>	The successive use of a major second in the vocal line and a perfect fourth in the accompaniment of the chorus of ‘Pretty Good Year’ .....	235
<b>Figure 4.9.</b>	The opening of the middle eight with a figuration built on a minor second, and the incessant use of a single note (B natural) in the vocal line .....	236
<b>Figure 4.10.</b>	The opening chords of ‘Hey Jupiter’ .....	238

<b>Figure 4.11.</b>	The melodic cell that consists of a major second and a minor second heard in the second part of ‘Hey Jupiter’s first verse .....	238
<b>Figure 4.12.</b>	The use of a melodic line heard in the verse and also in the chorus.....	239
<b>Figure 4.13.</b>	The cover art of <i>Little Earthquakes</i> and screenshots from the video of ‘Silent all These Years’ .....	244
<b>Figure 4.14.</b>	Screenshots from the video of ‘Pretty Good Year’ .....	248
<b>Figure 4.15.</b>	Screenshots from the video of ‘Hey Jupiter’ .....	251



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## **Declaration**

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates the role of gender in popular music, exploring the possibility of a feminine mode of writing. It focuses on the work of four leading female singer-songwriters, namely Laura Nyro, Joni Mitchell, Kate Bush and Tori Amos, whose songs are analyzed as textual entities. Building a theoretical bridge between musicology and feminist theory, the relationship between the text and the body is examined. The discursive perspective of this research allows pieces of popular music to be considered not only as ideologically signifying cultural commodities but also as textually signifying entities of words, music and images complementing (rather than supplementing) one another; in other words, that their cultural and ideological embodiments may be musicologically interpreted in tandem. My analysis of popular music pieces created and enoiced by these four artists departs from the presumption of the significance of gender-consciousness informing this word-music-image entity, located simultaneously at a representational and textual/musical level. Throughout this thesis, different female subjectivities are discussed, drawing primarily upon French feminism. Theories which establish a foundation for my arguments are Julia Kristeva's the semiotic, Luce Irigaray's feminine multiplicity and Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine*, as well as Joan Riviere's womanliness as masquerade. The resulting multilayered discourse acquires an interdisciplinary character, drawing upon and seeking to contribute to fields such as feminist musicology, popular music studies and gender theory. It also aims to shed light on issues from which gendered discourses arise, both in general terms and in the specific realm of music. This thesis concludes by discussing the extent to which female musicians achieved the feminization of popular music through manipulating both the lyrical and musical structures imposed by dominant discourses.

## INTRODUCTION

### Aim of the thesis

The principal aim of this thesis is to explore various modes by which different female subjectivities are represented in popular music, through the use of feminist theories within and beyond musicology. My methodological approach derives from a theoretical relation between the female body and language posited by French feminism. I extend these theories to music by seeking to understand a piece of popular music as a text, or more specifically a textual entity, that claims a kind of discursive coherence through words, music and image. Hence, what I intend to analyze through a theoretical bridge between musicology and feminist theory is the dynamics of a gendered narrative constructed within the whole structural body of musical production. In this sense, this research focuses on the examination of the relationship between the text and body. This is to expose the potential of the works of female singer-songwriters to manipulate artistic conventions, as French feminism, as well as other subsequent feminist theorists, argued that one of the ways for women to gain their own voice is to write their bodies. In general, one of the primary concerns of this research is to reappraise the position of female artists who, consciously or subconsciously, engage in resisting the male language that has dominated the popular music industry throughout its history.

Although this thesis also aims to shed light on the significance of female singer-songwriters within the Anglo-American popular music industry, it does not intend to offer a generalized reading of the history of women in popular music.<sup>1</sup> Rather, it

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<sup>1</sup> For literature exploring the history of women in popular music, see Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Lucy O'Brien, *She Bop II: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul* (London: Continuum, 2002), Mina Carson, Tisa Lewis, and Susan M. Shaw, *Girls Rock: Fifty Years of Women Making Music* (Kentucky: The University

attempts to propose alternative ways of analysis, based on psycholinguistic and feminist theories, to examine the contribution of female musicians to popular music. In other words, the analytical discourse of this research gives priority to literary and cultural theory, rather than popular music history. To this end, this thesis develops its theoretical agenda through the exploration of the works of four historically significant, white, English-speaking female singer-songwriters: Laura Nyro (1947-1997), Joni Mitchell (born 1943), Kate Bush (born 1958), and Tori Amos (born 1963). Although a historical survey of popular music lies outside the scope of this study, I do not avoid discussing other related artists (male or female) when necessary.

### **Selection of case studies**

One of the criteria that has guided the selection of my case studies is my contention that the figures in question provide considerably rich material in terms of suggesting a relatively new critical approach to the understanding of the gendered aspects of late twentieth-century popular music repertoire. However, it is not the only one. The primary reason for the selection of the artists included in this study is that they can be regarded as pioneering female musicians, owing to their unprecedented level of authorial input into the songs they compose and perform. From their formative days in the industry, they have all consistently taken overall control of their works as producers. They also arrange the majority of the songs they compose and produce. Furthermore, they are all acknowledged as accomplished instrumentalists, playing either the piano/keyboards (Nyro, Mitchell, Bush, Amos) and/or the guitar (Nyro, Mitchell) to accompany themselves both in the studio and on stage. Thus, I suggest that they can all

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of Kentucky Press, 2004), and Helen Reddington, *The Lost Women of Rock Music: Female Musicians of the Punk Era* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007).

be considered *auteurs*.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, as will be shown, they are also artists who have successfully exploited the field of popular music in order to reconfigure the discursive relationships between music, gender and sexuality throughout their careers.

Since I have identified the issues of ‘historical significance’ and ‘authorial control’ as two of the most important selection criteria, I will here set out to justify the exclusion of some artists from this study. At first glance, Madonna and Björk would also appear to provide this research with fertile ground. More than 25 years since her career began, Madonna is still regarded as one of the most significant female pop music artists in the Anglo-American popular music industry. One of the primary reasons, besides the commercial success of her artistic production, is her manipulative attitude to representations of both female subjectivity and the female body, and to issues related to gender and sexuality in general. She is also one of the female artists to have retained overall control of their work. However, the reasons I exclude Madonna from this study are that she is not credited as the only creator of her texts,<sup>3</sup> and that both her artistic performance and her public persona(e) are already discussed widely within various academic discourses. Specifically talking about music scholarship, with the publication of Susan McClary’s ‘Living to Tell: Madonna’s Resurrection of the Fleshly’,<sup>4</sup> Madonna began to attract serious attention from musicologists. Subsequently, from the early

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<sup>2</sup> Ron Moy, who also considers Kate Bush an *auteur*, argues that ‘[t]heories of authorship in popular music are rightly ambivalent in assigning the ultimate authority to one individual, or role. On some occasions it is assigned to the artist or star, on others to the writer(s), on others to the producer, on others to the DJ or mixer and on others to the label (...). However, when one individual combines more than one of these roles the assumptions relating to authorship are, quite logically, made more manifest’. According to Moy, besides Kate Bush, other prominent female *auteurs* are Madonna and Björk. For further discussion see Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love* (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), p. 73. Similarly, Allan F. Moore argues that ‘notions of “authorship” meant that to understand a piece of music was to understand the composer’s intention, or at least his (normal) workings’. See Allan F. Moore, ‘Introduction’, in *Analyzing Popular Music*, edited by Allan F. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> In order to claim a link between the body and text, I prefer to focus on artists who reject any external creative input, at least in the processes of composing and writing.

<sup>4</sup> See Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

1990s onwards, scholars such as Nicholas Cook, Stan Hawkins and Sheila Whiteley put an emphasis on the importance of examining different aspects of Madonna's work in relation to music.<sup>5</sup>

Turning now to Björk, she is also known to have complete control over her work, both in the processes of writing/composing and producing. Nevertheless, her work has different stylistic characteristics from that of the artists included in this study. Although throughout their careers Nyro, Mitchell, Bush and Amos have consistently crossed genre boundaries by combining different musical styles, they have all remained loyal to the singer-songwriter tradition of the 1960s in terms of deploying the piano or the guitar (played by themselves) as the primary representative of their music. Conversely, as a composer Björk has mostly worked within the styles related to dance and club cultures, deploying the studio as the primary instrument, as it were, to produce an idiosyncratic sound world. It is because of these crucial differences of musical style that I have not incorporated Björk into my analysis. Moreover, Björk's artistic production and identity politics are also discussed, albeit to a lesser extent than Madonna's, by scholars from

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<sup>5</sup> See Nicholas Cook, 'Credit Where It's Due: Madonna's Material Girl', in *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), Stan Hawkins's 'I'll Never Be an Angel: Stories of Deception in Madonna's Music', *Critical Musicology Online* (Leeds University, 1997), at <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/music/Info/critmus/articles/1997/01/01.html> (last accessed 10/10/2011), Stan Hawkins, 'Dragging Out of Camp: Narrative Agendas in Madonna's Musical Production', in *Madonna's Drowned Worlds: New Approaches to her Cultural Transformations, 1983-2003*, edited by Santiago Fouz-Hernández and Freya Jarman-Ivens (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 3-21, and Sheila Whiteley, 'Seduced by the Sign: An Analysis of the Textual Links Between Sound and Image in Pop Videos', in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, edited by Sheila Whiteley (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 259-76. For feminist criticism considering Madonna's work, especially her music videos, a challenge to traditional gender roles, see E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around The Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, And Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1987), pp. 116-27, and Lynne Layton, 'Like a Virgin: Madonna's Version of the Feminine', in *Desperately Seeking Madonna: in Search of the Meaning of the World's Most famous Woman*, edited by Adam Sexton (New York: Delta, 1993), pp. 170-94. For a feminist reading criticising Madonna by claiming that she only reiterates and reinforces the normative gender discourse imposed by patriarchy, see bell hooks, 'Power to the Pussy: We Don't Wanna Be Dickies in Drag', in *Madonnarama: Essays on Sex and Popular Culture*, edited by Lisa Frank and Paul Smith (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1993), pp. 65-80, and for a reading of Madonna from a sociological point of view, see John Fiske, *Reading the Popular* (London: Routledge, 2000), especially pp. 95-114.



musicology. Sheila Whiteley's 'Björk: the Icelandic Elf' (2005), Nicola Dibben's 'Subjectivity and the Construction of Emotion in the Music of Björk' (2006) and *Björk* (2009), Lori Burns, Marc Lafrance and Laura Hawley's 'Embodied Subjectivities in the Lyrical and Musical Expression of PJ Harvey and Björk' (2008) and Victoria Malawey's 'Musical Emergence in Björk's *Medùlla*' (2011) can be given as examples of academic writings exploring the relationship between gender, sexuality and Björk's music.<sup>6</sup>

### Literature Review

Unlike in the case of Madonna and Björk, and despite their above-mentioned achievements making them significant figures in the history of popular music, the existing academic sources focusing on the artists included in this study with regard to feminism or gender issues are surprisingly limited. Although Laura Nyro was the first female artist challenging the traditional position of women in 1960s' American popular music industry, there are only two articles devoted to her. Ironically, the first of these articles, Mark Anthony Neal's 'Bellbottoms, Bluebellies, and the Funky-Ass White Girl',<sup>7</sup> focuses on the only Nyro album consisting of non-original songs, namely *Gonna Take a Miracle* (1971). In this article, Neal discusses Nyro's disruptive attitude towards conventional race-relations in popular music industry. In the second article on Nyro, on

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<sup>6</sup>See Sheila Whiteley, *Too Much Too Young: Popular Music, Age and Gender* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 104-14; Nicola Dibben, 'Subjectivity and the Construction of Emotion in the Music of Björk', in *Music Analysis*, Vol. 25, Issue 1-2 (March, 2006), pp.171-97, Nicola Dibben, *Björk* (London: Equinox Press, 2009), Lori Burns, Marc Lafrance and Laura Hawley, 'Embodied Subjectivities in the Lyrical and Musical Expression of PJ Harvey and Björk', in *Music Theory Online: A Journal of Criticism, Commentary, Research, and Scholarship*, Vol. 14, Number 4 (November, 2008), at [http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.08.14.4/mto.08.14.4.burns\\_lafrance\\_hawley.html](http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.08.14.4/mto.08.14.4.burns_lafrance_hawley.html) (last accessed 12/10/2010), and Victoria Malawey, 'Musical Emergence in Björk's *Medùlla*', in *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, Vol. 136, Issue 1 (2011), pp. 141-80.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Anthony Neal, *Songs in the Key of Black Life: A Rhythm and Blues Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 4.

the other hand, Patricia Spence Rudden demonstrates the ways in which the artist constructed song-cycles ‘with the shape of the vinyl record itself serving as one of the organizing elements’,<sup>8</sup> by paying particular attention to two of Nyro’s albums, *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession* (1968) and *New York Tendaberry* (1969). Neither of these articles, however, offers any kind of feminist reading of the artist’s work.

Turning now to the space afforded to Nyro in academic books on the subject of women and popular music, she is not even given a mention in Simon Reynolds and Joy Press’ *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion and Rock ‘n’ Roll*,<sup>9</sup> one of the first books mainly focusing on the role of gender in popular music. Similarly, Lori Burns and Melisse Lafrance’s *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity & Popular Music*<sup>10</sup> does not refer to Nyro. To this list, we can also add Sheila Whiteley’s *Too Much Too Young: Popular Music, Age and Gender*, whilst there are only two brief references to Nyro in her *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity*. In addition, Charlotte Greig discusses, in ‘Female Identity and the Woman Songwriter’, the impact of motherhood on the career of ‘major talent’<sup>11</sup> Nyro in one succinct paragraph.

The literature on Mitchell and feminism especially in music studies, albeit not as scarce as in the case of Nyro, is nevertheless limited. As will become apparent in the course of this thesis, Mitchell insistently refused to be positioned as an artist within the limits of femininity. Perhaps as a result of this, some scholarship and critiques have tended not to

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<sup>8</sup> Patricia Spence Rudden, ‘Stacking the Wax: The Structure of Laura Nyro’s Studio Albums’, in *Singing for Themselves: Essays on Women in Popular Music*, edited by Patricia Spence Rudden (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *The Sex Revolts, Gender, Rebellion and Rock ‘n’ Roll* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Lori Burns and Méliisse Lafrance, *Disruptive Divas. Feminism, Identity & Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Charlotte Greig, ‘Female Identity and the Woman Songwriter’, in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, edited by Sheila Whiteley (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 175.

take into consideration in their discussions the role played by gender within her work. In one of the first academic books in the discipline of musicology entirely devoted to the artist, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, Lloyd Whitesell states:

I do feel compelled to point out that evaluation of her [Mitchell's] work has been affected by its placement within two predominant categories of cultural prestige: namely, on the disadvantaged side of the distinction between high and low art, and between male and female authorship.<sup>12</sup>

However, although Whitesell endeavours to justify why Mitchell's music should in fact fall on what he perceives to be the advantaged side of high art, he chooses not to examine the ways in which gender affects her position in the popular music industry and her work. At the end of a very limited discussion of gender, he asserts that 'I agree wholeheartedly with the view that Mitchell's accomplishment should stand or fall on its own merits, without respect to gender'.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike Whitesell, in the last few years some writers have attempted to explore Mitchell's problematic relationship with issues related to gender. Both Alice Echols and Stuart Henderson<sup>14</sup> have traced back through her testimonies about gender to reveal the motives of her declared identification with male artists. They also question her rejection of the conventional definition of the female singer-songwriter and that of feminism. However, neither Echols nor Henderson took into account Mitchell's artistic production in their analyses. Conversely, Wilfrid Mellers, in his book *Angels of the Night: Popular*

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<sup>12</sup> Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> For further discussion, see Alice Echols, 'The Soul of a Martian: A Conversation with Joni Mitchell', in *A Shaky Ground: The Sixties and its Aftershocks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 207-222, and Stuart Henderson, "'All Pink and Clean and Full of Wonder?'" Gendering "Joni Mitchell" 1966-1974', in *Left History* 10 (Fall 2005), pp. 83-109.

*Female Singers of Our Time*<sup>15</sup> centrally focuses on the analysis of Mitchell's music in exploring the significance of the artist in the popular music industry. Yet, the only link between Mellers's work and gender is its positioning of Mitchell within the wider history of female singer-songwriters and performers.

The only essay offering a feminist reading of Mitchell's work is Whiteley's 'The Lonely Road: Joni Mitchell, *Blue* and Female Subjectivity', from her book *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity*.<sup>16</sup> In this essay, Whiteley examines Mitchell's 1971 album *Blue* by concentrating on its 'implications (...) on female subjectivity'.<sup>17</sup> However, although Whiteley introduces an additional perspective into the discussions of Mitchell's significance, her methodology falls short of proposing a well-structured association between gender theory and an analysis of the musical text.

Coming now to Bush and Amos, in the second chapter of her book *Too Much Too Young: Popular Music, Age and Gender*, 'Little Girls', Whiteley examines the relationship between Bush, Amos and Björk's work and femininity focusing in particular on the analysis of their vocals. Although this chapter mentions some feminist theories, such as *écriture féminine*, the link between such theories and the music analysis remains once more vague. Elsewhere, both Nicky Losseff's 'Cathy's Homecoming and The Other World: Kate Bush's Wuthering Heights'<sup>18</sup> and Bonnie Gordon's 'Kate Bush's Subversive Shoes'<sup>19</sup> read Bush's work by questioning the

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<sup>15</sup> Wilfrid Mellers, *Angels of the Night: Popular Female Singers of Our Time* (New York: Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>16</sup> Sheila Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 78-94.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Nicky Losseff, 'Cathy's Homecoming and The Other World: Kate Bush's Wuthering Heights', in *Popular Music*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (May, 1999), pp. 227-40.

<sup>19</sup> Bonnie Gordon, 'Kate Bush's Subversive Shoes', in *Woman & Music*, Vol. 9, (2005), pp. 37-50.

interaction between gender and selected songs by the artist. Whereas Losseff's reading does not employ any theoretical framework with regard to gender, Dibben's discussion mostly finds its roots in Derrida's poststructuralist and Judith Butler's postmodernist theories. Similarly, in one of the first academic books on the artist, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, Ron Moy pays particular attention to 'the methodologies employed by Bush as part of the gendered, creative process'<sup>20</sup> in discussing Bush's authorship. Yet, his discussion is not based on any kind of gender or feminist theories.

With respect to Tori Amos, there are only two major studies reading her work from the viewpoint of gender and sexuality. In one of the chapters of *Disruptive Divas*, Burns and Lafrance concentrate on Amos's song 'Crucify', exploring the artist's critique of Christianity with regard to women's position within religion and society.<sup>21</sup> In her article on Amos, 'Tori Amos's Inner Voices', on the other hand, Bonnie Gordon examines Amos's vocals to demonstrate the gendered aspects of her performance. Her essay mainly concerns the female voice and its ability to express 'unspeakable thoughts'.<sup>22</sup> Although this would suggest a connection with feminism or gender theory, throughout the essay this connection is not made explicit.

### **Methodology, sources, and structure of chapters**

Each chapter in this thesis focuses on three songs, in terms of lyrics, music and visual representation. In selecting the songs to be analyzed in this study, my primary consideration was their potential to reflect some significant themes explored by their

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<sup>20</sup> Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> See the third chapter of Lori Burns and Mélisse Lafrance, *Disruptive Divas*, pp. 63-95.

<sup>22</sup> Bonnie Gordon, 'Tori Amos's Inner Voices', in *Women's Voices Across Musical Worlds*, edited by Jane A. Bernstein (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), p. 199.

creators throughout their careers. For three of my case studies, namely Mitchell, Bush and Amos, I concentrate on three songs taken from three different albums. However, in the case of Nyro, I primarily focus on one album, *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession* (1968).

The reason for this is, first of all, *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession* can be regarded as emblematic of the artistic considerations to which Nyro returned throughout her life as a songwriter and performer. Secondly, each of Nyro's studio albums has a thematic coherence that enables them to be regarded as concept works. For instance, all of the songs included in the album *New York Tendaberry* (1969) are either set in New York or are influenced by the city. Similarly, Nyro's last three studio albums released in her lifetime, *Nested* (1978), *Mother's Spiritual* (1984) and *Walk the Dog & Light the Light* (1993), are centred on the concept of motherhood. In the case of *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*, the underlying theme is that of a young girl's passage from childhood to womanhood. As Charlie Callelo, co-producer on this album, confirms, '[*Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*] was not thirteen songs—it was a complete work'.<sup>23</sup> The same statement may be made for the albums *New York Tendaberry* and *Christmas and the Beads of Sweat* (1970). Bearing this in mind, I would suggest that for a thorough understanding of the meanings embedded in Nyro's songs, each of her albums should be considered in its entirety. Examining the main themes running throughout *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession* with reference to the majority of tracks included on the album allows me to position the three selected songs within the context of the album as a whole, as intended by the artist. It also enables me to consider and interpret them as part of a wider narrative.

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<sup>23</sup> Charlie Callelo quoted in Michelle Kort, *Soul Picnic: The Music and Passion of Laura Nyro* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002), p. 62.

Mitchell's album *Song to a Seagull* (1968) can also be categorized as a concept work. However, throughout her career Mitchell has consistently crossed genre boundaries. In order to offer a relatively comprehensive reading of the artist's work, I therefore concentrate on three different albums that are representative of her different musical periods: *Song to a Seagull* (in which she accompanied herself only on guitar, taking folk models as her reference point), *Ladies of the Canyon* (1970) (in which she started to use more complex arrangements), and *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (1975) (in which she experimented with formal innovations). While selecting only three songs from the catalogue of an artist who released 161 songs between 1968 and 2007, I have been particularly concerned to ensure that the chosen songs are representative of some dominant themes continuously revisited by Mitchell throughout her career. Hence, after justifying my rationale for the song selection, three Mitchell tracks - 'The Dawntreader', 'Ladies of the Canyon' and 'Shadows and Light' - are analyzed in detail within the chapter.

Unlike Nyro and Mitchell, both Bush and Amos have enjoyed considerable chart success throughout their careers. Although they have also released concept albums, such as *Hounds of Love* (1985, Bush), *Aerial* (2005, Bush), and *Strange Little Girls* (2001, Amos), *Scarlett's Walk* (2002, Amos) and *American Doll Posse* (2007, Amos), the success of their singles and EPs seems to be crucial in the formation of their artistic legacies as female musicians. Considering Bush's and Amos's singles and EPs as the best representatives of the albums on which they are included, I focus on the analysis of three singles by each artist: Kate Bush's 'Wuthering Heights', 'Babooshka' and 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)', and Tori Amos's 'Silent all These Years', 'Pretty Good Year' and 'Hey Jupiter'.

The structure of each of the chapters in this thesis, which appear in chronological order, presents a case study firstly by positioning the artist in question within a social and historical context in relation to popular music styles, with particular emphasis on their significance in the industry. The introductory section of each case study is followed by a comprehensive overview of the related feminist theory. Subsequently, three songs by the artist are analyzed in terms of first lyrics, then music, and finally image.

My music analysis primarily concerns studio albums. In some cases, commercially published songbooks do not prove entirely reliable. I have detected some discrepancies between my auditory experience of some of the songs analyzed in this study and what was actually transcribed in songbooks. For this reason, using the songbooks available for the artists in question I have created my own versions, mostly by focusing on the vocal line and chord signs. In the chapter on Nyro, I rewrote all the chords of 'December's Boudoir' by listening to the actual song, as accurately as possible. In the chapter on Mitchell, I have used Whitesell's chords for 'The Dawntreader' and 'Ladies of the Canyon'. However, both for Bush and Amos I have found commercial songbooks to be sufficiently accurate to satisfy the requirements of my analysis.

As noted above, the analysis of the selected songs in each chapter concludes with a section on the artist's visual representation. It was only at the turn of the 1980s that music videos gained importance as a marketing tool intended to promote the sale of music recordings. Since in the first two chapters the songs I look at did not have associated music videos, I consider instead the cover art either created or approved by the artist concerned, which can therefore be said to reflect her intentions. Finally, each chapter concludes with a discussion of the artist's subsequent works, to point out the



continued presence of the issues and themes discussed in the selected songs. In so doing, my conclusive remarks serve as a demonstration of their importance for the artists throughout their *oeuvre*.

### **Why French Feminism?**

From the end of the 1960s onwards, psychoanalytical ideas started to exert a significant influence on feminist theory. By the early 1970s, French feminists including Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva<sup>24</sup> began to engage with Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, to reread and displace the masculine discourses that had governed Western thought for centuries. My justifications for using their theories today are manifold. Firstly, although the works for which they have become more famous mainly date back to the 1970s, all three are still either actively publishing today or have done so until recently, continuing to contribute to the discussion of women's issues with their fiction, theatre, essay and book production. Secondly, because their *oeuvre* spans well over three decades, during which their works did not merely engage with a single or just a few issues, but articulated several facets of the feminist debate about the position and condition of women, it offers a wider and richer theoretical framework on which to draw for an interpretation of women's artistic production.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Strictly speaking, the term 'French feminists' is not entirely correct as a description of Hélène Cixous (born 1937 in French Algeria), Luce Irigaray (born 1932 in Belgium) and, Julia Kristeva (born 1941 in Bulgaria), but reflects the fact that all three then went on to work and write in France. Nevertheless, they have almost invariably been categorized with this label, both generally and within feminism itself (for example, the subheader of the book *Sexual Subversions* by Elizabeth Grosz (Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (St. Leonards, Australia, 1989) reads 'Three French Feminists').

<sup>25</sup> As for example with Julia Kristeva, whose theoretical contributions considered in this thesis go from her book on poetic language, originally published in 1974 in France, to her theories on melancholia and depression, published in 1989.

Thirdly, since the songs and albums I have chosen to analyze in this thesis fall within the period from 1968 to 1996, I believe it is legitimate to argue that they are coeval to such theories, or they were released shortly after, that is, when said theories would have been widely debated and applied to literary studies, cultural studies and so forth. Finally, as well as wide-ranging, these theories are crucially concerned with language as one of their main starting points. Notwithstanding their differences, for Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva language is both where women's oppression is verbalized, and where the struggle for their emancipation can also take place. Whilst it is perhaps no surprise, then, that they have proven so influential and enduring in fields such as literature, poetry and linguistics, if one sees pieces of popular music as texts, as I propose to do in this thesis, their relevance as interpretive tools in reading songs also emerges.

Another of my reasons for focusing on French feminist theory in this study stems from the dearth of musicological literature exploring the potential of the ideas of French feminists to shed new light on music. Since women's position within the history of Western classical music has been revealed as problematic, some academic work has appeared from the late 1980s. *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950* (edited by Jane Bowers and Judith Tick),<sup>26</sup> Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, Marcia J. Citron's *Gender and the Musical Canon*<sup>27</sup> and *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*<sup>28</sup> (edited by Ruth A. Solie) concentrated not only on the significance of female artists but also on the social, political, historical and cultural conditions that have prevented women's participation in creative processes and on women's strategies to deal with these

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<sup>26</sup> *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950*, edited by Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

<sup>27</sup> Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, edited by Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

processes. Yet, despite the undeniable importance and stated aims of these books – to analyze issues such as gender and sexual difference in the history of music – their indebtedness specifically to French feminism is surprisingly limited.

Popular music scholarship has shown very little interest in not only artists included in this study but also French feminism. Burns and LaFrance's aforementioned *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity & Popular Music*, Nicola Dibben's 'Representations of Femininity in Popular Music',<sup>29</sup> Mavis Bayton's *Feminist Musical Practice: Problems and Contradictions*,<sup>30</sup> and Marion Leonard's *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*<sup>31</sup> are among examples of the literature that aims to offer new approaches to the textual and contextual analysis of popular music drawing on feminist criticism and gender theory. Whilst French feminist theory remained peripheral to the discussions of these scholars too, it is significant that it is actually mentioned, for example, in an important work such as *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion and Rock 'n' Roll* by Reynolds and Press,<sup>32</sup> where all three French feminists are quoted, often in some details and drawing upon multiple aspects of their theories. As well as supporting my argument as regards their enduring influence, I believe that their relevance for a specifically musical analysis is also suggested by their very inclusion.

Here I should stress that I would not claim that a feminist critical practice would necessarily be limited and inadequate if it had not assimilated perspectives from French

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<sup>29</sup> Nicola Dibben, 'Representations of Femininity in Popular Music', in *Popular Music*, Vol. 18 (1999), pp. 331-355.

<sup>30</sup> Mavis Bayton, 'Feminist Musical Practice: Problems and Contradictions', in *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions*, edited by Tony Bennett, Simon Frith, Lawrence Grossberg, John Shepherd and Graeme Turner (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 177-92.

<sup>31</sup> Marion Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *The Sex Revolts*, see in particular pp. 187-8 and p. 354 for Kristeva, p. 318 for Irigaray and p. 346 and pp. 377-8 for Cixous.

Feminism. Like Bayton, I am also aware that ‘feminism is not a monolithic, unchanging or easily defined movement’.<sup>33</sup> What I wish to emphasize, however, is that French Feminism bears crucial analytical possibilities for musicology that have hitherto been largely untapped.

Theoretical perspectives that establish a particular foundation for my arguments, listed in the order in which they appear in the chapters, are Kristeva’s notion of the semiotic, Irigaray’s theory of female multiplicity, Cixous’s *écriture féminine* and finally Kristeva’s rereading of Freudian *melancholia*. In addition, Joan Riviere’s notion of womanliness as masquerade – a concept well established in feminist film studies - is used in the analysis of Bush’s songs in parallel with Cixous’s theories about a possible female writing related to the multiple characteristics of female sexuality. Before reviewing my particular research questions and formulating the general considerations and specific elements of my discourse regarding Nyro, Mitchell, Bush and Amos, I believe that a brief outline of three crucial concepts within Jacques Lacan’s framework – that of the Symbolic order, of the phallus and of *jouissance* - will prove useful at this point, as background information and in order to set out the general terms of my discussion. The reason for this is that all the theories described in the various chapters of this thesis have as their common denominator Lacanian psychoanalysis, which they critiqued and with which they engaged in their different ways.

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<sup>33</sup> Mavis Bayton, ‘Feminist Musical Practice’, p. 177.

## **Jacques Lacan, The Symbolic order, the phallus, and *jouissance***

Firstly, we should clarify the significance of language for the Lacanian subject, since it is of the utmost importance. According to Lacan, who in the 1950s and 1960s sought to reformulate certain aspects of Sigmund Freud's theories, in order to become a subject the child has to be submitted to the Symbolic order – the domain of language, (paternal) law and socio-cultural, that is, ideological structures into which he or she was born. This is where all linguistic signifying systems are also structured. Briefly outlined, in a Lacanian model entry into language occurs on the basis of specific stages, the first of which is the Real, starting from birth, where the child has not yet acquired a sense of self. Here the infant's contact with the mother constitutes the entirety of his or her world, and all the infant's needs are fulfilled by others.

The Real is followed in Lacan's theory by the Mirror Stage, where the child starts to identify itself as a distinct being, as his or her own "I". Whilst doing this, as well as acquiring his/her own initial sense of identity, the child goes through a first process of self-alienation by recognising his/her difference from others – crucially from the mother. In so doing, s/he emerges from the world that surrounds him/her and begins a never-ending negotiation with other subjects. However, from this developmental stage the child starts to perceive a "lack", which in Lacan's theory marks the entire process of psycho-social development and, indeed, the condition of the human subject, male and female alike, although as we shall see this "lack" takes on different forms between men and women. The child's wish to be as one with the mother is unattainable, so attaining the status of a subject necessarily entails a traumatic separation. Moreover, as early as the Mirror Stage, another misconception also arises: the child perceives his/her own

image as denoting a stable and whole self, yet that original sense of fullness and unity is no longer ever obtainable.

Later in Lacan's system, with the acquisition of language, the child enters the Symbolic order – the social realm with its law, rules and discourses – severing completely his/her attachment to the maternal body. Now, in order to deal with others, the only possible way for the child to represent himself or herself is through the world of signifiers or, to put it another way, through words. Lacan argues that 'the Symbolic provides a form into which the subject is inserted at the level of his being. It is on this basis that the subject recognises himself as being this or that'.<sup>34</sup> He strengthens this argument by claiming that what determines the subject is nothing but the signifier.<sup>35</sup>

Within the Symbolic order, as posited by Lacan, the ultimate signifier is the phallus which, crucially, should not be understood as merely being synonymous with the penis.

Lacan explains the meaning of the phallus as follows:

In any case, man cannot aim at being whole...while ever the play of displacement and condensation to which he is doomed in the exercise of his functions marks his relation as a subject to the signifier.

The phallus is the privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book III 1955-1956*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and translated by Russell Grigg (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 179.

<sup>35</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI* (1964), edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), p. 67.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus', in *Ecrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 220.

The phallus replaces what the child loses when submitting to the rules of language to become a subject. In accepting societal rules and interdictions, the child necessarily denies his or her early sexual desires (most notably towards the mother or father). In the case of the male child, his development will be more markedly influenced by the castration complex and, therefore, his entry into the Symbolic order will imply a denial of his actual sexual organ, the penis. As for women, the transition to the Symbolic order will occur along different lines. These differences can be traced on the basis of Lacan's concept of *jouissance*.

Lacan emphasizes the importance of *jouissance* for the first time in his 'Signification of the Phallus', to underline its role in the process of becoming a subject. *Jouissance*, as Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose point out, 'indicates for Lacan the fundamental division which characterises the subject's relation to language'.<sup>37</sup> Lacan distinguishes between phallic *jouissance* and a *jouissance* that is *beyond the phallus*<sup>38</sup> (women's *jouissance*), which however cannot be expressed through the use of any linguistic signifying system. In 'God and the Jouissance of The Woman', he explains this as follows:

There is woman only as excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words, and it has to be said that if there is one thing they themselves are complaining about enough at the moment, it is well and truly that – only they don't know what they are saying, which is all the difference between them and me.

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<sup>37</sup> Carolyn Burke, 'Irigaray Through the Looking Glass', in *Engaging with Irigaray*, edited by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 74.

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'God and the Jouissance of The Woman', in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*, edited by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, translated by Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1985), p. 145.

There is a *jouissance* proper to her, to this 'her' which does not exist and which signifies nothing.<sup>39</sup>

Since women have no penis that needs to be denied in order to enter the Symbolic order, for Lacan they are both more lacking and more full as compared to men – the former because they are not in a position to access the phallus and its privileges within the Symbolic order as fully as men can; the latter because they have not suffered as much as men the loss of the penis. But since women's *jouissance* is *beyond the phallus*, for Lacan women do not have a place in a language constructed by the paternal law. He argues that 'when any speaking being whatever lines up under the banner of women it is by being constituted as *not all* that they are placed within the phallic function (...) There is no such thing as The woman, where the definite article stands for the universal'.<sup>40</sup>

As a result, despite subjectivity being built upon an unresolvable lack for both men and women, in Lacan's theory it is not possible for a woman to become a subject in the Symbolic order, in which phallic unity functions as the ultimate determinant of subjectivity. Departing from these arguments of Lacan and from a feminist reading of the Western philosophical traditions as a whole, the intellectual agenda of French feminism was to theorise a feminine locus of subversion to the paternal law that positions the woman as a lacking 'Other', searching for ways to create a non-phallogentric language that can be connected to the female body.

The theories of French feminism that are applied in this thesis emerged in the 1970s. In the last forty years, the changes that have occurred within society in general, and gender

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 144-5.

<sup>40</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'God and the Jouissance of the Woman', p. 114.



relations in particular, have brought about criticisms of the essentialist nature of some of the formulations of early French feminism. Shortcomings have rightly been pointed out as regards the relatively undifferentiated, and perhaps simplistic, assumption of a universal category of “woman”, to whom these theories and their proposals were supposed to appeal. In the last few decades, several theorists and feminists, chief among them Judith Butler, have emphasized the possible dangers and problems of some of the arguments advanced by French feminists.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, I believe that, historically, French feminism played a crucial role when women, after the 1960s, started to argue and fight for emancipation and equal rights. As such, I contend that the theories considered in this thesis should be understood as a product of their time and, moreover, as part of one of the wider concerted attempts by women to find their own voice. Furthermore, as I will point out in the following chapters, in many cases these feminist theories could equally apply – and in fact in some cases they openly do apply, according to the intention of their authors – to a discussion along both male and female lines.<sup>42</sup> Although the theories considered in this thesis were conceived primarily to challenge literary tradition by deconstructing linguistic structures and syntax, I depart from the proposition of a similar possibility to

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<sup>41</sup> See Judith Butler, ‘The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva’, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 107-26 and Judith Butler, ‘Bodies that Matter’, in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 27-56.

<sup>42</sup> I intentionally do not follow the French feminists into certain aspects of their theories that may be regarded as more essentialist. I make reference to Kristeva’s semiotic and Cixous’s *écriture féminine* in the second and fourth chapters of this thesis respectively. Both theories were used, first of all, by their creators to analyse texts written by males as well as females. Similarly, Kristeva’s melancholia, which appears in the fifth chapter of this thesis, should also be regarded as a non-essentialist theory as it is applied to the reading of artistic productions of both sexes. In the case of Irigaray, in the third chapter, I mainly use her arguments about the multiplicity of the female body but I deliberately avoid referring to her more essentialist claims such as ‘we are women from the start’. See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is not One*, translated by Catherine Porter with Caroline Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 212.

read in a fruitful and insightful way the texts of female singer-songwriters as *gendered texts* of popular music since the early 1960s.

The focus of my research derives both from my own interest in the works of female musicians, and from the continuous parallels I have encountered in my readings between music and the language to which the three feminist theories considered all aspire. As discussed in more detail in the various chapters of this thesis, such a language would need to be more musical, less semantically unitary and allow for multiple possible meanings; to enable women to represent their body in language, and furthermore seek to ‘represent the unrepresentable’ and ‘speak the unspeakable’ within the Symbolic order, in an attempt to manipulate it (or in the case of some of the theories considered, to replace it with something different).

Yet more parallels emerge between music and language as theorised by French feminism, in terms of their dialectic ‘oscillation’ between conventions and excess, which reflects the difficult balance between discipline and control on one hand, and the subject’s unconscious drives and desires that can never be fully controlled on the other. If we understand music and language as not existing in a vacuum, but as reflecting social and historical constructs, as well as participating in social formation, their dual normative and emancipating nature also becomes clearer. Both music and language have, so to speak, their own grammar and rules, yet signification and values are assigned by society, that is, within the Symbolic order. Their continuous ‘oscillation’, therefore, can be said to reflect their dialectic relation with contemporaneous society and the pressures and negotiations this relation invariably implies for the subject.

The theories of the French feminists considered in this thesis take as their starting point Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. For this reason, terms such as ‘hierarchy’ and ‘hegemony’, as well as the notion of women’s oppressed status, should be understood within a psychoanalytic context, and not as terms employed in social theory. Lacanian psychoanalysis does not characterize the precise dynamics of power relations and their effects on the subject. Nevertheless, more recently several scholars have explored Lacan’s ideas in terms of their possible role within theories of power, in particular Foucauldian frameworks.<sup>43</sup> A comprehensive discussion of such issues would far exceed the scope of this research, however, a few preliminary observations may be made, which will be reflected in some of the feminist theories described in the following sections.

As we have seen above, for Lacan the subject is constituted by language in the Symbolic order. Moreover, the subject is also the result of an inherent lack. As Saul Newman argued, according to Lacan the subject is ‘always *incomplete*. The symbolization of the subject – his self-recognition in the symbolic order – ultimately fails and, therefore, there is always a structural gap between the subject and the signifier that is supposed to represent him. In other words, there is a ‘lack’ in the symbolic identity of the subject – *a lack that paradoxically constitutes the subject*’.<sup>44</sup> This lack is represented by the Real, the original state of wholeness which is no longer attainable by the subject and ‘that which cannot be integrated into the symbolic order of meaning, this

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<sup>43</sup> See for example: Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), Lois McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), Saul Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2001), and: *Power and Politics in Poststructuralist Thought: New Theories of the Political* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Saul Newman, *Power and Politics in Poststructuralist Thought*, p. 57.

disturbing the very borders of identity'.<sup>45</sup> For this reason, the subject in Lacan is always unstable and, as such, also potentially able to resist to the workings of power, which, in order to exert its pressures in a constant way, would need a stable identity to work on.

Whilst the subject employs fantasy and other forms of self-deception to avoid fully facing the Real and the void at the core of its own self, it is in the psychic sphere, in the unconscious, as revealed by dreams, or indeed by some creative practices (as we will see later in this thesis), that the dictates of power can be resisted. As Jacqueline Rose argued:

The unconscious constantly reveals the 'failure' of identity. Because there is no continuity of psychic life, so there is no stability of sexual identity, no position for women (or for men) that is ever simply achieved. Nor does psychoanalysis see such 'failure' as a special-case inability or an individual deviancy from the norm. 'Failure' is not a moment to be regretted in a process of adaptation, or development into normality... 'failure' is something endlessly repeated and relived moment by moment throughout our individual histories...there is a resistance to identity at the very heart of psychic life.<sup>46</sup>

Lacan's notion of the psyche is not essentialist, since the unconscious itself is influenced by symbolic relations and is 'structured like a language'.<sup>47</sup> This potential to debase power, moreover, is open to all subjects, irrespective of gender. Whilst it is undeniably true – both in the time span considered in this thesis, and today – that globally women are generally more oppressed and discriminated against, theorising the unconscious as a locus of resistance to power in society can nevertheless prove extremely productive. This very potential was also centrally recognised by French feminism, as will become apparent from this research.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>46</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 90-91.

<sup>47</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XX: Encore, On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (NY: Norton, 1998), p. 48.

## Research questions and an overview of the thesis

The main questions of this research can be outlined as follows: (i) Is it possible to claim a relationship between the body and text in popular music? (ii) Can one talk about the potential to manipulate language with regard to musical creation? (iii) Can Irigaray's and Cixous's conceptualizations of corporeal, sexual multiplicity trigger a distinct mode of musical writing, that is, an *écriture féminine* of popular music? (iv) If so, recalling Riviere's understanding of womanliness as masquerade, can such a gender-conscious textuality of multiplicity be created by means of strategically masqueraded narratives, not to seek male reassurance but to parody and critique the so-called origin of the masqueraded gender conventions? (v) In other words, can a performance of masquerade act as a strategic attempt to produce an *écriture féminine*? (vi) If melancholia can be deemed a constitutive element of gender identity, can it also trigger artistic creativity? If this is the case, is it possible to talk about a gendered artistic performance informed by melancholia? (vii) Most importantly, can these notions be applied to and simultaneously discussed with the musical text? To answer these questions, this research proposes to conceptualize popular music in terms of gender by means of analyzing the representational dynamics within the artistic production embodied by lyrics, music and image.

Chapter 1 questions the possibility of manipulating the masculine language that dominates popular music, by concentrating on Laura Nyro's artistic production. The introductory section aims to emphasise the significance of this artist as a pioneering female singer-songwriter who challenged the perception of women in the American music industry of the late 1960s. Following this, I discuss the main characteristics of

Kristeva's psycholinguistic notion of the semiotic to provide a theoretical background for my analysis. The reading of the lyrics starts by briefly outlining the themes running throughout the album *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*. While reading Nyro's lyrics, music and visual representation, I focus on investigating the extent to which she attempted to go beyond the conventional limitations of the American music scene towards the end of the Sixties. Musically, the exploration of Nyro's song forms and their rhythmic and harmonic structures is of crucial importance. In discussing her vocals, Roland Barthes' theoretical contributions to Kristeva's theories, with specific reference to music, are also reviewed.

Chapter 2 discusses Joni Mitchell's selected songs with reference to the feminist criticism of Irigaray regarding the multiplicity which denotes feminine sexuality and the female self. I investigate whether the artist reflects such multiplicity through her songs. The chapter starts by looking at Mitchell's position as a singer-songwriter at the end of the 1960s. The exploration of Irigaray's theories is followed by an in-depth reading of Mitchell's lyrics (with particular reference to oceanic themes and mystical discourse), music and cover art. The music analysis examines the dominance of polymodality and polytonality in Mitchell's songs, as well as the plurality of her vocal timbre and rhythmic structure as evidence of a link between these considerations and the artist's work. The exploration of multiplicity is also extended to a discussion of the Mitchell's visual representation with regard to the cover art of the albums from which the songs in question are taken.

Chapter 3 concentrates on Kate Bush. My analysis begins by discussing the impact of punk on the British music industry at the end of the 1970s, and whether a relationship

can be traced between the artist's emergence and punk both as a musical genre and subculture. Following this, I examine the ways in which Bush creates several personae in her lyrics, reflecting different aspects of femininity by drawing upon literature and cinema. I analyze the artist's work by making reference to Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine*, supplementing my arguments with reference to Joan Riviere's concept of womanliness as masquerade. Musically, I question how her practice of masquerade is supported by her harmonic language in 'Wuthering Heights', her vocals in 'Babooshka' and her use of digital samplers in 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)'. The examination of the artist's music videos is based on the relationship between her lyrics, music (where relevant) and visual representation.

Chapter 4 examines Tori Amos's early work. I trace the relationship between her artistic production and the concept of melancholia as proposed by Freud and later interpreted by Kristeva. My discussion explores the ways in which Amos symbolizes melancholia in her music, lyrics and videos to narrate various forms of female subjectivities. In the lyric analysis, I examine how Amos positions herself or the main character of a song as a melancholic subject. With specific regard to the embodiment of melancholia in her music, I create a link between the repetitive rhythm and monotonous melody which pervade Amos's work and her vocal technique, as well as her songs' melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic structures. The reading of the music videos, by focusing on the relationship between image, lyrics and music, demonstrates how melancholia is also reflected through Amos's visual representation.

Finally, in the conclusion I review the degree to which this thesis succeeds in fulfilling its stated aims, suggesting areas not covered by my research but constituting promising starting points for future research.



## CHAPTER 1

### Weaving the *Loom's Desire*: Laura Nyro in 'Timer', 'Once It Was Alright Now (Farmer Joe)' and 'December's Boudoir'

#### 1.1. Introduction

'Serious Playground', one of the tracks on Laura Nyro's (1947-1997) posthumously released album *Angel in the Dark* (2001), stands out as being particularly representative of her approach to songwriting. In this song, she defines songwriting as a serious playground in which she builds homes out of music by using architectural sound-tools. Her response to an interviewer further helps us understand the artist's perception of her role:

I'm not interested in conventional limitations when it comes to my songwriting. For instance, I may bring a certain feminist perspective to my songwriting, because that's how I see life. I'm interested in art, poetry, and music. As that kind of artist, I can do anything. I can say anything. It's about self-expression. It knows no package - there's no such thing. That's what being an artist is.<sup>1</sup>

As an artist who exemplified a preference for being outside of the pop mainstream and its conventions, Nyro, starting with the release of her second album *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession* (1968), created a serious playground to which not only she, but also other female musicians of the latter part of the twentieth century, would lay claim. Although the album did not find a significant commercial success, (reaching only number 181 and spending 7 weeks in the charts), according to Rudden it 'hailed at the

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Nyro interviewed by Paul Zollo in Paul Zollo, *Songwriters on Songwriting* (Cincinnati: Da Capo Press, 2003), p. 219.

time as a major achievement in performance, writing and composition'.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, artists and groups such as Barbra Streisand, Blood, Sweat and Tears, The Fifth Dimension, Peter, Paul and Mary and Three Dog Night enjoyed great chart success with 'catchily-arranged'<sup>3</sup> versions of Nyro songs taken from her first three albums. However, it was, ironically, a song written by Carole King and Gerry Goffin that provided Nyro with the highest chart position (albeit a comparatively modest one) of her entire career. The 45 rpm version of 'Up on the Roof' reached number 92 in the Billboard Hot 100 and number 30 in the Easy Listening chart.<sup>4</sup>

Nyro can be regarded as one of the earliest singer-songwriters to have helped transform the realm of popular music, from a domain defined and ruled mainly by male language to one with the potential to reveal the expressive possibilities of the female body, sexuality and gender. According to Neal, it was Nyro who 'helped define the female singer-songwriter a few years before Carole King's *Tapestry*'.<sup>5</sup> The *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary Completing the Twentieth Century* states that Nyro 'defied pop conventions with her own breathtakingly original recordings, which influenced generations of musicians from Joni Mitchell to Rickie Lee Jones, from Kate Bush to Tori Amos'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Patricia Spence Rudden, 'Stacking the Wax: the Structure of Laura Nyro's Studio Albums', p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Billboard's Pop albums chart reveals that none of Nyro's albums had significant commercial success. *New York Tendaberry* (1969) reached no. 32 (spending 17 weeks in the charts), *Christmas and the Beads of Sweat* (1970) no. 51 (14 weeks), *Gonna Take a Miracle* (1971) no. 46 (17 weeks), *Smile* (1976) no. 60 (14 weeks), *Season of Lights...Laura Nyro in Concert* (1977) no. 137 (5 weeks), and *Mother's Spiritual* (1984) no. 182 (3 weeks). The biographical information on Nyro is mostly drawn from Michele Kort, *Soul Picnic*.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Anthony Neal, *Songs in the Key of Black Life*, p. 80.

<sup>6</sup> *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary Completing the Twentieth Century*, edited by Susan Ware and Stacy Braukman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 475-6.

The main objective of this chapter is to explore the ways in which Nyro manipulated the ‘conventional limitations’ of songwriting and femininity dictated and imposed by rock culture. The starting point for my discussion will be an investigation of the place of female artists in 1960s America, especially in relation to the emergent counterculture, and I shall position Nyro as a pioneering figure who claimed total control over her work. Following this, I shall analyse three of her songs taken from the album *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*, namely ‘Timer’, ‘Once it was Alright Now (Farmer Joe)’ and ‘December’s Boudoir’, by focusing on both the lyrics and music. In the lyric analysis section, which will be prefaced by a brief discussion of the connections between Nyro’s work and the themes explored by the American Beat generation and counterculture, I will investigate how the semiotic, as theorised by Julia Kristeva, surfaces in the texts of the three selected songs. Throughout the music analysis I shall examine four different elements of Nyro’s songs: the formal and rhythmic structures (‘Timer’), her vocal timbre (‘Once it was Alright (Farmer Joe)’ and harmonic structure (‘December’s Boudoir’).

As will become clearer in the music analysis section, the majority of the songs included on *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession* have a fantasia-like formal structure. They are also good examples of Nyro’s idiosyncratic tempo fluctuations. The reason I focus solely on ‘Timer’ to explore these two aspects of the artist’s work is that this song is a good example that includes both a complex formal structure and an idiosyncratic use of tempo. I then examine Nyro’s vocals by concentrating on ‘Once It Was Alright (Farmer Joe)’, because out of the three songs selected in this chapter, it is only here that Nyro creates a female character. I believe that her deliberate use of her voice to depict a woman, in other words, the consciousness of her performance, would be more revealing

to my discussion. Finally, I analyze the harmonic structure of ‘December’s Boudoir’, because this song can be regarded as an early manifestation of Nyro’s harmonic usage that would go on to dominate all the albums she released until the end of the 1970s.

Throughout this chapter, I shall draw upon Julia Kristeva’s theory of the semiotic (*le sémiotique*) in order to discuss the relationship between the structure of the unconscious and language, and the possibility of a language other than the Father’s Symbolic language. My analysis will find its methodological roots in Kristeva’s critique of the texts of avant-garde writers, and her work on ‘poetic language’,<sup>7</sup> as well as in later elaborations and contributions to her theories by Roland Barthes with specific reference to music. After considering the cover art for *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*, I shall conclude the chapter with a discussion of Nyro’s relationship with feminism by paying particular attention to two of her later albums, *Mother’s Spiritual* (1984) and *Walk the Dog & Light the Light* (1993), centred on the concept of motherhood and feminism.

Rickie Lee Jones held that it was Laura Nyro who ‘gave her a map’ to songwriting.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Suzanne Vega always gave full due to Nyro on every occasion; after Nyro’s passing away, she said ‘Laura’s music (...) was deeply heartfelt urban music about sex and death and love – her limits were nothing less than fury, glory, and God and the Devil (...) Though we were plain, ordinary, nasty kids, when she sang she made us

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<sup>7</sup> This term, as used by Julia Kristeva, denotes both poetry and prose. She defines it as follows: ‘[p]oetic language is an unbreakable dyad of the *law* (the law of ordinary discourse) and its *destruction* (specific to the poetic text), and this indivisible coexistence of the plus and the minus is the *constitutive complementarity* of poetic language’. Julia Kristeva, ‘Towards a Semiology of Paragrams’, in *The Tel Quel Reader*, edited by Patrick ffrench and Roland-Francois Lack (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 28. *Tel Quel* was an avant-garde literary magazine founded in Paris in 1960; Kristeva was a member of its editorial board.

<sup>8</sup> Rickie Lee Jones quoted in Michelle Kort, *Soul Picnic*, p. 100.

beautiful'.<sup>9</sup> According to Rosanne Cash, '[Nyro] has done a lot of work for [female artists], as a matriarch, as a singer and songwriter, to make sure [they] are more comfortable in [their] own authority, to encourage and defend, to give [them] permission (...) it would have been a lot harder without [Nyro]'.<sup>10</sup> Most significantly, in July 1996, Joni Mitchell, who always expressed her unease at being compared to other female artists, argued that the careers of most female singer-songwriters in popular music were made by backers (i.e. record labels/managers/songwriters/producers), but that 'Laura Nyro was not like that'.<sup>11</sup> Mitchell concluded by referring to Nyro and herself as 'composers and poets'.<sup>12</sup> In an interview published in the British music magazine *Mojo* in August 1998, Mitchell acknowledged Nyro's impact on her, telling Dave DiMartino that she was 'sick of being lumped in with the women' but that

Laura Nyro you can lump me in with, because Laura exerted an influence on me. I looked to her and took some direction from her. On account of her I started playing piano again. Some of the things she did were very fresh.<sup>13</sup>

As will become clear in the following discussion, Nyro can be considered a pioneering figure in American popular music history, one who challenged the restrictions imposed on women by rock culture due to its highly male-centric vision.

Reynolds and Press, who regard Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*<sup>14</sup> as 'a founding text for the first wave of rock rebels',<sup>15</sup> argue that to understand how rock culture defined

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<sup>9</sup> Suzanne Vega quoted in the booklet of Laura Nyro, *New York Tendaberry* (Columbia/Legacy, 1969, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Rosanne Cash, 'Foreword', in *Laura Nyro: Lyrics and Reminiscences* (New York: Cherry Lane Music Company, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Joni Mitchell interviewed by the magazine *Details* (July, 1996), at <http://www.jonimitchell.com/library/view.cfm?id=22> (last accessed 11/02/2009).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Dave DiMartino, 'The Unfiltered Joni Mitchell', in *Mojo* (August 1998), p. 84. See also <http://jonimitchell.com/Library/view.cfm?id=195> (last accessed 11/02/2009).

women, one needs to look at the American Beat Generation. They point out that even the title of Kerouac's girlfriend Joyce Johnson's book, *Minor Characters: A Beat Memoir*,<sup>16</sup> gives sufficient clues as to the place of women in the beat movement. Although the Beats of the 1950s, to use Jennie Skerl's words, 'sought to create a new alternative culture that served as a bohemian retreat from the dominant culture, as a critique of mainstream values and social structures',<sup>17</sup> when it came to women, instead of challenging social norms that positioned American women mainly as housewives and mothers, they supported them, marginalizing women in general and female writers of the movement in particular, both in their writings and in real life.<sup>18</sup>

The American counterculture of the 1960s, which found its roots in the 1950s' Beat movement,<sup>19</sup> similarly did not offer women new alternatives. As Andy Bennett puts it, counterculture was the result of white middle class youth's reaction to the structure of the society they were living in.<sup>20</sup> However, notwithstanding its deep influence on

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<sup>14</sup> Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1958).

<sup>15</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *Sex Revolts*, p. 230.

<sup>16</sup> Joyce Johnson, *Minor Characters: A Beat Memoir* (London: Methuen, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Jennie Skerl, 'Introduction', in *Reconstructing the Beats*, edited by Jennie Skerl (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion about the position of a female artist of the movement see Nancy M. Grace, 'ruth weiss's *DESERT JOURNAL: A Modern-Beat-Porno-Performance*', in *Reconstructing the Beats*, pp. 57-72. See also, Amy L. Friedman, 'Joanne Kyger, Beat Generation Poet: "a porcupine travelling at the speed of life"', and Ronna C. Johnson, 'Lenore Kandel's *The Love Book*; Psychedelic Poetics, Cosmic Erotica, and Sexual Politics in the Mid-sixties Counterculture', in *Reconstructing the Beats*, pp. 73-88 and 84-104, respectively.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle explain this as follows: '[t]he Sixties counterculture in the United States didn't come out of nowhere (...) It was a fruit that had been assiduously cultivated throughout the 1950s in the many scattered patches of bohemia across the land (...) The Beats were the first named set of cultural dissidents to be associated with this critique. And although their numbers never approached the status of a true "Beat Generation", as commentators often referred to them, their vigorous denunciation of cold war militarism, anticommunist demagoguery, racial segregation, social regimentation, and rampant, near-orgiastic consumerism articulated most of the themes that adherents of the 1960s counterculture would echo and amplify'. See Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, 'Introduction: Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s', in *Imagine Nation: the American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, edited by Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> See Andy Bennett, *Cultures of Popular Music* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001), p. 26. See also, Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America* (London: Allen Lane, 1971) and Theodore Roszak, *The*

society and the arts, with its opposition to the Vietnam war - which later, as Peter Doggett notes, 'began to merge with the crusade against racism, the first stirrings of feminism and the quest for liberation from the morals and methods of capitalist society',<sup>21</sup> - when it came to traditional gender roles these young people still appeared to endorse sexism. Consequently, women in counterculture were also marginalized and mostly positioned in the domestic sphere. For Alice Echols 'the problem of the counter-culture wasn't that it went too far – the typical view - but rather that its libertinism and its elevation of the far-out masked the ways that the hippie subculture mirrored the values of the dominant culture, especially in regard to women and gays'.<sup>22</sup>

Roles attributed to female artists in the popular music industry at that time also reflected counterculture's general attitude towards women: girl groups such as The Ronettes, The Shirelles and The Supremes, and female solo singers like Aretha Franklin, Dusty Springfield and Dionne Warwick, were amongst the most significant examples of the female voices who achieved a considerable level of visibility in the industry throughout the 1960s. According to Lucy O'Brien, the girl group sound 'articulated the *Zeitgeist*, the fresh ebullient hope of the early 1960s; it feminized rock and provided the basis for the [later] 1960s beat groups of the famed "British Invasion"'.<sup>23</sup> However, nearly all

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*Making of a Counterculture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).

<sup>21</sup> Peter Doggett, *There is a Riot Going On: Revolutionaries, Rock Stars and the Rise and Fall of '60s Counter-culture* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008), p. 53.

<sup>22</sup> Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground; The Sixties and Its Aftershocks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Lucy O'Brien, *She Bop II*, p. 66. The girl group sound also had a profound impact on Nyro's work. I would argue that she benefited from it primarily to feminize her music, especially by using its techniques of vocal arrangement that emphasize female voices. Her album paying tribute to her roots, *Gonna Take a Miracle* (1971), recorded with Labelle, may be regarded as a celebration of girl groups, with covers of songs such as The Shirelles' 'I Met Him on a Sunday', Martha and the Vandellas' 'Dancing in the Street', 'Nowhere to Run', and 'Jimmie Mack' and The Royalettes's 'Gonna Take a Miracle'. Nyro continued to sing girl group songs throughout her career. For instance, the opening and closing tracks of the last studio album released in her lifetime, *Walk the Dog & Light the Light* (1993), were the Crystals' 'Oh Yeah Maybe Baby (The Heebie Jeebies)' and The Shirelles' 'Dedicated to the One I Love'. Moreover, she used girl group-like harmonies (by multi-tracking her voice) in the arrangements for many of her songs.

these girl groups enjoyed success only for short periods of time. As Echols puts it, most of ‘the singers in these groups remained nameless and faceless, despite the millions of records they sold’.<sup>24</sup> Starting from the mid-1960s, they began to be disbanded one by one.

The first point to be noted is that none of the members of these groups were creators. It was songwriting teams such as Gerry Goffin and Carole King or Ellie Greenwich and Jeff Barry, based in New York City’s well-known song publishing office, the Brill Building, who wrote tracks for them to record. Secondly, they did not have any right to claim artistic control, either in the studio or on stage, over the songs they interpreted. They were overly dependent on labels such as Red Bird, Motown and Phyllis, and on producers like George “Shadow” Morton and Phil Spector. For instance, as a producer Spector<sup>25</sup> could decide not only which songs would be recorded by a given girl group, but also who would be the lead singer and when she would be replaced by someone else.

If we look at the eminent solo female acts of that era, we see essentially the same situation, in terms of dependency and artistic control. For instance, Dionne Warwick, whose eight top ten singles in the US pop charts between 1963 and 1970 made her one of the most commercially successful female vocalists of her time, reached the peak of her career with songs written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David. It is instructive to recall what she said to O’Brien in a 1988 interview: ‘when I first started working with

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<sup>24</sup> Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground*, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> In *Uncut* music magazine it is claimed that ‘Spector treated singers as interchangeable chattels-The Crystals’ UK breakthrough, “He’s a Rebel”, for example, was sung by Darlene Love-the exception being The Ronettes, whose lead singer, Veronica Bennet, became the voice of Spector’s most Wagnerian productions and, later his wife’. See Album Review of Phil Spector, The Phyllis Album Collection and The Essential Phil Spector, in *Uncut* (November, 2011), p. 102.



Bacharach & David, they were the songwriters and I was the interpreter. Any of the producers I've worked with since has had to take a similar method'.<sup>26</sup> Thus, like Bacharach and David, all producers she worked with throughout her career were decision-makers who had total control over Warwick's work.

Turning now to rock music, we see that it, too, was marked by the Beat generation's 'boys' club mentality'<sup>27</sup> throughout this period. During the second half of the 1960s, rock music saw the emergence of two of the biggest female rock stars of the era, Janis Joplin (as lead singer of Big Brother and the Holding Company) and Grace Slick (as lead singer of Jefferson Airplane). Both Joplin and Slick enjoyed a considerable level of appreciation by the music press and fans, as well as commercial success. However, in order to establish themselves as serious musicians they both had to revolt against the restrictions brought about by their womanliness. Strategies adopted by these musicians to show that women were as capable as men signified a process of self-masculinisation. To be regarded as respected rock musicians, these artists (in the words of Jerry Garcia) merely became 'one of the boys'.<sup>28</sup>

Now we can see clearly what distinguished Nyro from other female musicians of the era: it was in 1967 that Nyro released her debut album *More Than a New Discovery*, where remarkably for the time it was she, a female singer, who was credited as both the composer and the lyricist of all the tracks. However, despite the high regard Nyro was held in as a songwriter, both by arranger Herbert Bernstein and producer Milton Okun,

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<sup>26</sup> Lucy O'Brien, *She Bop II*, p. 91.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community and Mid-century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 175.

<sup>28</sup> Jerry Garcia quoted in Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, 'Rock and Sexuality', in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, edited by Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 377.

as a female artist she was not given the right to make any decision about the structures and arrangements of the songs. According to Okun, ‘she needed someone to tell her what the rules were’.<sup>29</sup> Particularly owing to Nyro’s frequent tempo changes and use of unconventional chords (to be discussed in the following sections), both Bernstein and Okun found her songs unlikely to achieve commercial success.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, they did not allow her to accompany herself on the piano. As Janis Ian puts it, ‘the attitude Nyro faced about her piano playing was par for the course in those days (...) Quite often you weren’t allowed to play on your own records (...) And you weren’t expected to be a songwriter or to lead a band. Those were things the boys did’.<sup>31</sup>

In 1968, however, Nyro was signed to a Columbia contract and established her own publishing company, Tuna Fish Music, providing her with the artistic freedom she was longing for. This was the beginning of a new artistic period. For the rest of her career she did not make another record without either playing piano or keyboards.<sup>32</sup> Her next three studio albums, *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*, *New York Tendaberry* (1969) and *Christmas and the Beads of Sweat* (1970), were even subtitled *Laura Nyro Accompanying Herself on the Piano*. According to Rudden, ‘this (...) remark was (...) no doubt referring to one of her main grievances with the producers of her Verve/Forecast release [*More than a New Discovery*]’.<sup>33</sup> Starting with the release of *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*, she was also credited as co-producer and arranger of the majority of her albums. From this point on, she never allowed anybody to make any decision about her work. While talking about the recording process of *Christmas and the Beads of Sweat*, co-producer Felix Cavaliere explains this as follows: ‘[e]very note,

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<sup>29</sup> Milton Okun quoted in Kort, *Soul Picnic*, p. 27.

<sup>30</sup> Janis Ian quoted in Michele Kort, *Soul Picnic*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> Patricia Spence Rudden, ‘Stacking the Wax: the Structure of Laura Nyro’s Studio Albums’, p. 28.

everything on that album, was her private property. We would literally have to bargain with her for our ideas, because she would not change a thing'.<sup>34</sup> This determination and strong belief in the importance of artistic integrity, often at the expense of commercial success, continued throughout Nyro's career.

Moreover, whereas many female popular music artists identified themselves with male musicians, Nyro invariably tended to acknowledge the impact of female musicians on her work. Whilst expressing her admiration for male musicians such as Bob Dylan and Curtis Mayfield, she frequently referred to female musicians as the main inspiration for her art. I suggest that this was the result of her desire to provide a feminine musical foundation to her *oeuvre* both as a performer and songwriter. For instance, according to her, it was Billie Holiday who taught her 'the art of phrasing'.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, throughout her career, she mostly covered songs recorded by previous female singers to emphasize her admiration for them, such as Dionne Warwick's 'Walk on By' (Bacharach/David), which was one of the last songs she recorded in the studio.<sup>36</sup> Most significantly, it was Nina Simone whose example, to use Kort's words, 'helped shape Nyro's style'<sup>37</sup> with piano-based music that conflates different musical styles such as soul, gospel, jazz, R&B, Western classical music and Tin Pan Alley. By taking mainly female artists as role models and assuming total artistic control of her songs, Nyro created a body of work that resisted the well-established male language of popular music in terms not only of the lyrics but also, more significantly, of the music itself.

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<sup>34</sup> Felix Cavaliere quoted in Michele Kort, *Soul Picnic*, p. 112.

<sup>35</sup> Nyro quoted in Michele Kort, *Soul Picnic*, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> The studio version of 'Walk on By' can be found on Nyro's posthumously-released album *Angel in the Dark* (2001).

<sup>37</sup> Michele Kort, *Soul Picnic*, p. 25.

## 1.2. Kristeva and the semiotic

Kristeva's theories consistently underlined the connections between mind and body, and between culture and nature. Adopting a multidisciplinary approach, for Kristeva the subject is always and simultaneously also a speaking being, who both uses language and at the same time is herself constituted through the use of language. In other words, Kristeva's theory of language is simultaneously a theory of the subject. According to her, subjectivity is a dynamic and unstable process, an oscillation whose dialectical nature is never complete or resolved. Language in Kristeva's theory is not a static entity, but an intrinsically dynamic signifying process involving two *modalities*, which she designates as "the semiotic" and "the Symbolic". She sums up their relevance as follows:

These two modalities are inseparable within the *signifying process* that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse (narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry, etc.) involved: in other words, so-called "natural" language allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the Symbolic. On the other hand, there are nonverbal signifying systems that are constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic (music, for example). But as we shall see, this exclusivity is relative, precisely because of the necessary dialectic between the two modalities of the signifying process, which is constitutive of the subject. Because the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* Symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either "exclusively" semiotic or "exclusively" Symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both.<sup>38</sup>

Although Kristeva mainly concentrated on the written text, as the above quote shows she identifies music as being able to express above all the semiotic modality; an

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<sup>38</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, translated by Margaret Waller with an introduction by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 24.

exploration of the ways in which this takes place and the effects that it achieves will form the basis of the discussion of Nyro's songs in this chapter.

For Kristeva, the subject is by nature always in motion (*"en procès"*, which in French means both "in process" and "on trial") and this, as we shall see in more detail below, challenges and disrupts both the myth of the monolithic nature of language and the attempt to discipline and regulate linguistic expression. As she points out in the above quotation, the semiotic and the Symbolic (which can also be said broadly to reflect nature and culture, respectively), strongly depend on each other – they are both needed, since signification has to make sense to other people, but without our own energy and bodily drives discharged into it, would have little meaning. As Kelly Oliver puts it, Kristeva brings 'the speaking body back into the very structure of language (...) [and] reinscribe[s] language within the body, arguing that the dynamics that operate the Symbolic are already working within the material of the body and the presymbolic imaginary'.<sup>39</sup>

This is one of the aspects with which Kristeva distances herself from the theories of Lacan. As detailed in the main introduction to this thesis, for Lacan, too, subjectivity necessitates language, but the language is masculine and based on the phallus as the universal signifier, excluding women from the position of active subjects. Kristeva, however, believes that subjectivity begins to develop and that it is guided by the mother (herself a speaking subject) both before (*in utero*) and after birth, and the maternal body then comes to represent the intersection between nature and culture. In so doing, Kristeva argues that the child begins to learn the ways of culture, the Symbolic, from

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<sup>39</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unravelling the Double-bind* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1993), p. 3.

the mother, before the father, in a space which she called semiotic *chora* (borrowing and elaborating the concept from Plato), not fully reducible to the maternal body and characterised as a kind of emotional field that precedes language, but one that is always influenced by cultural and social forces at play, and where the infant both experiences and discharges a great variety of drives. For Kristeva, the subject entering the Symbolic never leaves the semiotic totally behind – it will always stay in the background. This is another feature that distinguishes Kristeva from Lacan, for whom subjectivity is to be understood predominantly on the basis of the Symbolic.

According to Kristeva, we can find traces of this drive-ridden, pre-Oedipal language related to unconsciousness in the texts of avant-garde writers: '[t]hrough a specific practice affecting the mechanisms of language itself [...], the 'literary avant-garde' presents society – even if only in its margins – with a subject in process, attacking all the stases of the unitary subject (...) and accomplishes a revolution'.<sup>40</sup> In the analyses presented in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva focuses on the qualities of language related to the primary libidinal drives, such as rhythm, tone, sound, melody, silence, repetitions, and disruptions of both grammar and meaning, to show the ways in which the semiotic functions.<sup>41</sup> In this respect, Kristeva's proposals, I suggest, shows a connection with the importance assigned both by the Beats, such as William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, and subsequently by counterculture to avant-garde poetry, which starting with Bob Dylan in the early 1960s, went on to shape in an increasing way song lyrics.

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<sup>40</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'The Subject in Process', pp. 136-137.

<sup>41</sup> Kristeva states that 'Mallarmé calls attention to the semiotic rhythm within language (...). Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgement, but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax'. See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 29.

Kristeva then coins the term ‘genotext’<sup>42</sup> in order to make a distinction between texts that include symbolic and semiotic signifiers:

Designating the genotext in a text requires pointing out the transfers of drive energy that can be detected in phonematic devices (such as the accumulation and repetition of phonemes or rhyme) and melodic devices (such as intonation and rhythm), in the way semantic and categorical fields are set out in syntactic and logical features, or in the economy of mimesis (fantasy, the deferment of denotation, narrative etc.). The genotext is thus the only transfer of drive energies that organizes a space in which the subject is not *yet* a split unity that will become blurred, giving rise to the Symbolic. Instead, the space it organizes is one in which the subject will be *generated* as such by a process of facilitations and marks within the constraints of the biological and social structure.<sup>43</sup>

Even though Kristeva sees the semiotic as the “other” of language, we need to bear in mind that she does not propose it as a theoretical model able to create a mode of speaking or writing exclusive to women. Rather, it is one of the two modalities of the signifying process that she views as constituting language. According to her, it can be traced back in the texts of either sex. For Kristeva, there are no innate differences between the sexes. These differences start to emerge with the entry into culture, because of the different positions of men and women in the Symbolic order. Even the very concept of man and woman cannot be traced back to nature: it is the result of signifying practice. For this reason, her arguments lead to the conclusion that a woman can only disrupt the Symbolic order from within, by benefiting from the possibilities of the semiotic.

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<sup>42</sup> In opposition to the ‘phenotext’, which denotes a text written in a clear language, based on the rules of syntax and semantics.

<sup>43</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 86.

In the following lyrical and music analysis I shall explore various ways in which the Kristevan semiotic surfaces in the selected songs of Nyro. As will become clear in the analysis of the song 'Once it was Alright (Farmer Joe)', the relationship between music and the semiotic, already hinted at by Kristeva, was subsequently taken up and expanded in Barthes's concepts of the 'genosong' (the genotext in music) and, within it, of the 'grain' of the voice, which he defined as 'the body in the voice as it sings'.<sup>44</sup>

### **1.3. Words for a *Serious Playground***

Drawing upon Kristeva's analyses of literary texts, this section aims to explore whether Nyro's lyrics have the potential to manipulate the Symbolic order not only in terms of resisting social concepts and notions structured by paternal law, but also subverting the grammatical and syntactic structure of the language by creating breaks in the text. Although I shall primarily focus on the reading of the three selected songs, namely 'Timer', 'Once It Was Alright (Farmer Joe)' and 'December's Boudoir', I shall start my analysis by briefly discussing the possible roots of Nyro's poetic language. Following this, in order to interpret the songs in question within their context, I shall summarize the main themes running throughout the album.

Notwithstanding the Beats' problematic approach to women, as discussed in the introduction, their impact on the musicians of the era proved to be profound. Firstly, their search for reaching higher consciousness through drugs, sex, and alternative religious and philosophical practices had a significant impact on figures and groups such as the Beatles, Bob Dylan, Jim Morrison, and Lou Reed and the Velvet

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<sup>44</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 188.



Underground. Secondly, as Philip Shaw claims, ‘performing poetry with music (...) began with the beats in the 1950s and was carried over, via [Allen] Ginsberg and Bob Dylan, to the counterculture in the mid-1960s’.<sup>45</sup> At least partly as a result of these factors, many of the songs written throughout the 1960s were marked by a growing semantic opaqueness and an exploration of some taboo subjects emblematic of beat generation writers.

As will become clearer in the following discussion, Nyro’s lyrics, especially in her early albums, share some of the qualities seen in the songs of other poet-singers of the era. They were personal, obscure and full of lines that prioritized the rhythmic and melodic elements of the language over the rules of syntax and grammar. Bearing this in mind, I suggest that one could extend Kristeva’s description of poetic language and genotexts, with her discussion of ‘phonematic’ and ‘melodic’ devices, to Nyro’s lyrics, which then may be considered as breaks in the Symbolic language and instances where semiotic drives come to the surface. The discussion on the lyrics of the selected songs will emphasize further examples of these factors at play. Now, before starting the lyric analysis, I shall briefly talk about the content of *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*.

As explained in the main introduction to this thesis, *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession* is a concept album, consisting of thirteen songs mainly about a young girl’s experiences during her journey to adulthood. In other words, the album’s underlying theme is that of ‘becoming a woman’. What is worthy of note is that the woman described in the album is not a conventional one. Throughout the album Nyro mainly uses her pen to critique and destabilise norms dictated by patriarchy. As the songs ‘Luckie’, ‘Lu’ and ‘Eli’s

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<sup>45</sup> Philip Shaw, *Horses* (New York: Continuum, 2008), p. 8.

Comin’’ show, the subject of the album is a woman struggling between God and the Devil. In the songs ‘Sweet Blindness’, ‘Poverty Train’ and ‘Stoned Soul Picnic’, she tells of her experiences of being high on alcohol and drugs. Moreover, as the song ‘Emmie’ suggests, she is into alternative sexual practices, such as lesbianism. Here it should be noted that at the time of the album’s release, lesbianism was still a taboo subject. In tackling such issues, and especially in speaking about love between women, Nyro was not only opening the doors for artists such as k. d. lang and Ani DiFranco, but also taking risks.

Coming now to the first song to be analysed, in ‘Timer’<sup>46</sup> Nyro focuses on themes such as the passing of time and God. We cannot be sure who ‘Timer’ is in this song. Many hypotheses have been put forward, ranging from ‘a cat’ (Nyro apparently had a cat called ‘Timer’),<sup>47</sup> through to ‘time’ itself, and to ‘God’. This latter reading seems to be at least plausible, since religion, more specifically the struggle between God and the Devil, is one of the album’s underlying themes. In the song, Nyro walks through life ‘with the master of time’.<sup>48</sup> Time passes and Timer changes her face, yet it ‘knows the lady’s gonna love again’. Nyro is aware of the fact that life continuously throws us off balance. However, whilst she sings ‘take me Timer/ shake me Timer’ she also knows that the storm will pass: ‘let it blow/ let it blow’.

The line ‘I like her song’ is significant in Nyro’s lyrics since it refers to a possible female object of love. We know from her own life events that Nyro had known Maria

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<sup>46</sup> From this point on, all lyrics quoted (unless otherwise stated) are taken from Nyro’s *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession* (Columbia, 1968).

<sup>47</sup> See Michele Kort, *Soul Picnic*, p. 60.

<sup>48</sup> For the lyrics of ‘Timer’, see Appendix A1, pp. 275-6.

Desiderio, who was later to become her long-term partner, for many years previously.<sup>49</sup> Suddenly, therefore, the lyrics of 'Timer' acquire a more personal dimension, and their abstractness is counterbalanced by our identification with Nyro and her own desires. Some critics have read 'Timer' as a message from Nyro to her future lover – in some cases even implying that lines such as 'if you don't love me / The lady rambles / never more' may refer to some private disagreement or contrast between them.

In the song, the passage of time is made bearable by true love, of which Nyro is now capable, for her 'hand is open / and now my hand is ready for my heart' – and this true love will mean her spending her life 'with you and Timer'. True love, moreover, is what takes the subject of the song beyond ordinary existence. 'I keep rememberin' / indoors / that I used to walk thru / Baby I'm not tryin' to talk you down', sings Nyro, but beyond those doors lies a 'pleasure ground' and its call and appeal are irresistible. In the presence of this pleasure ground, materialistic concerns such as money no longer matter, and one can even forget about time passing.

Towards the end of the song, listeners learn that 'Timer is a jigsaw'. Not only that, twice Nyro sings 'You're a jigsaw Timer/You're a.../ God is a jigsaw / a jigsaw Timer'. What should one understand from these lines? By its very indeterminate meaning and unresolved character, they invite supposition and reflection. They also invite us to entertain possibilities and point to ideas of fragmentation and plurality, as opposed to the traditional institutionalised reading of divinity and religion. Crucially, they are also examples of genotext in Kristeva's sense, as they encourage us to draw parallels with

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<sup>49</sup> Michele Kort, *Soul Picnic*, p. 196.

our own unconscious drives and desires, and in this way can serve to bring our semiotic space to the surface.

We cannot be sure if Timer and God are one and the same, but even if they are not, they are both defined as a 'jigsaw'. This line may suggest that each person's time is a collection of pieces and fragments of one's life that accumulate with age. As for God, Nyro declared on more than one occasion her unease with institutionalised religion,<sup>50</sup> yet the lyrics of many of her albums amply demonstrate the importance of a personal God to her. I propose that, in 'Timer', Nyro imagines a God whose monolithic concept can be undone and recreated by the individual. Moreover, she offers us a God whose omnipresent unitary meaning can be manipulated, taken apart into many pieces and reassembled to reflect one's own experiences and outlook on life. In so doing, she continues in the tradition of avant-garde poets, which Kristeva referred to as examples in her description of possible disruption of the Symbolic.<sup>51</sup>

As a song, 'Timer' can be read as a celebration of life and its highs and lows, or a celebration of the thrilling discovery of ever new 'pleasure grounds'. It is also an embodiment of a subject in process in Kristeva's sense. In the case of 'Timer', Nyro tells the story of a woman who moves through life, leaving the semiotic ('Holding my cradle at the start') and entering the Symbolic; a woman whose dialectic relation with language and with the Symbolic, whose new experiences, give rise to reciprocal interactions and influences between her subjectivity and language, her Symbolic and her semiotic realms.

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<sup>50</sup> See Harry Klein, 'Laura Nyro: Rock Madonna from Bronx', in *Coast FM and Fine Arts* (October 1969), p. 21.

<sup>51</sup> See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 226.

‘Once it was Alright Now (Farmer Joe)’<sup>52</sup> has perhaps the most cryptic lyrics of the three songs under discussion in this chapter. What we are faced with is, at first sight, the story of a relationship between a man and a woman. Yet despite having a narrative timeline of sorts, and taking place in a physical setting, it is also a story of which we do not know the background, the ending and not even what the actual plot is. However, once again, despite the pronounced lack of any structured narrative and clear meaning, in ‘Once it was Alright Now (Farmer Joe)’ Nyro paints with just a few broad brushstrokes a vivid setting, which evokes almost cinematic images and the utter physicality and atmosphere of a rural American small town.

It is difficult to place the lyrics in a specific period, but the train whistling mentioned in the song takes us back to an earlier time. We are told straight away that the woman described in the song has just left her man, Farmer Joe, and that she intends to leave town. ‘I let you slide an hour ago’, Nyro sings, and ‘I can’t wait for / your cornfields / baby to grow’. She asks him to let her go so that she can begin a new life elsewhere: ‘Get me my bags / and let the good wind blow / I’ve got to see about a man I know’. Indeed, she has ‘got a date with the town shoe maker’. Does this mean he is her new lover? Or perhaps we should understand Nyro’s reference to shoes as signifying the woman’s impending departure.

Farmer Joe, however, cannot accept his woman leaving him and runs to fetch his gun. ‘Farmer boy / get your gun / and run, run, run-from love /.../ Run baby run’, Nyro sings. The insistent repetition of the word ‘run’, over two entire lines of the song, emphasizes the quickening succession with which events will soon unfold and also introduces an

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<sup>52</sup> For the lyrics of ‘Once it was Alright Now (Farmer Joe)’, see Appendix A2, pp. 277-8.

underlying feeling of threat and impending drama. The man is also called ‘farmer boy’, implying he is perhaps an ignorant person.

Suddenly, there is a break in the song and we come to a line that reads ‘Fire / Flames of gold rush my mind / Fire / Flames of gold rush my mind’. This is yet another phrase that has no semantic meaning, but is eminently able – not least with its reiteration – to evoke images such as the flash of the gun, the explosive impact of the bullet, the surge of blood and the deep bodily shock of the wounded. From the way Nyro’s voice cries out this line, it signifies a crucial development in the story. The preceding events seem to suggest that someone has been shot. One supposes that Farmer Joe got hold of his gun and shot the woman, and that whilst dying it is she who has visions of ‘flames of gold’ rushing through her mind in her final moments. Yet the following line in the song only adds to the uncertainty. Abruptly, Nyro sings: ‘Sock it to the railroad baby / Oo baby, there’s a train whistle / comin’. Was the woman perhaps waiting for the train which would have taken her away, had she not been found too soon and killed by her ditched lover? Is Farmer Joe the one who is about to flee town after killing her, or perhaps it was she who fired and killed him and now will leave? After all, in the opening lines of the song she is defined as ‘the meanest woman you know’.

Listeners have no way to resolve this story. The clues Nyro gives are too few and the meaning is left completely open. What is striking is just how much ‘Once it was Alright Now (Farmer Joe)’ can express and convey to listeners despite saying so remarkably little. I suggest that this is because of its very vagueness. In weaving just the beginnings of a story, Nyro lets each listener fill the voids with his or her own interpretation – an interpretation which will have its roots both in the Symbolic and the semiotic. As

observed by Kristeva, each subject can never be divorced from either of them – she will bring to the interpretation of the song her own semiotic drives and desires, yet her experience will be shaped by the Symbolic she operates in, and any final interpretation will draw from both realms.

In her description of the concept of genotext, Kristeva remarked that the discharging of semiotic drives can also be detected in the ‘economy of mimesis (fantasy, the deferment of denotation, narrative, etc.)’.<sup>53</sup> In the lyrics of ‘Once it was Alright Now (Farmer Joe)’, meaning is constantly deferred. In this way, the listener has to try and find signification not in what the text says, but in what is absent, in what the text does not say. The Symbolic is therefore disrupted – natural language is not sufficient by itself to provide meaning. The process of signification oscillates dynamically between the Symbolic and the semiotic, and Nyro’s lyrics allow the semiotic to come to the surface.

Coming to ‘December’s Boudoir’,<sup>54</sup> in the song Nyro’s lyrics build a very intimate and languid space. This intimacy is further underlined by the use of the French word ‘boudoir’, originally denoting a woman’s private room or bedroom, which historically has acquired connotations of a sensual and richly ornate space. Nyro in this song uses her words to depict such an atmosphere between two lovers. The contrast between ‘flames’ and ‘December’ in the first line, between hot and frosty, readily evokes a feeling of warmth – of a space sheltering from the cold outside. This sensual image is accentuated by the description of kisses that ‘fill me like melons’ in the second line. Despite its meaninglessness, the use of ‘melons’ – by definition summer fruits evoking

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<sup>53</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 86.

<sup>54</sup> For the lyrics of ‘December’s Boudoir’, see Appendix A3, pp. 279-80.

attributes such as ripeness, scent, juiciness and sweetness – is apt in conveying the sensual ‘delight’ of passionate kisses, of kisses which are ‘true’.

The rich sensual texture of colour, smell and taste created by Nyro continues in the second verse of ‘December’s Boudoir’. Here an invented word, ‘Decemberry’, joins up ‘December’ and ‘berry’ and – quite apart from its phonetic qualities, with the sensual rolling of the ‘r’s – conjures images of rich red winter berries standing out against white wintry ice. Winter in this song is mostly present in its festive character, but its coldness has been firmly shut outside. Nyro’s boudoir is filled with love and her ‘love coloured soul’ is infused with ‘kissing spice’, another sensual image that calls into play our sense of smell.

The veritable feast of the senses which is ‘December’s Boudoir’ reaches its climax in the two closing lines, where Nyro compares love to ‘mainstream / marzipan sweet / baking out / in December heat’. Another sensual image, this time evoking the sweet taste of marzipan and its rich texture, is offered alongside the word ‘mainstream’, which suddenly also brings music into play. ‘Mainstream marzipan sweet’ is an image that makes no obvious sense, yet when sung by Nyro with her voluptuous voice, and also emphasizing the alliteration of the two ‘m’s, which mirrors a sensual moan, acquires a life of its own and becomes extremely evocative. In ‘December’s Boudoir’, Nyro’s lyrics depict passionate love sweeping and flooding all senses in an all-encompassing embrace. Time in this song stands still: Nyro sings ‘I’m ageless/ loving you timelessly’. Critics and reviewers have often commented on the opaque and ambiguous nature of Nyro’s lyrics. When *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession* was released, its ads published in the national press read: ‘[s]he doesn’t explain anything – she fills you with



experience'.<sup>55</sup> However, whilst anyone searching for strict meaning in Nyro's lyrics would be frustrated, it is precisely this aspect that reveals them as displaying instances of poetic language, with their use of phonematic and melodic devices, as described by Kristeva.<sup>56</sup>

The lyrics of 'December's Boudoir' are a particularly good example of what Kristeva called genotext. Escaping from the confines of clear semantic meaning and, by implication, of the Symbolic, Nyro uses words for their poetic qualities and evocative powers. For Nyro, especially in the early years of her career, the sound of a word was as important as its meaning, and in some cases even more important. On *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession* she coined neologisms such as 'surry', 'lovewell', 'flameride' and 'lovething'. I argue that Nyro's purpose, in these cases, was to create a rhythmic pulse in the written text. The opening of another of the songs on the album, 'Confession', further supports this argument: 'Super summer sugar coppin'/in the morning/do your shoppin' baby' is a highly ambiguous phrase. It appears that Nyro used these words in order to exploit the possibilities of alliteration and rhyme, considering not their meaning but their sound (super/summer, sugar/shoppin', coppin'/shoppin'). One can observe a parallel use of non-existent words in the works of avant-garde writers, thus confirming that similar dynamics are at play in Nyro's lyrics, which can therefore be said to display the qualities of poetic language and to engender *jouissance* in the listener.

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<sup>55</sup> Michele Kort, *Soul Picnic*, p. 62

<sup>56</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 86.

#### 1.4. Music for a *Serious Playground*

Even though Kristeva only explored written texts to demonstrate the workings of semiotic and to place it in opposition to the Symbolic, she also drew attention, in certain passages of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, to some nonverbal signifying systems that can be related to the semiotic *chora*:

Although modern texts are the most striking example of this (...) process, equivalents can also be found fairly readily in nonverbal arts that are not necessarily modern. Music and dance, inasmuch as they defy the barrier of meaning, pass through sectors within the signifying process which, though fragmentary (since there is no signified, no language), obey the same lines of force as those induced by the productive device of signifiante seen in texts.<sup>57</sup>

Her interest in music as an instance of poetic language continued beyond her early work. For Kristeva, music ‘takes us to the limit of the system of the sign. Here is a system of differences that is not a system that *means* something, as is the case with most of the structures of verbal language’.<sup>58</sup> More importantly, to prove scientifically the existence of the semiotic she analysed language acquisition in children, claiming that a child actually learns melody and music before syntax, whilst still in the semiotic *chora*. She argued that ‘[p]rior to its constitution as a subject, let alone a speaking subject, the infant makes “music” as a direct release of the drive. It expels sounds in order to release tension, either pain or pleasure, in order to survive’.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 104.

<sup>58</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Language: The Unknown: An Initiation into Linguistics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 309.

<sup>59</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, p. 35. Elsewhere, Kristeva described the case of one of her analysands, Paul, who aged three was still only able to utter repetitive vowel sounds, that is, he was not able to engage in symbolic communication. Kristeva decided to communicate with him using something he could access, song (in this specific case, by composing improvised operatic arias), to show that, being closer to the maternal *chora*, music could better reach the repressed semiotic in this child. Kristeva argued that his

While Kristeva's framework can be fruitfully applied to music as well, it should be remembered that even in music – which she thought of as an instance of semiotic language – the Symbolic has a presence which can be more or less marked.<sup>60</sup> Music, too, has its own rules and codes, which define different musical genres. It is only when music acquires the characteristics of poetic language that the semiotic can prevail and transgressions of the Symbolic can be noticed. I shall now examine whether Nyro's songs have the potential to resist the Symbolic, showing how her work manipulates the conventional limitations of popular music in terms of both rhythmic and harmonic structures as well as the overall form of the song and her vocals.

When asked about her understanding of the structure of a song, Nyro's reply was:

I'm from the school that there are no limitations with a song. To me a song is a little piece of art. It can be whatever you like it to be. Structure of a song is a very interesting thing. And I've written some very simple songs and then some other songs with a more challenging structure.<sup>61</sup>

'Timer', 'Once it was Alright (Farmer Joe)' and 'December's Boudoir' can be considered examples of Nyro songs that involve, to use her words, 'a more challenging

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speech became more confident and that 'the singer became a speaker'. See Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 107.

<sup>60</sup> Kristeva's arguments about the lack of meaning in music should be read as lack of *semantic* meaning in music. From the 1990s onwards, scholars including Susan McClary, Elizabeth Wood, Philip Brett, Ruth A. Solie, Derek B. Scott and Lawrence Kramer challenged the notion that music has no meaning by exploring the social and cultural meanings embedded in music. In *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History*, Lawrence Kramer discusses this as follows: 'The object of musical hermeneutics is to study musical meaning, which for many people means that it is a discipline with no object at all. No ideas about music are more conventional than that music has no meaning, at least in the sense that words do, and that this lack is something to be treasured, something that helps make music special. The composer Ned Rorem speaks for many others when he claims that "music...is inherently meaningless in the intellectual sense of the words". Music may be "meaningful" in the sense that people find it important or that it expresses emotions or serves as a medium of social connection, but it does all these things without assuming a concrete content. It bypasses both language and the systems of rational thought depend on language'. For further information, see *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 11-12 and Derek B. Scott, 'Introduction', in *Musical Style and Social Meaning* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. ix-xiii.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Zollo, *Songwriters on Songwriting*, p. 224.

structure'. Instead of having one of the standard song forms, such as strophic, verse-chorus, or verse-bridge, these tracks have a fantasia-like structure which allowed the artist to compose without encountering any restriction in terms of form.

Fantasia, as a musical descriptor, has been used since the early 16<sup>th</sup> century to denote pieces with no fixed form. Even though it is difficult to define the term, the most distinctive character of pieces of this kind is their free and improvisatory nature. According to Denis Arnold and Lalage Cochrane, the title implies that 'a composer wishes to follow the dictates of his or her freely ranging imagination'.<sup>62</sup> Although it is used primarily in Western classical music, I suggest that it is also possible to adapt the term to popular music.

Critics such as Stephen Holden, Neil Spencer and Paul Zollo prefer to use the term 'suite' or 'suite-like' to describe Nyro's songs in their reviews and writings about the artist's early work. It is obvious that the reason for this comparison is the multi-sectional characteristic of Nyro's songs. However, given that the term 'suite' refers historically to instrumental pieces consisting of several short movements usually in simple binary form, based on a single tonal centre, comparing it either to a whole album (by considering each song as a movement of a suite) or a song (by considering each different section as a movement of a suite) seems inaccurate. Besides, it would appear that 'suite' is also less appropriate a term in the context of popular music, since 'suites' in popular music tend to refer to the multi-movement extensive pieces (which could last upwards of twenty minutes) of late Sixties and early Seventies progressive rock which have, to use Edward Macan's words, 'prominent instrumental sections and lengthy

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<sup>62</sup> Denis Arnold and Lalage Cochrane, *Fantasia* (Subject Entry) on *Oxford Music Online*, at [http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.city.ac.uk/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e2413?q=fantasia&search=quick&pos=2&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wam.city.ac.uk/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e2413?q=fantasia&search=quick&pos=2&_start=1#firsthit) (last accessed 23/03/09).

solos'.<sup>63</sup> Taking this into consideration, I prefer to use the term 'fantasia-like' to describe the structure of Nyro's songs more accurately, given the idea of freedom suggested by the term and the sense in which fantasias do not adhere to rigid formal structures.

To support my argument, I shall demonstrate the formal structure of the song 'Timer', followed by an examination of its rhythmic structure. The formal structure of the song can be schematized as follows:

A (a [bars 1-7] + b [bars 7-12] + bridge [bars 13-14]) + B (a [bars 15-27] + b [bars 28-33] + c [bars 33-40]) + C (a [bars 41-57] + b [bars 58-64]) + D (a [bars 69-74] + b [bars 75-84]) + Coda<sup>64</sup>

The first section of the song, being the shortest, has two different melodic motifs and a bridge. Although section B has only one constitutive melodic idea, it is also divided into three different melodic sections. Both sections C and D consist of two different melodic motifs. However, nowhere else in the song are the melodic motifs used in either of these sections heard again. Thus, it is not possible to define any of these sections as the verse, chorus or middle eight of the song; and they are essentially musically unrelated to one another. Nyro's use of different rhythmic divisions and tempos throughout further emphasizes the improvisatory character of this song.

Nyro starts to sing the first melodic motif of section A by maintaining the tempo at 84 beats per minute.<sup>65</sup> Towards the end of this motif she accelerates the tempo to 100 bpm

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<sup>63</sup> Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 18.

<sup>64</sup> For the music of 'Timer', see Appendix E, pp. 298-303.

for the second motif. At the beginning of second motif (bar 7), Nyro starts to alter the strong and weak beats (see Figure 1.1). Although she uses syncopated rhythms in bars 2, 3, 6 and 7, throughout the first melodic motif (bars 1-7), the emphasis is mainly on the first and third beats. However, starting halfway through bar 9, she sings the melody by emphasizing each beat individually. Considering the fact that she begins to change the tempo starting with the lines ‘and she [my lady] broke down / she got up / she let go’, I suggest that Nyro the tempo in parallel with changes in the song’s mood expressed through the lyrics. Moreover, the above-mentioned alterations in strong and weak beats are also related to the song’s lyrics. She emphasizes each beat individually while singing ‘take me Timer / shake me Timer’. As a result, she places an emphasis on every syllable to reflect the furiousness of these lyrics. Thus, as this example demonstrates, the change of mood in ‘Timer’ is also brought about by the fluctuation of tempo at different points in the song.

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<sup>65</sup> See the first track on the CD accompanying this thesis.

The image shows the opening page of the musical score for the song 'Timer'. It consists of four systems of music. Each system includes a piano accompaniment with guitar chords and a vocal line. The lyrics are: 'Up - town go - in' down ole life line, — Walk - in' down fast - er, walk - in' with the mas - ter of time. — My la - dy woke up — and she broke down, — She got up, — she let go. — Take me, Tim - er, shake me, poco a poco accel. Tim - er, Tim - er, let it blow. Let it blow. mp'. The score includes various guitar chord diagrams and dynamic markings such as *mf* and *mp*.

Figure 1.1 The opening page of 'Timer'

Although Nyro frequently draws on the possibilities of altering the tempo, section B (bars 15-40) of the song is mainly performed at 100 bpm. Section C (bars 41-64) is also sung at the same speed. However, with the beginning of this new section (C), the structure of the accompanimental rhythms is altered. Whereas the drums play only in crotchets throughout section B, in section C the drumbeat changes to quavers. In other words, while listeners hear the drums playing four equal notes in each bar of section B, in the following section they hear the beat divided into three. Therefore, although the

song's tempo is unchanged, it may sound to the listener as though it has doubled. This rhythmic change reaches its pinnacle in section D, where Nyro sings the lines 'you're a jigsaw Timer / you're a... / God is a jigsaw / a jigsaw Timer'. While singing these lines, the rhythmic structure is changed every two bars, first dividing each bar into four equal notes, then dividing each beat into three, without changing the overall tempo. As the brief formal analysis of this first track shows, one of the most important characteristics of Nyro's songs is their richness in terms of melodic ideas and their multi-sectional structures that create an ambiguity in the form of a song. Recalling Kristeva's claim that 'in "artistic" practices the semiotic - the precondition of the Symbolic - is revealed as that which also destroys the Symbolic',<sup>66</sup> I argue that Nyro's intervention to standard song forms also alludes to such a practice.

For the song 'Once it was Alright Now (Farmer Joe)', I will examine Nyro's vocals. From the similarities between language and music outlined earlier in this chapter, Roland Barthes attempted to parallel Kristeva's distinction between 'phenotext' and 'genotext' with that between 'phenosong' and 'genosong'. Barthes argues that language, when used to describe comprehensively musical experience, fails, because whereas in his concept of phenosong the voice largely remains within the confines of the Symbolic, preserving its intelligibility and conveying the Father's order and the phallic structure, the genosong displays the grain of the voice, which 'is not – or is not merely – its timbre; the *significance* it opens cannot better be defined, indeed, than by the very friction between music and (...) language'.<sup>67</sup> The grain, and by implication the voice, is therefore the point of intersection between music and language.<sup>68</sup> Even in the

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<sup>66</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 50.

<sup>67</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, p. 185.

<sup>68</sup> According to Barthes, '[t]he *geno-song* is the volume of the singing and speaking voice, the space where significations germinate "from within language and in its very materiality"; it forms a signifying



absence of complete words, what the voice sings are simple phonemes. However, just like in the infant's semiotic *chora*, these sounds can be full of meaning owing to the persisting grain of the singing voice. The grain denotes a voice that sounds what cannot be assimilated in language and culture – phonemes, screams, breath-sounds, growls.

In 'Once it was Alright Now (Farmer Joe)', we hear Nyro use her voice onomatopoeically, to mimic the sound and the whistling of an oncoming train, with a marked evocative effect.<sup>69</sup> Her voice is like a train that darts through the entire song, cutting right through it as if careering along its tracks, starting from the very end of the second line of the song ('Farmer Joe / I'm the meanest woman you know / woman you know'). We hear this sound effect produced by Nyro's voice again and again in the song, overlaying and accompanying the sound of brass instruments, well before we learn from the lyrics of the impending arrival of an actual train ('baby there's a train whistle / coming'). I would argue that this has a dual effect: firstly, it adds suggestiveness, in its evocation of a kind of imaginary 'landscape' where the listener starts to engage – despite the absence of any descriptive linguistic (Symbolic) information – with an attempt at visualization through music. Secondly, the grain in Nyro's voice provides what the lyrics of 'Once it was Alright Now (Farmer Joe)', in their semantic indeterminateness, do not: signification.

Nyro's onomatopoeic voicing of a train becomes the common thread of the entire song. Her voice here goes beyond the Symbolic, in that her grain, 'the body in the voice as it sings'<sup>70</sup> in Barthes' words, does not serve to communicate actual semantic meaning.

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play having nothing to do with communication (...) [here the] melody really works at the language – not at what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sound-signifiers, of its letters'. Ibid., p.182.

<sup>69</sup> See the second track on the CD accompanying this thesis.

<sup>70</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, p. 188.

Rather, ‘it forms a signifying play’,<sup>71</sup> uttering sounds that can have no place in language and working at ‘the voluptuousness of its sound-signifiers, of its letters’.<sup>72</sup> It becomes a semiotic signifier that conveys meaning through the discharge of drive energy, in this particular example using melodic devices such as the grain of Nyro’s voice, her rhythm and phonemes. As Barthes puts it ‘[t]he song must speak, must *write* – for what is produced at the level of the geno-song is finally writing’.<sup>73</sup>

Other notable instances of the grain of the voice in this songs can be found further on, when Nyro cries out the word ‘Fire’ like someone who is about to be shot (or to shoot someone?), and with this shout an abrupt break in the song ensues, as a crucial turning point in the story being told and as a very effective dramatic device. Faced with the generally cryptic nature of the lyrics in ‘Once it was Alright Now (Farmer Joe)’ as previously discussed, and the semantic meaninglessness of the line in question (‘Fire / flames of gold rush my mind’), I suggest that it is only through Nyro’s voice that an attempt at disambiguation can take place in interpreting the meaning of the song’s narrative – her voice is at the intersection between music and language.

In the following line of the song, Nyro’s sharp intake of breath and emphatic hissing pronunciation of the initial consonant while singing ‘Sock it to the railroad baby’ denote yet another example of grain, with their sounds that are inassimilable in the Symbolic (language and culture), and contribute to a playful accentuation of the streetwise and slang expression used. Moreover, whilst earlier in the song Nyro’s voice ‘runs’ with the lyrics, replicating the fast tempo and the insistent repetition in lines such as ‘Farmer boy / get your gun / run, run / Farmer boy/ get your gun, run, run, run, run, run’, with

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

each word almost tumbling over the next, at the very end her singing becomes intimate and regretful, while she reflects on the end of her love affair, or possibly the end of her own life. ‘Once it was alright, alright baby’, she sings breathlessly, holding the final word, ‘now’, for a long time until it fades away to complete silence (which is itself by no means devoid of meaning).

As discussed earlier, all the above instances specifically denote the grain of the voice as theorised by Barthes and can be interpreted as expressive devices to disrupt the Symbolic and bring the semiotic to the surface the semiotic. Lacan, in one of his seminars, argues that ‘the unconscious is structured as a language’<sup>74</sup> and that it speaks. What he meant is that through natural language, the unconscious finds an outlet to express desires that the subject is not able to consciously admit to – through slips of the tongue and other means. Genosongs are able to produce a feeling of bliss, of *jouissance*, in listeners, through the grain, which is the body perceived in the singing voice and which evokes with its sound the feeling of completeness that the infant had before language and meaning, before the Symbolic. However, this completeness has been lost forever, hence the impact of the grain of the voice expressing a desire that will remain unfulfilled.<sup>75</sup>

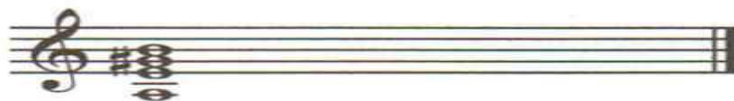
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<sup>74</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘Artistotle and Freud: The Other Satisfaction’, in *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973: Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, edited by Jacques Alain Miller and translated with notes by Bruce Fink (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), p. 55.

<sup>75</sup> Lacan calls the unattainable object of desire *objet petit a(utre)*. It is what is left behind after the introduction of the Symbolic. The grain of the voice appears to mimic the *petit objet a*. Subsequent theories of the voice, such as Mladen Dolar’s, also refer to the concept of ‘object voice’ as one of the embodiments of Lacan’s *petit objet a*. However, Dolar does not see the voice as attached or emanating from the body (as proposed by Barthes). For him ‘the voice ties the language to the body, but (...) *does not belong to either*’. Not reducible either to the body (physiologically) or to language (semantically), which it both exceeds, the voice conveys glimpses of the subject’s inner drives. As such, despite the inherent physical materiality of the voice, Dolar argues that ‘every emission of the voice is by its very essence *ventriloquism*’. Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (London: MIT Press, 2006), p. 72 and p. 70, respectively.

Nyro's songs can also be considered as unconventional in terms of their chord progressions. Besides various female artists and girl groups, the music she listened to when she was a teenager included that of jazz musicians such as John Coltrane and Miles Davis. In addition to these influences, owing to her mother's interest in classical music, during her childhood she listened extensively to the works of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. Perhaps because all these musicians are known for melodic, timbral and harmonic innovations, as a songwriter she always tended to use chord structures that were unconventional when considered in the context of 1960s American popular music scene.

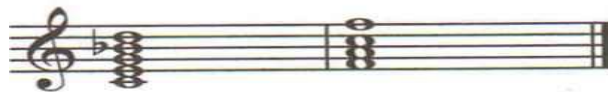
One of the clearest examples of her unique use of harmony was the result of her practice of structuring a chord without its third. This provided Nyro with the possibility of resisting the rules of conventional tonal harmony. For instance, the chords constructed as A + E + G# + B and C + G + B + D are frequently heard in her songs (Figure 1.2).



**Figure 1.2.** The chord A + E + G# + B

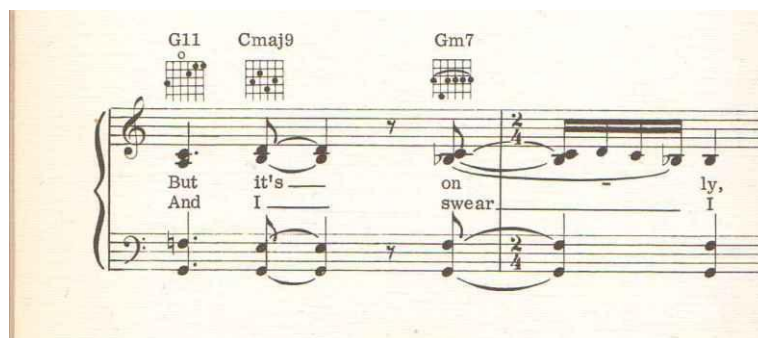
Since the roots of these two chords (A and C respectively) have the same rhythmic value as the other notes of these chords, they cannot be regarded as pedal notes. Thus, if the key is C major, what is described here (in the latter example) is not a dominant chord over a tonic pedal. Moreover, the lack of a third in these chords makes it impossible for us to call them CMaj9 or AMaj9 since none of these chords functions as a dominant discord. In other words, in key of F, the chord C9 (C + E + G + B flat + D)

or Cmaj9 (C + E + G + B + D) would conventionally resolve to the tonic since the 3<sup>rd</sup> (the leading-note of the key) leads to F (Figure 1.3).



**Figure 1.3.** The chord C9 resolves to F

However, Nyro’s way of structuring this chord without its 3<sup>rd</sup> enabled her to neglect this rule (Figure 1.4).



**Figure 1.4.** The chord Cmaj9 in ‘Emmie’

As can be understood from this discussion, it is not easy to explain the function and type of this chord, as it appears in Nyro’s songs, with reference to the rules of harmony.

Charles Callelo explains this as follows:

One of the things she did that was unique was to play chords differently than anybody else I ever worked with. I used this technique I learned from her throughout my career. She actually learned how to play by using the upper parts of the chords (...) What Laura did was play a Cmaj9 without the 3<sup>rd</sup>—a G major chord with the C in the bass. She would play triads but she would play the “wrong” bass notes, which would make the chords sound unusual. By doing that it altered

the sound of the way she wrote her songs. All through her life she played that style (...) Other composers tried to imitate her and tried to utilize that technique.<sup>76</sup>

I shall now examine the harmonic structure of ‘December’s Boudoir’, which, like ‘Timer’, also a multi-sectional formal structure schematized as follows:

A (a [bars 1-9] +b [bars 10-20] repeated) + B [bars 21-28] + C [bars 29-39]  
+ D [bars 40-48] + E [bars 49-55] + Coda<sup>77</sup>

In order to indicate the unconventional elements heard in the song, my analysis will start by specifying its traditional elements.

‘December’s Boudoir’ begins with a G minor chord heard in the piano accompaniment, defining the song’s tonality as G minor. As expected, the other tonal poles of the song are close to the original key: D minor (the dominant) in section D, C major (the subdominant major) in section C, F major (the relative of D minor) and D minor again in section E. However, throughout the song, Nyro employs what Calello described as “wrong” bass notes. Listeners encounter the first such chord, F/G, as early as bar 2. Other examples include the chords G/A in bar 5, A/D in bar 21 and Em7/A in bar 37. Some of these uses of “wrong” bass notes are common practice, particularly in the context of popular music. For instance, the chord F/G could be understood as a version of the dominant of C. However, the non-functional way Nyro uses these kinds of chords leads to more uncommon results. For instance, the chord F/G, heard in bar 2, goes to Bbmaj7 instead of resolving to C (Figure 1.5).

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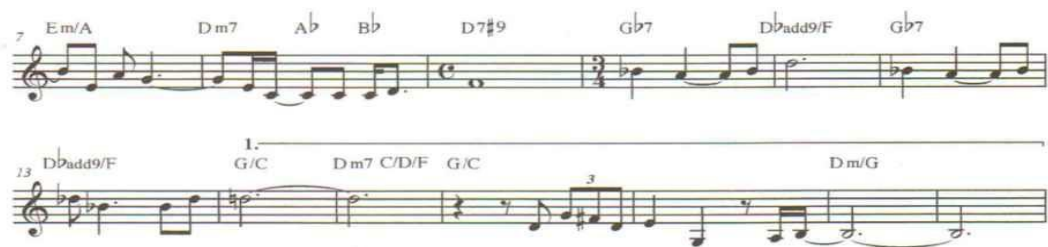
<sup>76</sup> Laura Nyro: *Lyrics and Reminiscences*, p. 42.

<sup>77</sup> For the music of ‘December’s Boudoir’, see Appendix F, pp. 304-5.



**Figure 1.5.** The opening bars of ‘December’s Boudoir’

Turning to other unconventional elements heard in ‘December’s Boudoir’, it is notable that throughout the song, Nyro avoids using the tonic chord (G minor). This chord is heard only in the first and last bars (although it has a misleading character in terms of harmony, since the last three bars comprise a type of plagal cadence in G minor). Moreover, in the repeat of section A, Nyro further obfuscates some of the harmonies, such as transforming the opening chord from G minor to Gm7. The second motif (b) of section A opens in G  $\flat$  major (bar 10). This is a move that could not have been predicted, since it is far removed from the original key. Moreover, the way she moves from G minor to G  $\flat$  minor deserves attention. The note F natural, heard in bar 9 (in the voice part only), is the third of the chord Dmin7. Thanks to a chromatic movement in the piano, Nyro changes it to the third note of the chord D  $\flat$ . Thus, starting from the third beat of bar 9, F becomes the leading note of the key of G  $\flat$  minor and resolves the D  $\flat$  major chord (the dominant of G  $\flat$ ) to G  $\flat$  minor (Figure 1.6).



**Figure 1.6.** Bars 7-15 of ‘December’s Boudoir’

Although ‘December’s Boudoir’ is primarily tonal, it is possible to determine a mixture of tonal and modal in some passages. A modal analysis would suggest that throughout

the first two sections of the song Nyro continuously visits different modes, such as B $\flat$  Lydian (bar 3) and G $\flat$  Ionian (bars 10, 11, 12 and 13). However, as my analysis above demonstrated, the harmonic framework in these sections is predominantly tonal. Modality is heard clearly only in section D; throughout the bars 40-48 we are in D Aeolian. As Richard Middleton discussed in *Studying Popular Music*, using tonality and modality in a song is common practice in Anglo-American popular music.<sup>78</sup> What makes 'December's Boudoir's modal structure 'unconventional' is its ambiguity; it is not easy to talk about a single prevailing mode. Throughout the song Nyro visits several modes: F Lydian (bar 4), G Mixolydian on pedal note C (bar 14), G Ionian on pedal note C (bars 16-17), D Dorian (bar 24).

Coming now to the coda, what makes this section unusual is the dichotomy between form and harmonic structure. In other words, a coda should reach, and remain in, the home key, in this case G minor. However, in bar 52, Nyro uses the chord A7 as if it were the dominant chord of a different key (that being D minor). Then, instead of resolving the chord as expected, Nyro shifts the harmonic progression towards C major. Throughout bars 53 and 54 she uses a C pedal as if the final key of the song were to be C major. However, at the beginning of bar 55, listeners hear an unexpected Gm (maj7) chord ending the song. Thus, although the song ends in G minor, Nyro visits two different keys (D min and C maj) throughout the coda by way of disrupting the section's harmonic focus. Once again, Nyro has been shown to manipulate musical conventions - in this song through her idiosyncratic chord progressions. The results she produces in doing so can be described as breaks in the traditional language of music and disrupt the Symbolic in a Kristevan sense.

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<sup>78</sup> See Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes : Open University Press, 1990), pp. 201-5.



To go back to the question as to whether it is legitimate to speak about genotexts in the songs of Nyro, I believe we can confidently answer in the affirmative. What the above sections have shown is that her lyrics and music do indeed lend themselves to a fruitful application of Kristeva's and Barthes's theories. Specifically talking about music, we could liken the rhythmic and harmonic structures of a musical text to the grammatical structure of a literary text. According to Kristeva, transgressing grammatical rules causes a disruption in the Symbolic.<sup>79</sup> In this respect, drawing on the conclusions of my musical analysis that Nyro's work signifies the transgression of both the rhythmic and harmonic conventions of music, one can suggest that it also distorts the internal rules of popular music. This transgression is further evidenced by the vocal analysis, where the grain of Nyro's voice was seen as acting as a semiotic signifier, elevating her songs to the level of genosongs by going beyond mere Symbolic communication, and sounding the inassimilable unconscious.

### **1.5. Nyro's 'Confession': the cover art for *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession***

In this section, I shall consider two images seen on the front and back cover of *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*. Parallel to the analysis of her lyrics, throughout my reading I shall investigate whether Nyro's visual images can also be said to introduce breaks into the Symbolic. This discussion will draw upon Kristeva's argument that 'the semiotic is articulated by (...) the cutting up [of] (...) social continuum'.<sup>80</sup>

Nyro devoted the same rigour and attention she reserved for her lyrics and music to the cover art for *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*. As previously discussed in the

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<sup>79</sup> For further discussion, see Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 57.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Introduction, she planned this LP as a concept album and structured it with care. Moreover, as Rudden reveals, as well as paying attention to the physical dimensions and appearance of the record sleeve, in early copies of the record there was ‘a fragrance of some kind that was in the ink used for the lyric sheet’.<sup>81</sup> According to Rudden, this was to ensure that *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession* would become ‘embedded (...) by association in the brains of an early group of listeners’.<sup>82</sup> In other words, Nyro thought about the album in all its aspects.

This attention to detail also extended to the order of the songs on the album. The concluding song is titled ‘The Confession’, thus bringing to a close the narrative of the entire record. Moreover, on the back sleeve Nyro also referred to herself as ‘the writer, composer, voices, piano and witness to the confession’. What exactly is her “confession”? On the cover of the album, we see a photograph of Nyro’s face against a dark background. The only accents of colour are her lips and her pale complexion. Her gaze is directed downwards and she is shown to be deep in thought, in a reflective mood that may also be called mournful (Figure 1.7). Perhaps she is reflecting on her life, aspects of which she will recount in the record itself, but be that as it may, the sombre character of the cover sets the tone for a record that will not fail to touch upon serious themes.

Nyro’s photograph on the front cover can be said to display mystical and quasi-religious features, almost as a contemplative Madonna, or, perhaps, resembling the imagery of a Mary Magdalene. This impression of meditation and silence reflects the title of the album, which appears to the right of her face, with its distinctly religious tone. The

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<sup>81</sup> Patricia Spence Rudden, ‘Stacking the Wax: the Structure of Laura Nyro’s Studio Albums’, p. 27.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

word ‘Eli’ means ‘God’ in some languages, Hebrew among them. Here it is useful to recall Nyro’s Jewish origins. As for the meaning of ‘thirteenth confession’, one potential reference, as Rudden suggests, is provided by St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, which is composed of thirteen books.<sup>83</sup> A possible interpretation for the choice of the album’s name is the fact that Augustine rejected the sins of his youth and converted to Christianity. Afterwards, all his literary works were dedicated to God as atonement for his sins. In other words, Augustine had converted to religion but had not been a holy man from the start. He changed his life through a painful and deeply felt process of self-examination.



**Figure 1.7.** The front cover of *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*

Another noteworthy element of Augustine’s *Confessions* is that they have an open-ended conclusion. His search for truth and meaning is not over, because it is a search that can end only with the end of one’s life. For this reason, although one should try to learn from past mistakes and grow, and ‘confess’ by being true to oneself, life may bring further challenges and require yet more confessions along the path to self-discovery. In *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*, Nyro ‘confesses’ many things, from

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<sup>83</sup> On this point see Patricia Spence Rudden, ‘Stacking the Wax: the Structure of Nyro’s Studio Albums’, p. 30. See also St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

alcohol and drug use, to religious self-doubt and her struggle between good and evil, to love for another woman. Whilst one should not necessarily see in this the idea of repentance in a religious sense, I would argue that a more secular interpretation, along the lines of a reflection on one's choices and decisions, may be conceivable.

Turning now to the photograph appearing on the back cover of the album, this dark, black and white picture shows the silhouette of a woman on the right, appearing to be Nyro – also, due to the fact that one of the few visible details is that of her earring, identical to the one in the photograph on the front cover. Barely lit from a light source behind her, Nyro kisses the forehead of another female figure in profile, who is younger in age (Figure 1.8). Some interpretations have read this image as Nyro kissing her younger self after becoming a woman. This would be consistent with the concept behind *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*, a woman's journey to adulthood. According to Kort, Nyro also said that in this picture 'she was kissing seventeen years of her life—her childhood—goodbye'.<sup>84</sup> If this interpretation is accepted, it can be suggested that the back cover of the album signifies the beginning of a journey which proved to be full of experiences that, judged on the basis of the rules and regulations of the Symbolic, should be 'confessed'.

This brief reading of Nyro's cover art for *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession* shows that the images selected by the artist to represent her work also introduce ambiguous and multiple readings that destabilize any unitary and clear-cut interpretation. As such, in a Kristevan sense they manipulate Symbolic language and its semantic definiteness.

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<sup>84</sup> Michele Kort, *Soul Picnic*, p. 57.

Moreover, the two related themes that can be said to be present in Nyro's cover art, religion and confession, are further examples of such destabilization.

As regards religion, following my suggestions of possible references to St. Augustine and Mary Magdalene in the album title and the front cover, Nyro can be said to destabilize one of the founding pillars of the Symbolic: organized religion. Both Augustine and Mary Magdalene were unorthodox figures within Christianity. Their embracing of religious faith was not superficial or dogmatic: they were individuals who had lived a life of sin outside of religion (prostitution in the case of Mary Magdalene, whilst Augustine confessed to sexual sins too). Therefore, they could also be said to be Kristevan subjects in process/on trial, who by constantly questioning their subjectivity and identity, are involved in an ongoing negotiation with their repressed drives.

In the light of the above discussion, I suggest that *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*, due to the themes of both its songs and its cover art, refers to an alternative view of religion that critiques and subverts its monolithic character within the Symbolic – one that is more embracing of female subjectivity and sexuality, which are no longer repressed and can be expressed freely.



**Figure 1.8.** The back cover of *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*

## 1.6. Conclusion

Based on Nyro's interviews published from the late Seventies, it can legitimately be assumed that she aimed for both her life and her music to be considered a feminist project.<sup>85</sup> Especially after giving birth to her son in 1979, Nyro espoused feminism. Throughout this period, as Kort points out, 'she became as intrigued by the metaphorical qualities of certain goddesses [such as Sophia and Hecate] as she once was by the God/Devil dichotomy'.<sup>86</sup> At around the same time, she began her relationship with Maria Desiderio, although throughout her life Nyro refused to be called a lesbian, stating that she preferred the definition term "woman identified", which emerged from the 1970s movement of lesbian feminism.

After releasing her seventh studio album, *Nested* (1978),<sup>87</sup> Nyro chose to take a break from the music business in order to raise her son. Another reason for this choice was her refusal to become, to use her words, a 'commodity'.<sup>88</sup> For the remainder of her life, she released only two more studio albums, *Mother's Spiritual* (1984)<sup>89</sup> and *Walk the Dog & Light the Light* (1993).<sup>90</sup> The common theme of the songs included in *Mother's Spiritual* was, as the title suggests, motherhood. 'To a Child', 'A Wilderness', 'Man in the Moon', 'Talk to a Green Tree' and 'Mother's Spiritual' were either songs about Nyro's relationship with her son or her mother. Besides this dominant theme, for the first time she expressed openly her unease about patriarchal societies and religions with

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<sup>85</sup> See Harry Clein, 'Laura Nyro: Rock Madonna from Bronx', pp. 20-2. See also Zollo, *Songwriters on Songwriting*, pp. 215-31.

<sup>86</sup> Michele Kort, *Soul Picnic*, p. 188.

<sup>87</sup> Laura Nyro, *Nested* (Columbia Records, 1978).

<sup>88</sup> Laura Fissinger, 'Organic Feminism' in *Musician* (September, 1984), quoted in Gillian G. Gaar, *She is a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock & Roll* (New York: Seal Press, 2002), p. 151.

<sup>89</sup> Laura Nyro, *Mother's Spiritual* (Columbia Records, 1984).

<sup>90</sup> Laura Nyro, *Walk the Dog & Light the Light* (Columbia, 1983).

the track 'Right to Vote', singing 'They say a woman's place / is to wait and serve / under the veil / submissive and dear / but I think my place / is in a ship from space to carry me / the hell out of here/ Patriarchal great religions / full of angels / forgiving and fair / while they push the buttons / and blow up the place / (might as well) / make room for a worthier race'. This period also saw a change in Nyro's use of personal pronouns. In order to avoid using gender-specific third-person pronouns, she began to use 'you' instead. Moreover, as the song 'Roadnotes' (*Mother's Spiritual*, 1984) exemplifies, in order to de-gender her lyrics, she preferred to employ neutral words such as 'lover' or 'baby'.<sup>91</sup>

Even though Nyro's last album released during her lifetime, *Walk the Dog & Light the Light*, included a new version of the song 'To a Child', and the title song was about Nyro's position as a touring musician and mother, its main themes were her feminist concerns and contemporary sociopolitical issues. As noted in the album's accompanying booklet, the song 'Louise's Church', in which she refers to 'the goddess of life and music', was written for women artists: the sculptor Louise Nevelson, the poet Sappho, the musician Billie Holiday, the painter Frida Kahlo and 'for the next wave of feminism' in general. Moreover, she dedicated the third track of the album, 'The Descent of Luna Rosé', to her menstrual period. Since feminist poets frequently refer to their periods, she felt that writing about her period was, in her own words, 'an obligation'.<sup>92</sup> Nyro's decision to employ only female musicians to perform her new songs on stage can also be taken as proof of the impact of her feminist beliefs both on her art and her life. It is clear that from the late 1970s, Nyro, as a singer-songwriter, primarily devoted herself to the dissemination of her feminist messages. However, I

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<sup>91</sup> See Michele Kort, *Soul Picnic*, p. 197.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

claim that it was her early work that celebrated female gender and sexuality with their potential to lead to a new linguistic configuration, through writing and composing, by creating a distinctive distortion in the conventions of male language.

To sum up, different sections of this chapter demonstrate that Nyro's work can be related to a feminist linguistic strategy proposed by Kristeva, namely the semiotic. The analysis of the lyrics reveals that Nyro's language, in *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*, brings semiotic drives and repressed desires into the Symbolic (natural language with its prescribed syntactic and semantic rules), thereby disrupting the dominant male-centred discourse from within. Displaying many of the features of what Kristeva called genotexts, Nyro's lyrics – with their disregard and manipulation of grammatical rules and linear logical meaning – encourage processes of signification in which the semiotic plays a bigger role and as such are evidence of the potential of poetic language in critiquing the patriarchal order, also as embodied in 1960s America's moral values that imposed strictly limited roles on women, by reimagining women's freedom and rebellion.

The music analysis, meanwhile, leads to the conclusion that Nyro succeeded in manipulating the conventions of rock music with her highly innovative early work, thanks to the freedom provided by her improvisation-based composing technique and use of a fantasia-like song form. Her work triggers a distinctive mode of songwriting that can be related to Kristeva's theory of the semiotic, given its stylistic sophistication, harmonic complexity, rhythmic variety and tempo fluctuations, all qualities related to primary, pre-symbolic libidinal drives. To this we should add the role played by the grain of Nyro's voice in evoking and suggesting breaks in the Symbolic and providing



listeners with an engaging and absorbing experience, conducive to evocation of unconscious drives and desires and engendering listening *jouissance* as a result.

Finally, the examination of the cover art for *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession* has reiterated Nyro's pioneering role as a female singer-songwriter claiming total artistic control on her work. As underlined earlier, I would not propose that the mode of writing suggested by Kristeva is specific to women. However, by disrupting the laws of rock music's patriarchal language that articulate and celebrate masculinity (thereby positioning women as 'other'), Nyro's language created new ground in popular music in which not only she but also subsequent female artists could represent themselves wholly, by consciously or subconsciously trying to reach the semiotic *chora*.

## CHAPTER 2

### **‘Out of the City and Down to the Seaside’: Joni Mitchell in ‘The Dawntreader’, ‘Ladies of the Canyon’ and ‘Shadows and Light’**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

For centuries it has been thought that if women did write music, it would sound frail and passive—that is, would sound the way dominant culture assumed women were and should be.<sup>1</sup>

The assumption to which McClary referred above can be instructive in understanding the motives of many women musicians of the late 20th century for rejecting the role of sexual identity as an influence in their work. Although McClary’s reading is mainly derived from the position of female composers - with the exception of a few non-canonical musical figures such as Laurie Anderson and Madonna - working within the confines of Western classical music, it can also be useful in decoding the strategies of some female musicians who emerged from the Anglo-American popular music scene starting from the mid-1960s. For instance Joni Mitchell, who is regarded as one of the most significant and influential singer-songwriters of the late 20th century, has similarly been known for her unease at being categorized as a female musician. Conversely, her work is considered today as one of the ultimate examples of female experience in popular music, with its emphasis on the female body and sexuality.

According to McClary, the principal reason why many women musicians appeared to be dismissive of gender issues was their concerns that their womanliness could cause them to be unfairly positioned as inferior to men.<sup>2</sup> Some of Mitchell’s statements seem to resonate well with McClary’s argument. For instance, when asked by Morrissey to talk

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<sup>1</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> For further discussion see Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings*, p. 139.

about her feelings about being referred to as a female songwriter, Mitchell's response was that 'it implies limitations'.<sup>3</sup> In the same interview, she further emphasized her unease at being lumped with groups of women, posing a crucial question: 'they don't put Dylan with the Men of Rock; why do they do that to me with women?'<sup>4</sup> In the press conference following the Polar Music Prize in 1996, in response to questions about her being the first female musician to win this award, Mitchell's reaction was as follows:

Oh I don't like to think about that so much, this man-woman-man-woman thing...I try not to think about gender distinctions...I found it an isolating question and I hope there will come a day when this distinction is not made. I am a musician and I leave gender aside. I am an accomplished musician.<sup>5</sup>

As these statements make clear, even after her status as a classic singer-songwriter in the history of popular music was confirmed by numerous awards, for Mitchell an emphasis on her womanliness would still call into question the seriousness of her musicianship.

Some writers, such as Stuart Henderson, read Mitchell's reaction as stemming from her belief that 'her music (and, by extension, all great art) should be genderless'.<sup>6</sup> However, her stance on gender issues (sometimes expressed by appreciating the superiority of the male) surfacing in her interviews reveals that what makes Mitchell reject the definition of female musician is derived from the historically and culturally constructed position of women – a position which drives them away from artistic creativity and language. On every occasion, Mitchell voices her discomfort at being compared to other female

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<sup>3</sup> Mitchell quoted in Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 233. See also 'Words and Music – Joni Mitchell and Morrissey' transcribed from the audio by Lindsay Moon (October 18, 1996), at <http://jonimitchell.com/library/view.cfm?id=678&from=search> (last accessed 17/10/2011).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p.15.

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Henderson, "'All Pink and Clean and Full of Wonder?'" Gendering "Joni Mitchell" 1966-1974', p. 84.

musicians. With the exception of Nyro, as noted in the previous chapter, she never referred to any female artist as a model for her art. To Mitchell, it was male figures such as Leonard Cohen, Miles Davis and Bob Dylan, and Monet and Picasso, who exerted an influence on her.

Her relationship with feminism has also always been problematic. In an interview with Bill Flanagan in 1997, she declared ‘I never called myself a feminist. I could agree with a lot of men’s point of view’.<sup>7</sup> In the same interview she further states that ‘a gypsy told me that this is my first life as a woman. In all my previous incarnations I was a man. I am still getting used to it’.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, as I will show in the course of this chapter, throughout her career she created a body of work manipulating the patriarchal structures of popular music. Furthermore, as Whiteley emphasizes, ‘much of [her more recent songwriting] openly engages with issues that have traditionally occupied feminists’,<sup>9</sup> such as rape (‘Sex Kills’, 1993) and domestic violence (‘Not to Blame’, 1993). My proposal, here, is not that Mitchell’s work should be judged solely on gender. Rather, I suggest that a gender-based analysis of her work will help further our understanding of the artist and her production.

The principal objective of this chapter is to explore ways in which Joni Mitchell’s *oeuvre* lends itself to such analytical possibilities. However, in order to justify a gender-based examination of her work, I will begin by briefly discussing the motives of Mitchell’s declared identification with “the male”. To understand her cultural, historical and artistic challenges, within the chapter I shall discuss the notions of body and text in

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<sup>7</sup> Joni Mitchell quoted in Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 241. See also Bill Flanagan, ‘Lady of the Canyon’, in *Vanity Fair* (June 1997), at <http://jonimitchell.com/library/view.cfm?id=401&from=search> (last accessed 17/10/2011).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Sheila Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music*, p. 12.

parallel. To this end, Luce Irigaray's theory of multiplicity with regard to the sexed or gendered body will be applied to my readings of Mitchell's work.

By focusing on three songs taken from different albums, namely 'The Dawntreader' (*Song to a Seagull*, 1968), 'Ladies of the Canyon' (*Ladies of the Canyon*, 1970) and 'Shadows and Light' (*The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, 1975), I shall explore how the notion of multiplicity (one of the constitutive elements of Irigaray's theory) comes into play in Mitchell's selected songs, in terms of lyrics, music and visual representation. The lyric analysis will concentrate on the ways in which Mitchell creates a multilayered text and narrative reflecting the multiplicity of female body and psychology, by using oceanic themes ('The Dawntreader') and invoking multiple personae ('Ladies of the Canyon'). In analysing the lyrics of 'Shadows and Lights', I shall also look at Mitchell's use of mystical discourse, departing from Irigaray's emphasis on the significance of such a discourse in feminine language.

Throughout the music analysis, the multilayered character of Mitchell's songs in terms of harmonic, modal, and rhythmic structures, as well as her vocal timbre, will be closely considered. Since I regard the harmonic structure of Mitchell's songs as the most significant element of her writing, throughout my music analysis I shall mainly focus on her use of modality and tonality that give way to a multilayered language. I shall also examine her vocal timbre while analyzing the song 'Ladies of the Canyon'. Throughout this song, Mitchell explores different female subjectivities; hence I suggest that here she uses her vocals to give life to the personae she creates. As a result, her use of vocal becomes a crucial part of the multilayered musical language that dominates the song. I shall also discuss briefly her back vocals, heard in the song 'Shadows and Light', for the

song's harmonic language is mostly created by back vocals. In the analysis of Mitchell's visual representation, I shall investigate whether the multiplicity of the female body can be traced in her paintings for the cover art of the albums from which the songs analyzed in this chapter are taken, as she, as a gifted painter in her own right, did create most of her album covers. Throughout the conclusion, I shall discuss the significant role that multiplicity plays in Mitchell's entire work.

Even though there are several songs suitable for analysis on grounds of multiplicity, this chapter will focus on the three previously cited since I suggest that they include some key elements of Mitchell's artistic production observed throughout her whole *oeuvre*. Lyrically, each of these songs represents a different facet of Joni Mitchell the poet. In 'The Dawntreader', we are faced with a poet who uses words for their evocative qualities, to paint dream-like images. In 'Ladies of the Canyon', we listen to a poet who chooses her words to tell her own story. Finally, in 'Shadows and Light', we are introduced to a poet who uses her pen to criticize the society she lives in. Musically, although these three songs have some crucial elements of Mitchell's musical language, their number is not sufficient to claim a comprehensive reading of the work of an artist who has been active for more than forty years. However, I believe that they have a significant place in her catalogue; both 'The Dawntreader' and 'Ladies of the Canyon' were chosen by Mitchell herself to be included in her album *Travelogue* (2002), which was planned as an exploration of her career. Moreover, 'Ladies of the Canyon' was the title track of her seminal 1970 album. As to 'Shadows and Light', the closing track on one of her most artistically acclaimed albums, *The Hissing of the Summer Lawns*, Mitchell performed the song in nearly all her concerts throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s. Furthermore, she chose it as the title of her Mingus tour, arguably a

retrospective of her most experimental musical period, as well as for the double live album recorded at the Santa Barbara County Bowl in September 1979.

In order to understand what made Mitchell reject the definition of ‘female musician’, one needs to look at the position of women artists in the folk revival of the 1960s. In the previous chapter on Nyro, I discussed in some detail the effect that the counterculture had on women in general, and how popular music treated female artists during the 1960s. Mitchell began her career as a singer performing in coffee houses around the Canadian town of Saskatoon in 1962. Her debut album, *Song to a Seagull*, produced by David Crosby, was released in 1968. During that decade, according to Whiteley, ‘both the lifestyle and the musical ethos of the period undermined the role of women, positioning [most of] them as romanticised fantasy figures, subservient earth mothers or easy lays’,<sup>10</sup> yet some new opportunities were arguably emerging for female musicians, most notably in folk starting from the mid-1950s.

Around that time, names like Peggy Seeger and the McGarrigle Sisters started to pave ‘a more idiosyncratic and personal path through folk music’, to use O’Brien’s words.<sup>11</sup> Although not primarily a songwriter, Odetta - who recorded her first album, *The Tin Angel*, in 1954 - also became one of the key figures of the American folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s, with many musicians of the era referring to her as a major influence. For instance, in 1978 Bob Dylan said ‘[t]he first thing that turned me on to folk singing was Odetta. I heard a record of her in a record store (...) [r]ight then and there, I went out and traded my electric guitar and amplifier for an acoustic guitar’.<sup>12</sup> At the end of

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<sup>10</sup> Sheila Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music*. p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Lucy O’Brien, *She Bop II*, p. 181.

<sup>12</sup> Ron Rosenbaum, ‘Playboy Interview: Bob Dylan’, in *Playboy*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (March 1978), pp. 61-90. See also <http://www.interferenza.com/bcs/interw/play78.htm> (last accessed 14/10/2011).

the 1950s, Joan Baez, who began her career singing traditional folk songs, became one of the most significant folk musicians of her time through her early 1960s recordings, which engaged with social and political issues. Similarly, Judy Collins, who released her first album *A Maid of Constant Sorrow* in 1961, enjoyed a considerable level of critical acclaim and commercial success throughout the 1960s and 1970s with her interpretations of the songs of, amongst others, Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger and Randy Newman. She was one of the first musicians who helped Leonard Cohen to gain popularity by recording his early songs.

Although women in folk came across as strong figures, thanks to their politicization and their endorsing of a human and civil rights agenda, seemingly gaining some kind of independence, their achievements in terms of challenging the traditional positioning of female musicians were limited. According to Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, ‘whatever the ability, integrity, and toughness of Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Sandy, and the others, their musical appeal, the way they were sold, reinforced in rock the qualities traditionally linked with female singers—sensitivity, passivity, and sweetness’.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, as in any other popular music genre, “the privileged position of the creator” was, in folk, reserved for males. Besides traditional songs, the majority of female folk musicians mainly sang songs written by their male counterparts and, as in the case of Joan Baez and Peggy Seeger, they were usually mentored, controlled or overshadowed by males.

Unlike most of the other female musicians of the era, however, Mitchell was *the sole* creator of her songs. Like Nyro, she successfully claimed total control over her work,

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<sup>13</sup> Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, ‘Rock and Sexuality’, p. 377.



and starting from her second album, *Clouds* (1969), she appeared as both the only producer and arranger in her albums. In order to establish herself as a serious musician, therefore, Joni Mitchell put herself forward through her public persona as oppositional to ‘the representations and representatives of womankind [seen] in pop music’, to use Reynolds and Press’s words.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Mitchell’s identification with “the male” and her rejection of the female can be regarded as a political gesture due to the highly male-centric vision of the Anglo-American popular music market.<sup>15</sup> However, whereas she refused the normative ideological position of female musicians in the area of popular music, as a songwriter she has drawn fruitfully from and celebrated all the experiences she went through as a woman from her first album onwards. Her text has a special place in the history of popular music in terms of its relationship with the female body and experience. Before proceeding further, in order to explain what I regard as a relationship between a work of art and the female body, I shall discuss Luce Irigaray’s notion of feminine multiplicity.

## **2.2. Luce Irigaray and the multiplicity of the female body and text**

In *Speculum of the Other Woman*<sup>16</sup> and *This Sex Which is not One*,<sup>17</sup> Irigaray theorizes the female body as a site of strategic and political celebration with the potential to lead to a new linguistic configuration through writing, reflecting a feminine corporeal plurality in the text. Like Kristeva, she also proposes her linguistic theory as an

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<sup>14</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *Sex Revolts*, p. 240.

<sup>15</sup> Frith and McRobbie also confirm this vision by drawing attention to the fact that women’s roles in the industry were created by males, resulting from their perceptions of female abilities. According to them ‘in general, popular music’s images, values, and sentiments are male products’. For more on this point see Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, ‘Rock and Sexuality’, pp. 373-4.

<sup>16</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, translated by Gillian G. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is not One*, translated by Catherine Porter with Caroline Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

alternative to the patriarchal Symbolic order, which has always invalidated women and has defined them as the negative of man. The common thread running through Irigaray's work is the search for a feminist alternative – based on a wide-ranging analysis of various aspects of Western thought – to the straitjacketing of the female sex, seen either as not different from the male sex, or as its binary opposite, woman as 'not-man', according to a rigid logic dating back to ancient Greek philosophy.<sup>18</sup>

*Speculum of the Other Woman* opens with a blistering critique of Sigmund Freud's statements about female sexuality and the psychology of women. In 'Femininity',<sup>19</sup> Freud argues that there is no difference between the first libidinal stages of individuals of both sexes. Therefore, according to Freud, in the early phases of libidinal development the little girl, with her smaller penis (i.e. the clitoris), is '(only) a little man'.<sup>20</sup> In other words, it is not possible to talk about sexual difference throughout the oral, anal and phallic phases. It is only after this pre-Oedipal stage, when the little girl who is viewed as 'a little man' begins to take her father instead of her mother as her love object, that sexual difference occurs. Thus, the Freudian little girl, with her masculine libido and phallic sexuality is, as Elizabeth Grosz puts it, '*the same as or identical with the boy*'.<sup>21</sup>

Freud further claims that the little girl who considers her clitoris as an inferior penis feels that she has already been castrated. However, for Irigaray, Freud's assumption is problematic. She suggests that the question of castration 'refers back in reality to the

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<sup>18</sup> For further discussion, see Hanneke Canters and Grace M. Jantzen, *Forever Fluid: A Reading of Luce Irigaray's Elemental Passions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. XXII, edited and translated by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1974), pp. 112-35.

<sup>20</sup> Freud quoted in Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, p.108.

father's castration, including the father of psychoanalysis—to his fear, his refusal, his rejection, of an *other sex*'.<sup>22</sup> For her, Freud's psychoanalytic theory, like all Western philosophical discourse, is phallogentric and – being based on the logic of sameness<sup>23</sup> - brings to the fore a misogynistic point of view by conceptualizing female sexuality only on the basis of masculine parameters, to 'inscribe her in the law of the *same* desire, of *the desire for the same*'<sup>24</sup> and guarantee man's superior position in the Symbolic order.

Besides the theory of sameness, Irigaray also exposes the superior status assigned by Western psychoanalytical and philosophical discourse to visibility, which is seen as a prerequisite for identity. As interpreted by Irigaray, this positions women outside representation: since the male has a visible sexual organ, the penis, as the representative of his identity, he appropriates the domain of representation. On the other hand, the female, who has no single fully visible sexual organ, is positioned outside representation and is defined as 'lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject'.<sup>25</sup> For Irigaray's theory, being outside representation, woman also has no access to language to reflect the specificity of her body and her pleasure (the Lacanian '*jouissance*',<sup>26</sup> based on the phallus as its privileged signifier and therefore, by definition, the prerogative of man):

...there is, *for women*, no possible law for their pleasure. No more than there is any possible discourse...And if women—according to him [Lacan]—can say nothing,

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<sup>22</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 55.

<sup>23</sup> See Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', pp. 112-35.

<sup>24</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 55.

<sup>25</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 78.

<sup>26</sup> This term has already been explained and considered in the main introduction to this thesis. For a more in-depth discussion of female *jouissance*, see Jacques Lacan, 'God and the Jouissance of The Woman', in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*, p. 147. For a feminist critique of Lacan's concept of the phallus in the context of *jouissance*, see Mary Ann Doane, 'Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body', in *Feminism and Film Theory*, edited by Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 220-21, and Diana J. Fuss, "'Essentially Speaking": Luce Irigaray's Language of Essence', in *French Feminists: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory. Volume III: Luce Irigaray*, edited by Ann J. Cahil and Jennifer L. Hansen (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 101-20.

can know nothing, of their own pleasure, it is because they cannot in any way order themselves within and through a language that would be on some basis their own.<sup>27</sup>

According to Irigaray, women ‘would undoubtedly have a different alphabet, a different language’<sup>28</sup> (a ‘language sexed as female’<sup>29</sup>). But what characteristics would the ‘different language’ invoked by Irigaray need to have in order to provide women with a female Symbolic, in which they are positioned not as the objects but as subjects with a language exclusive to them, in an attempt to rearticulate the link between the female body and language by incorporating woman’s difference into her text?

For Irigaray, such a language would necessitate a different signifier from the phallus, for female *jouissance* and sexuality to be represented. Such a signifier, moreover, would have to symbolize openness, fluidity, plurality and multiplicity. Irigaray termed it the ‘two lips’ – a concept related, but not solely reducible, to the female genitals and ‘a mode of being “in touch” that differs from the phallic mode of discourse’.<sup>30</sup> She explains this as follows:

So woman does not have a sex organ? She has at least two of them, but they are not identifiable as ones. Indeed, she has many more. Her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further: it is *plural*.<sup>31</sup>

Irigaray’s suggestion is that just as the female genitals are formed of these two lips (to say nothing of her other genitalia), constantly open, constantly self-touching and constantly exchanging fluids, women’s language/writing should reflect this multiple

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<sup>27</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 95.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 91.

<sup>30</sup> Carolyn Burke, ‘Irigaray Through the Looking Glass’, p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 28.

characteristic of the female body, which contrasts with the “oneness” of the phallus. Only in this way would the images that cannot be represented by the phallus become representable. For Irigaray, in the Symbolic order only mysticism has a very strong association with the female and female language. Irigaray regards the mystical discourse/mystic domain as a sphere where differences such as inside/outside, subject/object and, ultimately, the self and consciousness cease to apply. As such, the mystic domain is inherently fluid and represents a space where women can be truly free to express themselves.<sup>32</sup>

In a nutshell, Irigaray categorically rejects the idea of a given femininity determined by the phallus. Her proposal, on the contrary, is about an imaginable and re-writable femininity. Moreover, in Irigaray’s understanding, the definition of female sexuality by the patriarchy has severed the connection between women’s own bodies and their multiple and heterogeneous pleasures. As the following section will detail, for Irigaray the Symbolic system excludes bodily fluids that are identified with woman. This very system imposes the solidification of fluids for the sake of maintaining visibility and the integrity of the body and the subject. That is, man attempts to transform women into a solid surface on which he can see his own reflection. However, as Irigaray puts it, ‘the/a woman cannot be collected into *one* volume’.<sup>33</sup> The multiplicity of fluids cannot be reduced to a single form. In light of these arguments, I will question whether it is possible to extend Irigaray’s arguments to the musical domain by creating a link between Mitchell’s lyrics and the female body.

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<sup>32</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, translated by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 63.

<sup>33</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 240.

### 2.3. 'Something truthful in the sea': Joni Mitchell the poet

During the late 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, Mitchell often wrote her lyrics inspired by stories from her private life. As a result, even today there is a tendency to position her in the history of popular music as one of the pioneering confessional singer-songwriters. Although she confirms that '[her songs] have always been more autobiographical than most people's',<sup>34</sup> the word 'confession' appears to be problematic as a means of categorizing Mitchell's lyrics. According to her, on the one hand this word implies a situation in which one is obliged to speak truths of which s/he is afraid or ashamed. On the other hand, it has religious connotations related to Catholicism. She explains this as follows:

When I think of confession, two things come to mind. The swinging light and the billy club, you know, trying to get a confession out of somebody that's been captured. Confess, confess! Or a witch hunt. Or trials. Confession is somebody trying to beat something out of you externally. You're imprisoned. You're captured. They're trying to get you to admit something. To humiliate and degrade yourself and put yourself in a bad position. Then there is the voluntary confession of Catholicism. Where you go to this window and you talk to this priest and you tell him that you're having sexual fantasies and he's wanking on the other side of the window. Both of those things, that's confession. That's the only two kinds of confession I know—voluntary and under duress—and I *am not* confessing.<sup>35</sup>

Although albums such as *Ladies of the Canyon* (1970), *Blue* (1971) and *For the Roses* (1972) are mainly based on Mitchell's own experiences, as a lyricist her primary aim was not to reveal truths about herself, but rather find a way to express human truths through her personal stories. In this respect, given Mitchell's own statement on the

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<sup>34</sup> Michelle Mercer, *Will You Take Me as I am: Joni Mitchell's Blue Period* (New York: Free Press, 2009), p. 47.

<sup>35</sup> Joni Mitchell quoted in Michelle Mercer, *Will You Take Me as I am*, pp. 42-3.

subject, I would suggest that this use of her personal experiences should not be seen as an instance of confessional songwriting, but rather as a search for a linguistic means of expression capable of reflecting Mitchell's experiences as a woman, escaping the strictures of the male Symbolic order.

This section will investigate how Mitchell's lyrics manipulate the Symbolic, by looking at how the themes of fluidity and multiplicity, as well as mystical discourse, function in the chosen songs. I shall start with the multilayered language Mitchell creates, with which she manipulates the syntactic structure of patriarchal language through the use of oceanic imagery in the song 'The Dawntreader', and then question how the act of sketching out different personae is used in the song 'Ladies of the Canyon', reflecting what Irigaray described as a woman's 'not oneness'. Finally, I shall explore the significance of mystical discourse in Mitchell's work in creating a new system in which women can represent themselves, focusing on the song 'Shadows and Light'.

Joni Mitchell's first album *Song to a Seagull* was, much in keeping with trends of the time, a concept album. It was released in 1968 and the songs within it were clustered thematically under two different headings: Side 1) I Came from the City, Side 2) Out of the City and Down to the Seaside. The five songs that appeared on the first side of the album are based mainly on Mitchell's experiences whilst travelling from Toronto to Detroit and on to New York in the late 1960s. For instance, the opening track of side 1, 'I Had a King', refers directly to the last days of her marriage to Chuck Mitchell. According to Karen O'Brien, the line 'king in a tenement castle / Lately he's taken to painting the pastel walls brown' is 'a literal description of the apartment which they'd

decorated together, in a building known locally as the Castle'.<sup>36</sup> The B-side of the album consists of five songs that are mainly centred on oceanic themes.

'The Dawntreader', the second track on Side 2, opens with a description of an underwater world.<sup>37</sup> What is significant here is Mitchell's creation of another world, through the use of oceanic images, which constantly defies our perception of the familiar. Throughout the song she offers listeners an imaginary world, the boundaries of which are quite vague. The lyrics consist primarily of images of colours and fluids:

Peridots and periwinkle blue medallions  
Gilded galleons spilled across the ocean floor  
Treasure somewhere in the sea and he will find where  
Never mind their questions there's no answer for  
The roll of the harbour wake  
The songs that the rigging makes  
The taste of the spray he takes  
...  
Mermaids live in colonies  
All his sea dreams come to me<sup>38</sup>

As these lines show, in the imaginary world depicted in 'The Dawntreader', there is no place for concreteness. Throughout the song, Mitchell abstracts each object by distorting it with colours and by burying it in the sea. For instance, all that remains from a galleon are golden scraps that are dispersed all around the ocean floor. Mitchell also creates an ambiguity in terms of the identities of the song's characters. According to

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<sup>36</sup> Karen O'Brien, *Shadows and Light: Joni Mitchell the Definitive Biography* (London: Virgin Books Ltd., 2001), p. 77.

<sup>37</sup> For the lyrics of 'The Dawntreader', see Appendix B1, pp. 281-2.

<sup>38</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'The Dawntreader', in *Song to a Seagull* (Reprise, 1968). From this point on, all lyrics are quoted from Mitchell's albums, namely *Song to a Seagull* (Reprise, 1968), *Ladies of the Canyon* (Reprise, 1970), *Blue* (Reprise, 1971), *For the Roses* (Asylum, 1972), *Court and Spark* (Asylum, 1974), *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (Asylum, 1975), unless otherwise indicated.



Whitesell, ‘the actual details of setting and character are dreamily indeterminate, so that the identities of “he”, “they”, and “me” are never precisely drawn’.<sup>39</sup> We are not given any clue about their appearance or what they are doing in life and where they are coming from. The only thing listeners know about the characters is that they are positioned in and on or by the sea. Parallel to this dream-like atmosphere, the song’s language also creates a fragmented linguistic structure. Many of its lines end incompletely, thereby manipulating the syntactic logic of language. As a result, as Whitesell puts it, ‘each line begins a new thought before the last one resolves, in the lulling rhythm of overlapping wavelets’.<sup>40</sup> I suggest that here Mitchell’s aim is to create a multilayered language through which she can reflect the ocean’s endlessness and pluralistic character.

In order to establish the significance of oceanic imagery to previously discussed notions of multiplicity as a feminine trait and theories of fluids, we need to return once more to Irigaray’s feminist theories. In her essay ‘The “Mechanics” of Fluids’, Irigaray criticizes Western science for being unable fully to develop a theory of *fluids*.<sup>41</sup> According to her, while *fluids* signify feminine pleasure and female expression, *solids* stand for the male logic that also defines the comprehensible language. She argues that it is the inseparability of rationality and solids that privileges, within a phallogocentric system, what is visible, erected, quantifiable and firm. Her claim is that ‘the whole psychic economy is organized in terms of the Phallus’.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, there is no place for the fluidity of the female in this economy. For Irigaray, one of the ways of creating a female symbolic for women is to devise a language that privileges fluidity by going beyond the

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<sup>39</sup> Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 68.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>41</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 106.

<sup>42</sup> Carolyn Burke, ‘Irigaray Through the Looking Glass’, p. 50.

boundaries of regular syntax. Mitchell's intention in the song 'The Dawntreader' to create an abstract world, and a language that resists the syntactic and grammatical structures of standard language, can be considered an example of what Irigaray defines as a feminine Symbolic.

The song 'Ladies of the Canyon', from the album of the same name, provides us with a different aspect of female multiplicity that bears an affinity with psychoanalytic theories. Even in the early 1970s, instead of merely documenting the experiences she went through as a woman, Mitchell sought ways as a songwriter to transform these experiences into an artistic practice. According to her, this is what distinguishes the practice of recording one's own experiences in the form of mere confessions from the act of artistic creation:

Art is artifice and it doesn't matter whose life I scraped to get that text. Of course, I have more access to my own. If you spend a lot of time alone, that's your major resource—your own experience. If I have a human revelation about myself, that's the kind of thing that inspires me to say, "There is a human element worthy of a song." It doesn't have to be very big. You can make a good play out of anything, including yourself. But song traditionally didn't carry these literary elements, and that's what my contribution to the songwriting form probably was, to bring songs closer to something like a good play. But I am not making these songs out of a need to confess to anyone; it's out of a need to create a story.<sup>43</sup>

If there is a common denominator in the majority of Mitchell's songs, it is that each has a story to tell. Mitchell even started to consider her songs as little plays, stating in another interview that she preferred to see herself both as a playwright and an actress. Although, as Whitesell points out, 'such theatrical metaphors do not appear explicitly

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<sup>43</sup> Joni Mitchell quoted in Michelle Mercer, *Will You Take Me as I am*, p. 46.

until [the early 1990s],<sup>44</sup> ever since the late 1960s Mitchell had been creating different personae, especially (although not exclusively) to reflect different modes of female subjectivity in her songs.

In the course of the song ‘Ladies of the Canyon’, Mitchell depicts three different women who live in a bohemian canyon.<sup>45</sup> The first of these women, Trina, is an artist who works in paint and fabrics. The second, Annie, is depicted with ‘cats and babies around her feet’. Being nurturing and home-loving, she lives in the kitchen and feeds the children and cats of the canyon. The last, Estrella, who is a circus girl, brings music to the canyon. Although, at least at first glance, ‘Ladies of the Canyon’ appears to be, as O’Brien puts it, ‘a series of character vignettes of life down among the women in the Laurel and the Topanga canyons of Los Angeles’,<sup>46</sup> my contention is that it may also be interpreted as a series of diary entries about Mitchell’s life, as can be seen below. Moreover, I would argue that the three women depicted in the song symbolize different aspects of Mitchell’s personal and artistic nature – as well as aspects of woman’s nature in a more general sense – that are equally important and should all be developed and explored in their multiplicity in order for female expression to be fully actualized.

At the end of 1968, Joni Mitchell and her then partner Graham Nash moved into a house on Laurel Canyon’s Lookout Mountain Road. Laurel Canyon, which was developed as a neighbourhood of Los Angeles, California, in the 1910s, and became an important part of counter-cultural activity in the late 1960s. Around this time, it also started to gain a reputation as one of rock music’s geographic epicentres, counting among its residents Mama Cass, David Crosby, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, Brian Wilson, Neil

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<sup>44</sup> Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 43.

<sup>45</sup> For the lyrics of ‘Ladies of the Canyon’, see Appendix B2, pp, 283-4.

<sup>46</sup> Lucy O’Brien, *Shadows and Light*, p. 110.

Young and Frank Zappa. Life in Laurel Canyon was communal. Most of its famous inhabitants sang their newly-written songs to each other and played on each other's records, some even living in each other's houses. Mitchell lived in a small house, painting pictures, writing songs, feeding her cats and cooking meals for her guests and partner. In this respect, I suggest that Mitchell portrays different aspects of herself through referencing the three female figures of 'Ladies of the Canyon'.

The first woman, Trina, represents Joni Mitchell the painter:

Trina wears her wampum beads  
She fills her drawing book with the line  
Sewing lace on windows' weeds  
And filigree on leaf and vine

Trina may arguably represent the artistic in women. Unlike 'great male artists', however, she is presented as more concrete and very much in touch with nature and her surroundings. Mitchell's lyrics are poetic, yet they employ words and expressions that still convey images of female domestic industriousness and practical work. So, Trina is described as wearing 'wampum beads', which evokes the world of native American Indians and draws parallels between their condition and that of women: on the one hand marginalised and deprived of their rights and freedoms, on the other hand still deeply attached to the natural world. Trina's art (further on in the song, Mitchell says that Trina 'weaves a pattern all her own') is described in a way far removed from the lofty language of most art books. Mitchell sings that 'she fills her drawing book with the line', and her art is also expressed through her hands 'sewing lace'. Yet, this image of female domestic work is not reductive, but creates beauty, 'lace', and 'filigree'. Whilst

money is far from Trina's mind ('Her coat's a secondhand one'), in the canyon this does not matter. She is still noble – a 'lady' whose attire is 'trimmed with antique luxury'.

The second woman, Annie, represents the nurturing side of Joni Mitchell:

Annie sits you down to eat  
She always makes you welcome in  
Cats and babies 'round her feet  
...  
She may bake some brownies today

Annie represents the caring and the maternal in women. Far from seeing in this aspect the reiteration of women's repression as housewives, in the haven women have created in the canyon Mitchell underlines its importance and reclaims women's humanity in any representation of the female self. Annie provides a firm point of reference, pointing to the possibilities inherent in a more matriarchal order where traditional domestic activities, such as cooking and baking, are no longer obligations and chores imposed by patriarchy, but expressions of female solidarity and support. Everyone can be sure of a warm welcome, and the cats and babies she cares for 'are all fat and none are thin'. It is important to note that these babies are not hers. In other words, the canyon can also be seen as an experiment in exploring a way of life different from the traditional nuclear family within the Symbolic order. Here women are mothers to each other's children.

The last woman, Estrella, represents Joni Mitchell the musician:

Estrella circus girl  
Comes wrapped in songs and gypsy shawls  
Songs like tiny hammers hurled  
At bevelled mirrors in empty halls  
...

[She] colors up the sunshine hours  
Pouring music down the canyon

Estrella is different from Trina and Annie – she comes wrapped in ‘gypsy shawls’ and is described as a ‘circus girl’. In other words, despite being a lady of the canyon – i.e. a facet of femininity like the other two already analysed above – she also conjures images of being an outsider, a wanderer, someone exotic and free-spirited, outside the norms. I would argue that this reflects the nature of music and the expressive freedom Mitchell finds within it. But music as symbolized by Estrella, whom Mitchell calls her ‘dear companion’, is not merely a source of comfort and self-expression. Estrella composes ‘songs like tiny hammers hurled / At bevelled mirrors in empty halls’. This image evokes the world of circuses and fairgrounds. In their hall of mirrors, people pay to see their image distorted in various ways, with amusing but also disconcerting effects. Crucially, these reflected images are fake: they are the product of a deliberate distortion engineered by variously curving the mirrors’ glass. This distortion, I would argue, reflects the distortion of women and femininity within the Symbolic order. Women cannot and should not recognise themselves in those images being imposed on them, hence Mitchell’s use of her songs as ‘tiny hammers hurled’ against those reflections to shatter them.

Thus ‘Ladies of the Canyon’ can be seen to operate within a mode of exploration of Mitchell’s self and of the position of women in general. The canyon comes to represent a possible ‘woman’s world’, which Mitchell invites women to experience to be themselves and to be free (‘Come out for a visit here / To be a lady of the canyon’). In this world, women would not have to deny or renounce any of the various sides that

constitute their self. Their multiplicity, their claim to be artists, mothers, lovers, would be embraced and seen as inherent to their womanliness.

Mitchell's use of the third-person pronoun (she) in 'Ladies of the Canyon' is also significant. Firstly, she employs "she" instead of the first-person pronoun ("I") despite potentially depicting an autobiographical persona, as I have discussed above. Secondly, although throughout the song Mitchell may well be portraying herself, the "she" of the song is not only one. We are introduced to three different "she"s who are differently named. As mentioned above, the three different personae of 'Ladies of the Canyon' are used to refer to one "I", signifying different aspects of the same person who sings the song. However, throughout the song, this "I" is never revealed explicitly. Keeping in mind Irigaray's argument that '[the woman] is indefinitely other in herself',<sup>47</sup> I propose that this usage characterizes the fragmentation of the self. From Irigaray's point of view, a woman cannot be identified either as one person or two (or, in this instance, three). Parallel to the multiplicity of woman's *jouissance* and that of her genitals, her identity is also fragmented. Thus, the song 'Ladies of the Canyon' provides us with an image of femininity that can be read in parallel with what Irigaray suggests in terms of the multiplicity of female identity. Thirdly, the use of the feminine personal pronoun is further mirrored and emphasized by Mitchell's use of the possessive pronoun 'her' throughout the lyrics. This iteration reaches its peak in the lines:

Trina takes her paints and her threads  
And she weaves a pattern all her own  
Annie bakes her cakes and her breads  
And she gathers flowers for her home  
For her home she gathers flowers

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<sup>47</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 28.

I believe that this insistent repetition of the female possessive pronoun is not coincidental. ‘Ladies of the Canyon’ can be read in its entirety as a ‘tiny hammer’ hurled against the world of the male Symbolic, as a possible alternative. It is also, crucially, an alternative conceived by a female artist, on the basis of her understanding and appreciation of the female condition; and it is with pride that Mitchell – speaking as an artist and as a woman – calls it “hers”.

The remainder of this section will focus not only on multiplicity but on the role of mystic personae in Mitchell’s work, through an examination of the song ‘Shadows and Light’. Throughout her career, Mitchell created several mystic personae,<sup>48</sup> the “child of God” of the song ‘Woodstock’ (1970) being perhaps the most famous example. Her adaptations of the poems of W. B. Yeats (‘Slouching towards Bethlehem’, 1991) and William Blake (‘Taming the Tiger’, 1998) prove that Mitchell’s interest in creating a visionary discourse is evident not only in her early career, but also in her later work. ‘Shadows and Light’ differs from the other songs in which a mystic persona speaks, by virtue of its feminist criticism of the patriarchal system. In this song we hear Mitchell use a style of language resembling that of a preacher; evocative, hypnotic, and explicit in its biblical references (God, Devil, and Cain).<sup>49</sup>

Throughout ‘Shadows and Light’, Mitchell presents listeners with a series of binary oppositions, including blindness/sight, night/day, black/white and wrong/right. What is worthy of our attention here is her problematization of such dichotomous structures: throughout the song, she consistently stresses complementariness and coexistence of what the Symbolic order considers instead as opposites. By doing so, she creates an

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<sup>48</sup> For a discussion of the significance of mystic personae in Mitchell’s work, see Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, pp. 68-9.

<sup>49</sup> For the lyrics of ‘Shadows and Light’, see Appendix B3, pp. 285-6.



economy in which the term within the pair that has consistently stood for negativity and passivity is now restored to an equal position to the term traditionally valued more positively. As a result, she forms a ground on which the term that has no identity becomes the subject. In other words, in the song, the binary system which is related to the pairing ‘man/woman’, and with it the value-laden assumptions that underpin such a system, are critiqued and cast into doubt. I suggest that this can be read as an attempt to create a new system that opposes the androcentric Symbolic order. Mitchell’s manipulations continue with a series of paradoxical images such as ‘The perils of benefactors/the blessings of parasites’. According to Whitesell, ‘such paradoxical images tell of primal forces locked in struggle’.<sup>50</sup> However, what Mitchell does here is manipulate what the Symbolic order dictates, by showing oppositional elements not as mutually exclusive, but as overlapping.

In ‘Shadows and Light’, Mitchell uses repetition to place an emphasis on the illusory and misleading nature of dichotomous structures. In this respect, the words ‘blindness’, ‘night’ and ‘wrong’ are repeated several times, dominating each stanza of the song respectively. The song itself opens with the lines ‘Every picture has its shadows / And it has some source of light / Blindness, blindness and sight’. Therefore, from the very beginning Mitchell presents a more complex and multi-layered understanding of reality, in which there are no clear boundaries between “truth” and “falsehood”, or between “right” and “wrong”: reality is always an inescapable combination of both. This syntactic formulation continues in the second stanza as Mitchell sings ‘Suntans in reservation dining rooms / Pale miners in their lantern rays / Night, night and day’. Besides the word night, the word ‘day’ is also repeated at the end of the second stanza. I

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<sup>50</sup> Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 69.

suggest that Mitchell's use of repetition creates a multiplicity in the song's poetic language, inviting reflection about the basis of, and assumptions behind, values presented as unquestionably "given". Thus, in 'Shadows and Light', binary oppositions are not only problematized but also used to create a language that can be related to the female body as described in Irigaray's theories.

At the end of each verse, Mitchell puts forward an uncompromising critique of the patriarchal system. From a feminist point of view, her choice of employing a mystic persona to be able to criticize the system she is dealing with seems to be an obvious one. According to Irigaray, mystical experience signifies the loss of the rule of consciousness by sinking it into a dark night. It is where the subject/object opposition disappears. Irigaray claims that 'this is the place where "she"— and in some cases he, if he follows "her" lead—speaks about the dazzling glare which comes from the source of light that has been logically repressed, about "subject" and "Other" flowing out into an embrace of fire that mingles one term into another, about contempt for form as such, about mistrust for understanding as an obstacle along the path of *jouissance* and mistrust for the dry desolation of reason'.<sup>51</sup> As a result, it provides woman, whose subjectivity is denied by the patriarchal discourse, with the possibility of speaking freely. For Irigaray, mystical experience is 'the only place in the history of the West in which woman speaks and acts so publicly'.<sup>52</sup>

As Whitesell argues, in 'Shadows and Light', 'the poetic discourse climbs to a metaphysical plane, patterning the successive verses around the figures of "devil,"

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<sup>51</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 191.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

“god,” and “man”<sup>53</sup>. Mitchell firstly sings of the ‘Devil of cruelty / Drawn to all things / Devil of delight / Mythical devil of the ever-present laws / Governing blindness, blindness and sight’. However, later in the song the above lines are almost exactly mirrored in Mitchell’s depiction of the devil’s opposite, God, when she sings: ‘God of cruelty / Drawn to all things / God of delight / Mythical god of the everlasting laws / Governing day, day and night’. Finally, it is the turn of ‘Man of cruelty-mark of Cain / Drawn to all things / Man of delight-born again, born again / Man of the laws, the ever-broken laws / Governing wrong, wrong and right’. Her lines suggest that devil, God and man can all be sources of both “cruelty” and “delight”. Despite “ever-present laws” and “everlasting laws” which impose all dichotomies by rejecting all differences, in man these laws are “ever-broken”. It is these laws – which are marked by phallic devils, gods and men – that create the Other and position it outside representation. However, as the song in its entirety strives to emphasize, they are “mythical” laws that have no real grounding and predominantly serve to divide and separate something from its “other”. In her critique of philosophical logic and psychoanalysis, Irigaray similarly critiqued binary oppositions. According to her, only a new fluid logic which can be related to mystical discourse can have the potential of ‘destabilizing the hegemony of rigid boundaries with their hierarchies of domination’.<sup>54</sup>

As the analysis of the songs ‘The Dawntreader’, ‘Ladies of the Canyon’ and ‘Shadows and Light’ reveals, Joni Mitchell’s lyrics may be read as a demonstration of a link between text and the female body. What bears importance here is this link’s potential to manipulate the well-established rules of patriarchal language by inscribing the multiple characteristics of the female body into text. In this respect, I suggest that the multiplicity

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<sup>53</sup> Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 69.

<sup>54</sup> Hanneke Canters and Grace M. Jantzen, *Forever Fluid*, p. 26.

observed in Mitchell's lyrics and mystical discourse discussed above can be considered as a feminist gesture to create a feminine linguistic locus.

#### **2.4. 'Songs like tiny hammers hurled at bevelled mirrors in empty halls': Joni Mitchell the composer**

In an interview in 1996, Joni Mitchell described herself as a 'musical explorer'.<sup>55</sup> She argues that this is what distinguishes her not only from other female musicians, but also from well-known male musicians of her time, such as Bob Dylan:

If you want to be a songwriter and see what the standard is, you have to take a look at Dylan and me. Dylan tremendously upgraded the American pop song in terms of content, and I... well, musically I'm further out than Dylan, and as a result less popular. But I'm a musical explorer and not just a pop songwriter or an occasional writer of a song or half a song, like these other women.<sup>56</sup>

As a *musical explorer*, in her entire career Mitchell crossed genre boundaries, from folk to jazz and from world music to synthesized pop. Since she does not consider herself a pop songwriter, she aims to redefine whatever genre she chooses to explore through her innovative approach. In this respect, her harmonic language deserves particular attention. Mitchell's work is distinctive, among other aspects, for her tuning technique: instead of using the conventional tuning (E A D G B E), she composed most of her guitar-based songs using open or non-standard tunings. As she reveals, throughout her career she worked with more than 50 different tunings. This provided her with the possibility of exploring harmonies that were more varied and complex, giving rise to a multilayered musical language.

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<sup>55</sup>Joni Mitchell, interviewed by the magazine *Details* (July, 1996), at <http://www.jonimitchell.com/library/view.cfm?id=22> (last accessed 16/11/2009).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

The modal harmonies of jazz and folk music, the complex harmonic language of Western classical composers such as Chopin, Debussy, Rachmaninov and Stravinsky, and also the sophisticated approach to songwriting by Tin Pan Alley composers were all important sources of influence for Mitchell's art. Perhaps because these influences point towards melodic, timbral and harmonic innovations, as a musician she has always tended to use chord structures that were relatively unconventional when considered within the context of the Anglo-American popular music scene. In addition, her work is dominated by the use of performing techniques signifying a musical multiplicity in terms of rhythm, tempo and vocals. Before exploring how multiplicity functions in Mitchell's selected songs, I shall suggest a possible link between Irigaray's theories and music. Following this, I will specify my particular research questions concerning Mitchell's music.

Although Irigaray's project does not concern music, according to her there is a relationship between woman's writing and music. Referring to Plato, she explains this as follows:

In Plato, there are two *mimeses*. To simplify: there is *mimesis* as production, which would lie more in the realm of music, and there is the *mimesis* that would be already caught up in a process of *imitation*, *specularization*, *adequation*, and *reproduction*. It is the second form that is privileged throughout the history of philosophy and whose effects/symptoms, such as latency, suffering, paralysis of desire, are encountered in hysteria. The first form seems always to have been repressed, if only because it was constituted as an enclave within a "dominant" discourse. Yet it is doubtless in the direction of, and on the basis of, that first *mimesis* that the possibility of a woman's writing may come about.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 131.

As can be understood from this statement, the musicality of language is vital in Irigaray's theory. One may further argue that, for Irigaray, music has potential as a medium in which the 'possibility of a woman's writing may come about'.<sup>58</sup> In other words, to her arguments, the moments when writing gives up meaning for musicality bear importance. However, she does not give readers a direct indication as to how music itself, as a language (i.e. as an embodied Symbolic construct), might be considered in the context of this feminist project. Here we can ask the following questions: can Irigaray's conceptualization of corporeal, sexual multiplicity trigger a distinct mode of writing, in other words, an *écriture féminine*<sup>59</sup> in music? Is it possible to analyse music with a method derived from Irigaray's theories? Can music be considered as a textual medium reflecting a feminine corporeal plurality through its constitutive elements?

By focusing on Irigaray's theory of multiplicity, this section aims to suggest a possible way of reading music to answer these questions. In order to do this, throughout the following music analysis I shall examine ways in which Mitchell creates a multilayered musical language. As explained in the main introduction for the analysis of the songs 'The Dawntreader' and 'Ladies of the Canyon', I will take Whitesell's transcriptions of the chords of these songs as my reference point.<sup>60</sup> The discussion will be built up by degrees. I shall firstly demonstrate how Mitchell creates a multilayered musical language in 'The Dawntreader' by benefiting from possibilities offered by modality and tonality. Following this, towards the end of the analysis of 'Ladies of the Canyon', the examination of Mitchell's vocal timbre with regard to its addition to the text's

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>59</sup> For a fuller explanation of *écriture féminine* in theoretical and creative terms, see the following chapter on Kate Bush.

<sup>60</sup> For the chords of 'The Dawntreader', see Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 132, and for the chords of 'Ladies of the Canyon', see p. 128.

multiplicity will be brought into discussion. Finally, I shall explore how the rhythmic structure of the song 'Shadows and Light' enriches Mitchell's multilayered text.

'The Dawntreader' starts with a figuration played by guitar consisting of the notes of the chord D minor 9. However, in the third bar Mitchell plays a D major chord. Thus, she alters the third note of the chord D minor from F<sup>b</sup> to F#. As a result, in this bar, the song's tonal centre seems to change from D minor to D major. As Whitesell shows in his analysis, a modal reading of these passages suggests that the song opens in D Dorian. However, the D major chord heard in the third bar allows Mitchell to change the mode from D Dorian to D Mixolydian, which differs from D Dorian only with its raised, rather than lowered third (F#).

The song's first verse (bar 5) begins with an open D (D5). Since this chord lacks its third degree, which is the determinant note in terms of harmonic centre and the chord's modality, as Whitesell puts it, 'at the portal of each verse [it] encapsulates the tonal equipoise [Mitchell] has constructed between two modes, one given initiatory, the other cadential importance'.<sup>61</sup> Following this, in the sixth bar, a D minor7 chord is heard. This chord suggests a return to the opening, D minor or the Dorian mode which dominates the following four bars of the song, since we hear the notes F natural and C natural in every chord (bars 7-10). However, in the eleventh bar, Mitchell arrives back at D major or the Mixolydian mode by way of the chord D (Figure 2.1). Although throughout bars 11-30 we are mainly in D/ D Mixolydian, in bar 34 of the song the chord B<sup>b</sup> major 7 is introduced. Whitesell argues that this chord is 'borrowed from the Aeolian'.<sup>62</sup> The reason for this is as follows: as noted, the song is dominated by two harmonic centres: D

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<sup>61</sup> Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 131.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

minor and D major (or D Dorian and D Mixolydian). When we consider each note of the chord B $\flat$  major7 with regard to its relationship to D minor or D Dorian, due to the note B $\flat$ , we are either in D minor (natural) or D Aeolian which would yield the notes of D, E, F, G, A, B $\flat$ , C, D. Thus, at this point in the song, the music's polymodality is even further emphasized (Figure 2.2).

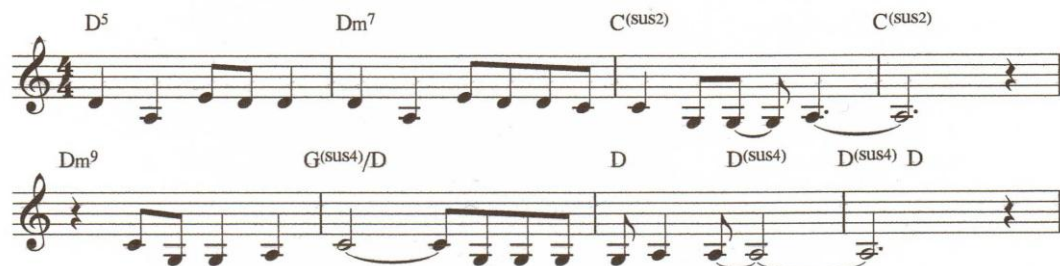


Figure 2.1. Bars 5-12 of 'The Dawntreader'

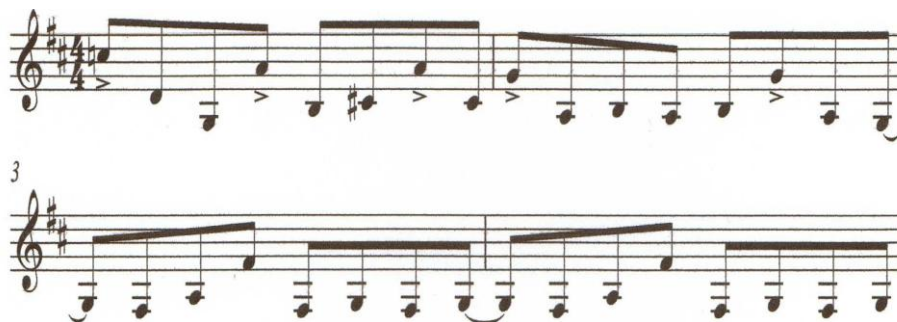


Figure 2.2. Bars 31-35 of 'The Dawntreader'

Mitchell returns to the 'home' tonal centre, D minor or D Dorian, in bar 34 with the note F $\natural$  forming part of the chord G7sus. Although throughout the rest of the song we are mainly in D Dorian, she ends the song with a major chord of D which suggests the Mixolydian. As this brief analysis reveals, throughout 'The Dawntreader', Mitchell oscillates back and forth between two different modalities, creating a kind of modal multiplicity. Bearing in mind that Irigaray redefines the female body's sexual excess to construct a narrative contesting the male economy by celebrating its multiplicity, 'The Dawntreader' with its dual modality can be seen as one example of the reflection of female sexuality (as theorized by Irigaray) in a single song.



Coming to ‘Ladies of the Canyon’, what Mitchell does throughout this song is also illuminating in terms of the issues of multiplicity and femininity. She starts the song in A minor; on the third beat of the first bar, the chord changes to A major. Since the chord D is not introduced until the third bar, throughout the first two bars, the song sounds as if it has two different tonal centres, A minor and A major. However, at the beginning of the third bar, a D major chord is heard, defining the song’s ‘home’ tonality to be D. Although an A major chord is played in the first bar, the A minor chord heard at the beginning of the song (because of the note C $\flat$ ) might suggest the song’s tonal centre to be D Mixolydian. By altering this mode’s 7<sup>th</sup> degree from C $\flat$  to C $\sharp$ , Mitchell creates an unexpected switch between Mixolydian and A major. Therefore, with the beginning of the song, she starts to construct a multilayered harmonic language based on modal and tonal mixture (Figure 2.3).



**Figure 2.3.** The opening bars of ‘Ladies of the Canyon’

The song’s first phrase, at bar 5 (‘Trina wears her wampum beads, she fills her drawing book with line’), opens with the chord D. Since this chord is introduced following the chords A major<sup>9</sup> and D (4), it creates a strong tonal feel. However, this does not last long, as the prominence of C $\flat$  in the following chord, A minor<sup>13</sup>/C, takes us back to D Mixolydian. Throughout bars 7-8 and 11-12, the modal feel, through a plagal cadence, is further emphasized in Mitchell’s use of a G major<sup>7</sup>/B chord before arriving at D (4)

(Figure 2.4). Thus, throughout the first fourteen bars, ‘Ladies of the Canyon’ goes back and forth between tonality and modality. According to Whitesell, what is more remarkable in terms of this mixture is Mitchell’s use of ‘two options together’.<sup>63</sup> At the end of the third phrase (‘Vine and leaf are filigree, and her coat is a second hand one’), while a C natural (as pedal note) is heard on the guitar, we hear a C sharp in the vocal line. Thus, at this moment Mitchell employs the Mixolydian’s lowered 7<sup>th</sup> and D major’s raised 7<sup>th</sup> at the same time. Whitesell claims that ‘[t]his simultaneous cross-relation is so artfully spaced that it sounds quite natural— though it is certainly climactic, triggering as it does a move in a chromatic direction’.<sup>64</sup> Although it sounds natural, this usage creates an ambiguity in terms of the prevailing mode. The melodic lines of the song are, in fact, suitable for a very simple harmonic structure. However, Mitchell’s continuous mixing of tonality and modality throughout the song arguably makes ‘Ladies of the Canyon’ an early example of her role as a “musical explorer”.



**Figure 2.4.** Bars 5-8 of ‘Ladies of the Canyon’

Turning now to Mitchell’s vocal delivery, from beginning to end, Mitchell sings ‘Ladies of the Canyon’ with an unvaried vocal timbre.<sup>65</sup> This decision may reflect the argument that each one of these ladies signifies Mitchell herself. However, in contrast to this constant vocal timbre, at the end of each verse she creates a vocal multiplicity by multi-tracking her voice. Throughout phrase 5, we hear Mitchell using her voice in three different registers (low, middle and high). What is more striking here is Mitchell’s employment of sevenths to harmonize the melodic line. Her use of this dissonant

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>65</sup> See the fifth track on the CD accompanying this thesis.

harmonic interval may be read in parallel with Irigaray's claim that '[woman] is indefinitely other in herself'.<sup>66</sup> By using this interval, Mitchell appears to emphasize different aspects of her personality depicted in the lyrics of the song and how *she is other in herself*.

'Shadows and Light' also provides evidence for how a multilayered musical language dominates Mitchell's work. She starts the song by singing *a cappella* in D. The opening chords, G/A/G/A/D, created by backing vocals (while she sings 'Blindness, blindness and sight') also define the song's tonality as D major. Nevertheless, Mitchell's use of parallel bare fourths and fifths throughout the song suggests that the music is primarily modal and we are in D Ionian. However, on the 14<sup>th</sup> bar, we hear the chord G/C. C natural, used as a pedal note, places this chord in Mixolydian mode (Figure 2.5). Following this bar, Mitchell continues to use the note C natural also in the vocal line. Yet, starting with the second half of bar 19, we hear her singing the melody using F<sup>♮</sup> instead of F#. By doing this, she changes the song's mode, this time, from Mixolydian to Dorian. Although the song has a polymodal harmonic base, at the second half of bar 23 Mitchell leaves modality for tonality by using an implied dominant seventh chord (G/C#/E) resolving on D minor. Following this, the end of bar 25 suggests B Mixolydian, with the notes D# and G# heard in the vocal line (Figure 2.6). However, throughout bars 33-36, listeners hear the synthesiser playing the notes of D Dorian in parallel fourths and fifths. Thus, in 'Shadows and Light' Mitchell employs a multilayered harmonic texture by mixing two different modes (Mixolydian, Dorian) with D major and D minor.

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<sup>66</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 28.

Figure 2.5. Bars 1-16 ‘Shadows and Light’

Figure 2.6. Bars 25-27 of ‘Shadows and Light’

Aside from the harmonic structure of ‘Shadows and Light’, its rhythmic structure is also worthy of attention since the latter, as in Nyro’s case, is dominated by the use of different time signatures.<sup>67</sup> The song starts in 4/4 time. At the beginning of the second melodic motif (bar 5), the time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/4. Mitchell employs this time signature (3/4) for only two bars; at bar 7, she returns to 4/4 to end the second melodic motif. 3/4 reappears at the beginning of bar 13. However, in the following bar, Mitchell reverts to 4/4. Throughout the song, she goes back and forth between these two different time signatures (Figure 2.5). As a result, in ‘Shadows and Light’ the sense of tempo is disrupted. Although Mitchell sings the song without changing the tempo, in some bars listeners would hear it as being sung by using rubato. Using a single time signature would create a regular and consistent metrical pattern dominating a whole piece; however, Mitchell’s practice of mixing different time signatures gives her music

<sup>67</sup> See the sixth track on the CD accompanying this thesis.

an irregular rhythmic feel. This irregularity also supports the song's multilayered structure, this time in terms of rhythmic structure and pulse.

Mitchell's backing vocal arrangements indicate 'Shadows and Light's multilayered language. Although she starts the song *a cappella*, with the introduction of the second musical phrase we hear Mitchell's voice multi-tracked. This technique provides her with the possibility of singing simultaneously in different registers. For instance, from bars 5-7, listeners hear her singing in the lower and upper registers at the same time (between the notes lower E and upper B). Although sometimes her voice is multi-tracked within the limits of an octave, her use of 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> intervals (for instance, in bars 19-20) results in music with a distinctive vocal multiplicity. Mitchell's employment of complex backing vocals reaches its peak between bars 90 and 96. Throughout these bars, she sings three different melodies in three different registers simultaneously. At the same time, by using a call and response-like technique, she creates an intricate choral sound. This choral sound supports not only the song's multilayered musical language but also the mystical atmosphere that dominates the lyrics.

As the analysis of these three songs reveals, mixing more than one mode within a single song is one of Mitchell's favourite practices as a songwriter. Here, it should be stressed that the history of popular music offers many examples of songs composed using more than one mode. However, as Whitesell puts it, 'though modal mixture does occur [elsewhere] in popular music around the beginning of Mitchell's career, she makes use of it to an unprecedented degree'.<sup>68</sup> In other words, the entire *oeuvre* of Mitchell is dominated by a multilayered harmonic language that may therefore be considered one

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<sup>68</sup> Lloyd Whitesell states that 'out of 152 songs written or co-written by Joni Mitchell, only twenty-two are in one pure mode with no modal mixture'. For further discussion, see Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 127.

of the most distinctive characteristics of her musical writing. Besides her harmonic language, as the songs ‘Ladies of the Canyon’ and ‘Shadows and Light’ demonstrate, multiplicity can also be discerned in Mitchell’s use of vocal register. Moreover, as observed in the analysis of ‘Shadows and Light’, using more than one time signature in a single song is a common practice not just for Nyro, as established in the previous chapter, but for Mitchell as well. In this respect, recalling Irigaray’s theorization of the multiplicity of a woman’s body and her search for a new language through which this plurality is scripted and celebrated, I would argue that Mitchell’s writing represents one of the most significant examples of female writing in popular music through the consistency with which this plurality is mapped on to the realm of artistic creation.

### **2.5. ‘She weaves a pattern all her own’: Joni Mitchell the painter**

Even though McClary states that ‘[i]t is quite rare for women singers to contribute so much to the composition of their materials, and it is almost unheard of them to acquire the skills required for production’,<sup>69</sup> Joni Mitchell, from the beginning of her career, always composed and arranged her music and wrote her lyrics. In addition, following her debut album, she has appeared as the producer of most of her records. Furthermore, as a painter, she drew many of her album covers and created the conceptual framework of the photographs (mostly taken by Joel Bernstein) that appeared either on the covers or inside sleeves of her records. Bearing this in mind, I would argue that both her paintings and the photographs used in her albums should be considered a part of her artistic output. Prior to concluding this chapter, then, I shall briefly discuss the cover art of the albums from which the three songs selected for analysis in this chapter are taken.

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<sup>69</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings*, p. 153.

*Song to a Seagull*, which includes ‘The Dawntreader’, further confirms the oceanic themes that characterize this song and which were analyzed in the lyric section above and in the discussion of multiplicity theorised by Irigaray. The front cover of the album shows a highly colourful and swirling drawing, characteristic of the psychedelic era, which carries on to the back cover too. In this cover, much of what Mitchell sings about throughout the album is visible: flowers, cacti, tree branches and birds. In other words, what we see here is nature in all its glory and colours. Importantly, it also includes a female element: a woman drawn in profile, with long flowing hair (into which Mitchell also inserts her name), a very ornate headdress and an equally elaborate robe. This colourful exuberance spills into a seascape. Here we can observe a boat sailing against a spectacular sunrise. The rays of the sun are drawn as fanning out and, seemingly from the sea itself, a large number of seagulls, or seabirds, fill the sky and arrange themselves to form the letters of the album title (Figure 2.7).



**Figure 2.7.** The cover art for the album *Song to a Seagull*

The sense of freedom, of light and colour conveyed by these images of nature and the sea is set in sharp contrast to city life, shown by means of an actual photograph. On the album front cover, in between the flurry of flowers, we can barely make out its presence

and content, whereas a larger version of the same inset picture appears in the centre of the album back cover. Inside it, it is now possible to see a photograph of Mitchell herself, carrying her guitar and walking under an umbrella. She is walking down a small city street, perhaps an alleyway, strewn with rubbish bins. Her umbrella is the only colourful part of this photograph, which is otherwise grey and drab (Figure 2.7).

Recalling the discussion on Irigaray's oceanic imagery to signify women's multiplicity and fluidity, I suggest that several features of Mitchell's cover art for *Songs to a Seagull* lend themselves to a reading consistent with my proposed arguments. Starting with the album front cover, the roundel which contains Mitchell's urban photograph is barely discernible. This is first of all due to its size but also to the fact that it is completely surrounded by the larger, colourful and luxuriant flowers and foliage, which then go on to spill into the sea. I suggest that this may be taken to mean both that Mitchell sees herself and her life firmly as part of nature, but also as a small part of a much larger whole that always surrounds one's life. It is accessible and reachable if one is willing to keep herself open, as women are able to do, owing to the impossibility of being defined, and fully expressing the multiple features of their self, under the normative oneness of the Symbolic order.

On the album back cover, the larger roundel containing Mitchell's photograph in the city is also completely encircled by nature and its colours. We see a peacock too, drawn in bright colours, gazing inside the roundel and at Mitchell herself. Despite her dark and almost derelict immediate surroundings, with her red umbrella and her music, symbolized by her guitar, Mitchell seems to depict hope and resilience. Although she finds herself in such a gloomy environment, the image appears to suggest that she is



trying to hold on to beauty, to her dreams and also to her female subjectivity within the concreteness of man's phallogocentric world. In this sense, I argue that the juxtaposition of this photograph, which is the only element with definite boundaries on the cover of *Song to a Seagull*, and the overlapping and boundless painting and line drawing of nature, the figure of the woman and the sea, further emphasize the contrast between them and the different approach and understanding of life that they represent. This emphasis is further strengthened by the lack of colour and life in the photograph – which, save for Mitchell, depicts a deserted, almost abandoned world – placed alongside and surrounded by the joyful potentiality of an alternative way of life. A life that women, by trying to express the multiplicity posited by Irigaray to denote their self and gender, can conceive of and aspire to.

As regards *Ladies of the Canyon*, which contains the eponymous song analyzed in this chapter, a pencil drawing of Joni Mitchell is on display, as well as a colourful fragment of landscape scenery (Figure 2.8). What is notable about this drawing is, first of all, its emphasis on the incompleteness of Mitchell's body. The cover presents a sitting Joni Mitchell figure which is only partially drawn. It is perhaps even quite difficult to define it as an illustration of the human body.<sup>70</sup> In other words, the body we see is not a complete body. Likewise, the face we see is not a complete face. Thus, she who is seen on the cover quite literally does not offer a complete picture. What is obvious is the fact that she is not a complete object. Like her body, her desire—if it exists—is also out of our gaze. We may even suggest that there is no such concept as *her desire*, since we are not able to see or touch it. It is not possible to determine whether she is dressed or not. However, this does not make the drawing a nude. Because the body she has is not a

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<sup>70</sup> Here it is helpful to recall Irigaray's claim that 'the being that is sexualized female in and through discourse is (...) a place for the deposit of the remainders produced by the operation of language. For this to be the case, woman has to remain a body without organs'. See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 90.

proper body, her nudity signifies nothing sexual. It only emphasises how that body is defined by its absence.

On the one hand, this drawing exemplifies what prompted Lacan, following Freud, to claim that women are excluded from the Symbolic order.<sup>71</sup> At least at first sight, on the cover of the album we see a woman hidden under the gaze of patriarchal society. She is the representative of everything the Symbolic dictates, or imposes on women. The body exposed on the cover is quite different from the well-shaped male body that Western culture has glorified. It is not erect, it is amorphous. It is not clear where it starts or where it ends. It does not have limits. Its relation to time and space is indeterminable, since it is positioned nowhere definitive.



**Figure 2.8.** The cover art for the album *Ladies of the Canyon*

<sup>71</sup> For more on this point, see Jacques Lacan, 'God and the Jouissance of The Woman', in *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 144.

On the other hand, I propose that the same drawing reveals many aspects of female sexuality as discussed by Irigaray. First of all, what we have in front of us is a limitless figure. It represents everything that the Symbolic order rejects. It is neither one nor two bodies. As the absence of some of its contours symbolizes, it is an endless figure. Irigaray argues that a woman's lips prevent her body from ever being completely closed. Moreover, because of the openness of the two lips, this always leaves a 'passage from the inside out, from the outside in'.<sup>72</sup>

The drawn female figure unveils what has been veiled throughout the centuries. It makes the invisible perceptible. Here one can ask: what is meant by the 'veiled' or 'invisible'? In this context, the invisible is what the Symbolic refuses to see or acknowledge. In other words, it is everything that distinguishes the female body or desire from the male body or desire. What is seen here is the figure of a woman which is hidden in the body-like shape of a woman. As underlined by the contrast between where she stands and the adjoining colourful image of the landscape, which Mitchell describes as being the view from the window of her house in Laurel Canyon, she is positioned outside the material or Symbolic world. Thus, the drawing offers us two different worlds. If one is the phallogentric Symbolic world, then we can consider the other to be the female Symbolic.

In this respect, I might suggest that the drawn female figure represents the forgotten passage that links everything. Toril Moi, in interpreting Irigaray's arguments about women's position within the Symbolic, argues that

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<sup>72</sup>Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 210. See also Hanneke Canters and Grace M. Jantzen, *Forever Fluid*, p. 121.

...if patriarchy sees women as occupying a marginal position within the symbolic order, then it can construe them as a *limit* or border-line of that order... women will then come to represent the necessary frontier between man and chaos, but because of their very marginality they will also always seem to recede into and merge with the chaos of the outside... They will share in the disconcerting properties of *all* frontiers: they will be neither inside nor outside, neither known nor unknown.<sup>73</sup>

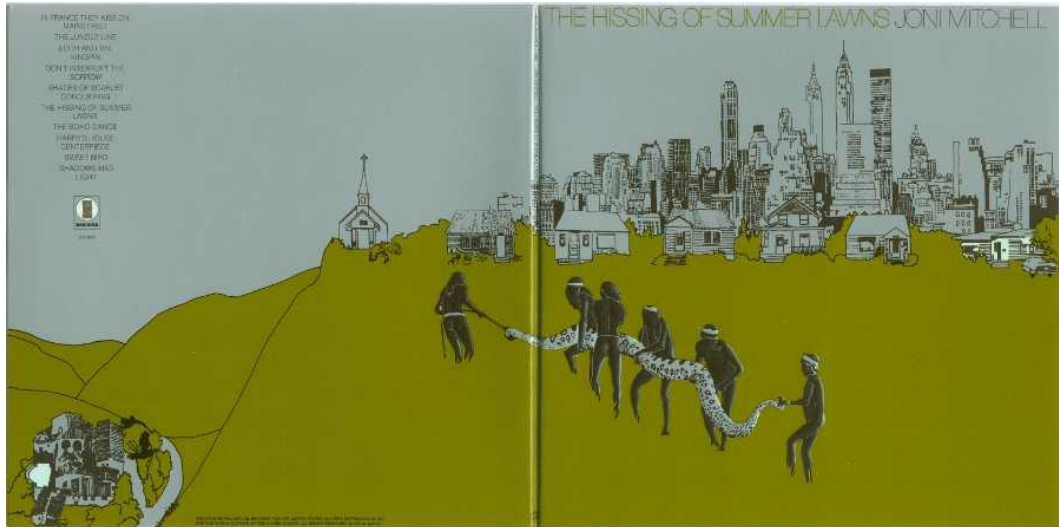
The position of the female body seen on the cover of *Ladies of the Canyon* is very similar to the position of women within the patriarchy as described by Moi. Everything is intertwined within her: exterior, interior, outside, inside. I propose that this drawing, with its emphasis on the plural characteristics of the female body and the duality of the phallogentric world and the female Symbolic, strengthens the above argument that the application of Irigaray's theories to Mitchell's work may give rise to a reading of popular music emphasizing a kind of difference between male and female expression.

Finally, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, which includes the song 'Shadows and Light', also has an original artwork created by Mitchell herself, which extends to both the front and back cover (Figure 2.9). The front cover depicts the outskirts of a cityscape, from its skyscrapers in the distance, to the last of its houses already surrounded by green grass and the countryside. To the far right, one of the houses is coloured in blue. In the foreground, an image in stark contrast to the architecture of the city straddles the front and back cover of the album. Six black figures, depicted seemingly half-naked, with long hair and white headbands, are seen handling a very long and large snake. Since the head of the snake appears to be gripped in the rope held by the male figure in front,

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<sup>73</sup> Toril Moi, 'Feminist, Female, Feminine', in *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, edited by Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (New York: Blackwell, 1997), p. 112.

whilst the tail is supported by the last of the six figures, it appears that the snake is in the process of being moved in the direction of the city.



**Figure 2.9.** The cover art for the album *Hissing of Summer Lawns*

Several readings of this image are possible. The snake may be interpreted as symbolizing nature and the natural world, alongside the male figures, whose attire seems to resemble that of native or indigenous people of some kind. This reading could suggest that, since the idea that cities are outside nature, and that by living in an urban sprawl man somehow detaches from and elevates himself over nature, is illusory, Mitchell may be emphasizing both this fallacy and the importance of our links with the natural world. Another possible reading is that of the snake as a phallic symbol, or as representing sin and temptation. A third reading, however, could be hypothesized recalling the word ‘hissing’ of the album title, which also brings to mind snakes. In the song ‘Hissing of Summer Lawns’, Mitchell sings of the ‘golden prison’<sup>74</sup> in which a woman lives under the controlling gaze of her man. Here, ‘From her window sill’ the woman can ‘see the blue pools in the squinting sun / And hear the hissing of summer lawns’. As O’Brien suggests, the hissing sound would be the noise produced by

<sup>74</sup> Joni Mitchell. ‘Hissing of Summer Lawns’, in the album *Hissing of Summer Lawns* (Asylum, 1975).

sprinklers<sup>75</sup> watering the grass of these expensive mansions, which in turn embody the prison in which women find themselves under the Symbolic order, stifled and confined by the oneness of phallogentric society, as discussed by Irigaray.

In a corner of the album back cover, we see one such mansion, with its pool visible in blue. This shade of blue is identical to the one in which Mitchell painted what is, according to O'Brien, her own house<sup>76</sup> on the opposite side of the cover. In light of the discussion that follows below, I suggest that this may be taken as drawing a parallel between the situation of the wealthy woman in the song, and that of Mitchell as a woman: their social status may be different, yet as women they both find themselves constrained and controlled in the expression of their subjectivity and self.

On the inner sleeve of the album, we now come across a photograph of Mitchell herself, clad in a bikini (Figure 2.10). The very same lines of the lyrics of 'The Hissing of Summer Lawns' mentioned above are reproduced here. Therefore, it becomes clear that Mitchell is depicted in one of these 'blue pools', that is, in a position similar to that of the woman described in the song's lyrics: controlled by a man, by 'her master', who 'put up a barbed wire fence / To keep out the unknown'. In the photograph, Mitchell cuts a lonely figure, with her eyes closed and isolated in her muffled and rarefied silence, with only the sound of the 'hissing summer lawns' to remind her of life on the outside. Yet, recalling Irigaray's emphasis on oceanic themes and fluidity to symbolize the multiplicity and openness of the female sexuality, the fact that Mitchell is seen immersed in water and the lines 'She could see the blue pools in the squinting sun' may

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<sup>75</sup> See Karen O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, p. 157.

<sup>76</sup> See Karen O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, p. 157.

also come to signify hope and the possibility of resistance. Women’s multiplicity can never be fully stifled. It survives in the Symbolic order, even if only within isolated blue pools (a metaphor for women themselves, perhaps). And within her confined space, her ‘pool’, woman also sees other women in her same situation, under the glaring light of the Symbolic, and knows she is ultimately not alone.



**Figure 2.10.** Joni Mitchell in the booklet of *Hissing of Summer Lawns*

It is significant that the mansion with the pool appearing on the album back cover is shown as completely detached from the city in the background, and also that the indigenous figures appear to be moving the snake in a position opposite to it. Perhaps, the people who inhabit these houses, with their ‘blue pools’ and their materialistic and hypocritical life, are bound to remain outside spectators and can neither understand nor experience nature and real feelings. However, the snake also appears to be carried in a certain direction in Mitchell’s artwork for the album: to the left of the main buildings that constitute the city, we see a standalone church, again detached and distinct. The male figures and the snake they carry appear to form a diagonal line heading toward the church itself.

Recalling the lyric analysis of ‘Shadows and Light’, which was based on Mitchell’s critique of the binary oppositions and dichotomous structures imposed by male patriarchal language, and also employed a mystic discourse, on the basis of the theories proposed by Irigaray I argue that the cover art of *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* is quite emblematic. The Symbolic order, here embodied by the city, and nature are not seen by Mitchell as oppositional elements, and their dichotomy is presented as a false one. In her artwork, Mitchell assigns much more space to nature and its wide expanses of green grass, manipulating the primacy traditionally assigned to ‘reason’ over nature within the Symbolic, and attempts to redress and reverse it. The imagery of the snake and the indigenous people is also quite effective as a critique of such binary oppositions, in its stark contrast between primitiveness on the one hand, and the modern image embodied by the city skyscrapers on the other.

Finally, as regards Mitchell’s use of mystical discourse in such a critique, I believe that the fact that the snake seems to be moving in the direction of the church on the album back cover, is also worthy of attention. Irigaray argued that mystical experience and mystical discourse allow women freedom of expression by removing the opposition between subject and object and giving voice to a female fluid logic that has the potential to destabilize the firm boundaries of the Symbolic. By reclaiming a place for nature – and by extension for women – ‘against the dry desolation of reason’ in androcentric society, as argued by Irigaray in her theory, women can articulate their subjectivities, in the hope that each of their ‘blue pools’ may merge together and form a boundless sea.



## 2.6. Conclusion

The themes of multiplicity in Mitchell's work are not limited to the songs analyzed in this chapter. Throughout her career, Mitchell composed the majority of her songs by mixing different modes, using more than one tonal centre, or blurring the boundaries between tonality and modality within the boundaries of a single song. Besides harmonic structure, multiplicity also appears in the rhythmic structures of her songs, as well as in her tempo fluctuations. In most of her songs, Mitchell employed more than one time signature to create a multilinear rhythmic organization. We may read this in parallel with Irigaray's arguments about fluids discussed above. In an interview from the late 1970s, Mitchell explains her reasons for using tempo fluctuations by saying 'I wanted everything floated around (...) anything linear had to go'.<sup>77</sup> Thus, for her there is a link between tempo fluctuation and linearity.

In 2002, Mitchell released her 18<sup>th</sup> studio album, *Travelogue*, which she planned as her final recorded work.<sup>78</sup> Throughout the album - where she is accompanied by a 70-piece orchestra, as well as jazz musicians Brian Blade, Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter and Kenny Wheeler - Mitchell revisited 22 songs selected from her entire catalogue. I maintain that Mitchell's choice of re-recording some of her songs with the accompaniment of a classical orchestra, thereby adding even more harmonic, melodic and rhythmic layers than in the songs' original versions, also points to the significance of multiplicity in her work. Finally, I suggest that Mitchell's above-mentioned practice of crossing genre boundaries<sup>79</sup> may be related to Irigaray's logic of 'not-one'. It may be argued that this kind of multiplicity could be observed in some other artists' careers,

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<sup>77</sup> Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 127.

<sup>78</sup> Joni Mitchell came out of retirement by releasing her 19<sup>th</sup> studio album *Shine* in 2007.

<sup>79</sup> See my earlier discussions on pp. 19 and 107.

regardless of any mode of gender consciousness. However, in Mitchell's case it is the result of her urge to conduct an artistic experimentation motivated by her search for a less conventional musical language.

In terms of Mitchell's lyrics, ocean-related themes have always had a special place in her work. For instance, in one of her most celebrated songs, 'Blue' (1971), Mitchell positions herself within the sea: 'you know I've been to sea before/crown and anchor me/or let me sail away'.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, at the end of the song she tells us that her song also comes from the sea: 'here is a shell for you / inside you'll hear a sigh / a foggy lullaby / there is your song from me'. In 'Banquet', the opening song of her 1972 album *For the Roses*, while talking about realities of life such as 'fat bellies and hungry little ones' or people who 'turn to Jesus [or] heroin / [or] rambling round', she leads us to understand that she protects herself and her dream from these realities by taking refuge in the sea: 'I took my share down by the sea /.../ seagulls come down/and they squawk at me / down where the water-skiers glide /.../ I took my dream down by the sea'. In other words, in 'Banquet' the sea is depicted as a place where escaping from the Symbolic is possible. In the song 'Lesson in Survival' from the same album, Mitchell defines water as meeting her needs: '...I know my needs /.../ I need more quiet times/ by a river flowing /.../ I'm looking way out at the ocean/love to see that green water in motion / I'm going to get a boat'. According to this song, proximity to water can fulfil some of her innermost needs. In the song 'Trouble Child' (1974), Mitchell uses oceanic imagery to define a person who breaks away from society and its norms: 'so why does it come as such a shock/to know you really have no one / only a river of changing faces/looking for an ocean/they trickle through your leaky plans /.../ you know it's

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<sup>80</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'Blue', in the album *Blue* (Reprise, 1971). Throughout this section the lyrics quoted are from Mitchell's following albums: *For the Roses* (Asylum, 1972) and *Court and Spark* (Asylum, 1974).

really hard/to talk sense to you/trouble child / breaking like the waves at Malibu'. It is significant that in nearly all these examples, Mitchell invokes oceanic themes, whether to escape the society in which she or the central character of her song lives, or to depict an already alienated character who is very similar to Irigaray's definition of woman in the Symbolic order.

Turning now to Mitchell's visual representation, no less than 11 out of 19 studio albums released by Mitchell between 1968 and 2007 have at least one direct reference to oceanic images, either on their covers or in their related booklets.<sup>81</sup> The background of her debut album's artwork, as we have seen, is already dominated by an endless sea, which can be, symbolically, read as the source of Mitchell's artistic creation. On the cover of the album *For the Roses*, the sea (or a river) is also positioned as a background image. However, inside the booklet we find a nude photograph of Mitchell with her back to the camera, standing on a rock in the middle of the sea. I suggest that this picture bears importance as we see Mitchell's body in the process of becoming part of an oceanic image, which for Irigaray symbolizes the multiplicity of the female body and language.

The main objective of this chapter has been to explore the gendered aspects of Joni Mitchell's work by discussing them with respect to lyrics, music and visual representation. By focusing not only on the lyrics and cover art, but also searching for gendered signifiers within the music itself, this chapter aimed to analyze ways in which a feminine corporeal multiplicity is reflected within Mitchell's work. To this end, the

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<sup>81</sup> These albums are *Song to a Seagull* (Reprise, 1968), *Clouds* (Reprise, 1969), *For the Roses* (Asylum, 1972), *Court and Spark* (Asylum, 1974), *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (Asylum, 1975), *Wild Things Run Fast* (Asylum, 1982), *Night Ride Home* (Geffen, 1991), *Turbulent Indigo* (Reprise, 1994), *Taming the Tiger* (Reprise, 1998), *Both Sides Now* (Reprise, 2000) and *Travelogue* (Nonesuch, 2007).

words and music of three different songs of the artist were discussed, namely 'The Dawntreader', 'Ladies of the Canyon' and 'Shadows and Light', as well as the cover art of the albums these songs are taken from.

The lyric analysis leads to the conclusion that in 'The Dawntreader' Joni Mitchell envisages another world oppositional to the one constructed by patriarchal discourse. By invoking oceanic images, Mitchell creates not only the picture of an abstract world but also a language that manipulates the grammatical and syntactic structure imposed by the phallogentric system. I would argue that the polymorphous characteristic of the world and that of the language dominating 'The Dawntreader' can be read in parallel with Irigaray's arguments about the relationship between the female Symbolic (or feminine language) and fluidity. Whereas 'The Dawntreader' provides us with the possibility of exploring multiplicity, especially in terms of linguistic structure, 'Ladies of the Canyon' reveals another aspect of female multiplicity in Mitchell's work, related to the psychology of woman. Throughout the song, by referring to three different women, Mitchell portrays distinct aspects of her identity. Since the three women depicted in 'Ladies of the Canyon' can be interpreted as representatives of various aspects of Mitchell's character, I would argue that this song may be seen as an example of how female identity is fragmented and how a woman is othered within herself, also as evidenced by Mitchell use of the third person pronoun instead of first person. Such a scenario is envisaged in Irigaray's theory, according to which the multiple character of women's sexuality and genitals also translates to their identity being characterised by multiplicity. The analysis of 'Shadows and Light', by contrast, focused on Mitchell's reversal of dichotomous pairs, such as night/day, wrong/right and, implicitly, woman/man, and on the role of mystical discourse in Joni Mitchell's work, by focusing

on the question of whether it is possible to consider it as a way of creating a new system, in which women reflect the multiple characteristics of their body and identity.

The music analysis demonstrates that Joni Mitchell's use of more than one modal system within a single song enables her to construct a multilayered harmonic language. In addition, as 'Ladies of the Canyon' and 'Shadows and Light' reveal, the plurality of vocal technique and that of the timbre heard throughout these songs open up additional possibilities for a mode of female writing in music. As was explored through an analysis of 'Shadows and Light', multiplicity can also be discerned in the rhythmic structure of Mitchell's music. Since multiplicity in terms of musical elements can be traced through most of Mitchell's songs, I propose that it should be regarded as an artistic strategy. In Mitchell's case, this strategy is triggered by the artist's claim to creative originality. Her assertions about her superiority over Bob Dylan, quoted at the beginning of the music analysis section above, can be given as an example of the artist's consciousness about her originality as a composer. Furthermore, some of Mitchell's statements about the relationship between her emotions and the chords she uses in her songs strengthen my arguments about the link between body and text. Mitchell explains this relationship as follows:

Chaka Khan once told me my chords were like questions, and in fact, I've always thought of them as chords of inquiry. My emotional life is quite complex, and I try to reflect that in my music. For instance, a minor chord is pure tragedy; in order to infuse it with a thread of optimism you add an odd string to the chord to carry the voice of hope. Then perhaps you add a dissonant because in the stressful society we live in dissonance is aggressing against us at every moment. So, there is an inquiry to the chords comparable to the unresolved quality of much poetry.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Joni Mitchell quoted in Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 119.

As this quotation indicates, for Mitchell her chords are used to express her emotions. Thus, Mitchell's text and body have a constant relationship in the process of creation. Bearing in mind Irigaray's arguments about the originality of female language and the notion of woman's text as her body, I would argue that each of the songs analysed in this chapter may be considered as a reflection of female sexuality in popular music.

The analysis of the cover art of the albums *Song to a Seagull*, *Ladies of the Canyon* and *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* suggests that the notions of multiplicity, fluidity and mystical discourse posited in Irigaray's theory have relevance not only Mitchell's lyrics and music but also her visual representation. It also allows to consider a popular music product as an embodiment of words, music and images, and to regard gender as a mode of narrative self-consciousness which informs not only words and music, but also any accompanying visual material. Mitchell's cover art for *Song to a Seagull* contrasts the openness and fluidity of the sea and the freedom and unbounded multiplicity of nature, of which woman is shown to be an integral part, with the isolation and desolation of female life within the boundaries of the male-centred Symbolic order. The half-drawn, incomplete self-portrait of Joni Mitchell on the cover of *Ladies of the Canyon*, as I have argued, could be interpreted both as a critique of woman's status within patriarchal order – marginal and whose full being cannot be represented – and as an opening to undermine and dismantle that very order, through a 'fluid logic' that only women and their multiplicity can provide. Finally, Mitchell's cover art and inner sleeve for *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* lend themselves to an analysis of similar themes, with their depiction of the confined and repressed position of women. Furthermore, they critique Symbolic binary oppositions and their imposed values, the reversal and ultimate

overcoming of which, also by means of the potential offered by a female mystical discourse, bear importance of women's own freedom of expression and subjectivity.

Considered in its entirety, the analysis of these songs by Joni Mitchell demonstrates that her work provides us with fruitful ground upon which we may claim a relationship between feminist and psychoanalytical theories, and Mitchell's *oeuvre*. Most importantly, it demonstrates that even though these theories have hitherto almost always been used in the analysis of literary works, they are also applicable to the analysis of music. Drawing upon the new perspectives revealed by different sections of this chapter, I propose that 'The Dawntreader', 'Ladies of the Canyon' and 'Shadows and Light' articulate a strong relationship with psycholinguistic feminist theories, indicating the existence of a kind of female expression in music.

## CHAPTER 3

### **‘Swapping Places’: Kate Bush in ‘Wuthering Heights’, ‘Babooshka’ and ‘Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)’**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The absence of women as creators in pop music can be called sexist (...) Sexism is as pervasive in rock music as in any other form of music. It pervades the structure of the music industry along with the lyrics and instrumentation of the music itself.<sup>1</sup>

As one of the first pioneering female British singer-songwriters, Kate Bush began her formal career in January 1978 with the release of her first single ‘Wuthering Heights’.<sup>2</sup> As the above quotation from Steve Chappel and Reebee Garofalo’s book *Rock ‘n’ Roll is Here to Pay: The History and Politics of the Music Industry* (1977) suggests, at the time Bush started to gain favour, the popular music industry was still marginalising female artists who created their own material. For instance, despite significant critical acclaim, the subject of the previous chapter, Joni Mitchell, was nevertheless considered to be an avant-garde figure having only two top ten songs in the charts: ‘Free Man in Paris’ (1974) and ‘Help Me’ (1974). Likewise, Patti Smith, who established herself as one of rock music’s acknowledged poets with the release of her seminal debut album *Horses* (1975), had yet to make any significant inroads into the charts. However, few years later Bush, in a similar music industry (at least in terms of women’s position) achieved a notable level of critical and commercial success within one month of the release of her first single. In the first week of March, ‘Wuthering Heights’ reached

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<sup>1</sup>Steve Chappel and Reebee Garofalo, *Rock ‘n’ Roll is Here to Pay: The History and Politics of the Music Industry* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1977), p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> See Rob Jovanovic, *Kate Bush: The Biography* (London: Portrait, 2006), p.72. The biographical information on Kate Bush is drawn mostly from Jovanovic’s book.



number one in the British music charts. *The Kick Inside*, the album that included this single, was released just weeks later on February 17 and entered the charts at number 3.<sup>3</sup>

For many critics, ‘Wuthering Heights’ signalled the arrival of an ‘unlikely’ pop star, to use Holly Kruse’s words.<sup>4</sup> According to Lucy O’Brien, ‘nothing like it had been heard before’.<sup>5</sup> For Bush’s biographer, Rob Jovanovic, ‘[the song] was certainly out of step with the rest of the charts’.<sup>6</sup> Many writers claim that it was, first and foremost, Bush’s voice that marked her as unusual. As Moy states, ‘the singularity of the artist’s voice makes an immediate and provocative impact’.<sup>7</sup> Besides this, it was Bush’s skilful placing of the female body and experience in her work that distinguished her from many of her contemporaries. As Graeme Thomson emphasizes, ‘*The Kick Inside* is lit up with the ecstasy and fear of puberty and sexual awakening –everywhere you look there’s a sense of a body growing, changing shape, immensely powerful but also terrifying’.<sup>8</sup> The majority of the album’s subjects, such as incest and resulting pregnancy, and menstrual pain, were taboo for the British music scene at the end of the 1970s.

Regarding Kate Bush as an *auteur*<sup>9</sup> who underlines different aspects of female subjectivity and sexuality in her work, this chapter will question the ways in which she textualizes through her songs discursive strategies with regard to gender and sexuality. I shall begin by positioning Kate Bush within her historical context as a significant female artist, by discussing punk’s impact on the British popular music industry.

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<sup>3</sup> See Graeme Thomson, *Under the Ivy: The Life and Music of Kate Bush* (London: Omnibus Press, 2010), pp. 93-4.

<sup>4</sup> Holly Kruse, ‘In Praise of Kate Bush’, in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, edited by Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 451.

<sup>5</sup> Lucy O’Brien, *She Bop II*, p. 192.

<sup>6</sup> Rob Jovanovic, *Kate Bush*, p. 73.

<sup>7</sup> Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Graeme Thomson, *Under the Ivy*, p. 90.

<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive discussion on Kate Bush in relation to *auteur* theory, see Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, pp. 72-88.

Following this I shall read a selection of Bush's songs in parallel with the theoretical articulations of Joan Riviere, Hélène Cixous and Marie Ann Doane, extrapolating Riviere's and Doane's considerations of female subjectivity as masquerade and Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine* to the realm of the sexed and gendered popular music text, which I understand as comprising lyrics, music and visual representation. Throughout my analysis, I shall focus on three of Bush's songs from three different albums, namely 'Wuthering Heights' (*The Kick Inside*, 1978), 'Babooshka' (*Never for Ever*, 1980), and 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)' (*Hounds of Love*, 1985). I shall analyse her artistic performance by taking three main questions into consideration: (i) how the notion of masquerade works in her lyrics; (ii) how her music supports her masquerade; (iii) how she creates different personae in her music videos in parallel with her lyrics. Within my music analysis, as I did in the chapter on Laura Nyro, I shall also make reference to Roland Barthes and his theoretical statements about the voice. Throughout the chapter, the notion of masquerade will be discussed in parallel with Cixous's theories about femininity and a feminine writing. To conclude my arguments, I shall demonstrate how masquerade is used by Kate Bush throughout her career to date, which encompasses albums released between 1978 and 2011.

The reason for choosing these three songs is my belief that they hold a special place in Bush's *oeuvre*. As I discussed above, it was 'Wuthering Heights' that provided Bush with both artistic and commercial success in the UK. After the critical disappointment of her second album *Lionheart* (1978), she claimed back her unique place in the British music industry with 1980's *Never for Ever* and its second single 'Babooshka', which reached number 5 in the music charts. If it was 'Wuthering Heights' that made Kate Bush a star in Britain, it was, undoubtedly, 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)',

released in August 1985, that brought her universal stardom by entering the charts not only in Europe but also, for the first time in her career, on the other side of the Atlantic. Moreover, the music videos of these three songs have, I suggest, a primary role in the formation of Bush's visual representation.

Moy argues that female musicians 'found themselves in an invidious position in the late 1970s – forced to conform either to the sensitive singer-songwriter model (Carole King, Joni Mitchell), or the torch-song balladeer (Barbra Streisand, Elaine Paige) or the sassy r 'n' b diva (Tina Turner, Millie Jackson)'.<sup>10</sup> Although according to Pat Martin, who played bass on Bush's 1975 demo tape produced by Pink Floyd's guitarist David Gilmour, in those sessions '[Bush's sound] was more Joni Mitchell-like, that was obviously an influence',<sup>11</sup> there was hardly any similarity between the sound of *The Kick Inside* and that of Joni Mitchell's albums released between 1968 and 1977. Also, Bush was neither a torch-song balladeer nor an r 'n' b diva. Furthermore, as Jovanovic states, her position as the writer of her own songs distinguished her from most of her female counterparts, such as 'Donna Summer, Diana Ross, Olivia Newton-John and Elkie Brooks'.<sup>12</sup>

Bush recorded *The Kick Inside* throughout July and August 1977, a year in which the impact of punk rock on the British music industry was deeply felt. Groups such as the Clash and the Sex Pistols released their first albums throughout 1977 and achieved considerable chart success. When finally Bush's debut was released in early 1978, as Moy puts it, 'the extensive impact of punk was still rippling through the industry'.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Pat Martin quoted in Graeme Thomson, *Under the Ivy*, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Rob Jovanovic, *Kate Bush*, p. 94.

<sup>13</sup> Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, p. 11.

Musically, punk was, first and foremost, a reaction to the musical mainstream and progressive rock of the early 1970s. Its use of stripped down instrumentation, basic chord progressions and simple rhythmic structures within relatively short songs was the result of its objection to progressive rock's complex songs forms, unorthodox chord and rhythmic structures that were supported by long solo passages calling for a high level of technical skill from the performer. Just as much as punk was a reaction to the musical mainstream and the elitism of progressive rock, it was also a reaction to Britain's economic decline and the political establishment which dominated the country throughout the 1970s. According to Stuart Borthwick and Ron Moy, unlike its American counterpart, British punk rock became commercially successful and socially notorious in the space of a few months following its first appearance in the music press, in February 1977, 'because British punk rock seemed to be a musical genre that was purpose built for the articulation of young people's dissatisfaction with the few remaining fruits of the postwar social-democratic consensus'.<sup>14</sup>

Aesthetically, there was no relationship between punk and Kate Bush, who burst into public consciousness with a song based on a nineteenth-century novel and its highly stylistically choreographed video. Musically, apart from using reggae rhythm that became popular in England with punk rock,<sup>15</sup> in the songs 'Kite' and 'Them Heavy People', Bush showed no interest in punk. Despite these facts, I suggest that Bush's

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<sup>14</sup> Stuart Borthwick and Ron Moy, *Popular Music Genres* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 83.

<sup>15</sup> Dick Hebdige, in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, discusses punk's relationship with reggae as follows: 'The Clash and the Slits in particular wove reggae slogans and themes into their material, and in 1977 the reggae group Culture produced a song describing the impending apocalypse entitled "When the Two Sevens Clash", which became something of a catchphrase in select punk circles. Some groups (e.g. the Clash, Alternative T.V.) incorporated reggae numbers into their sets and a new hybrid form (...) grew out of the liaison. From the outset (...), heavy reggae had occupied a privileged position inside the subculture as the only tolerated alternative to punk, providing melodic relief from the frantic *Sturm und Drang* of new wave music'. For further discussion, see Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), p. 67.

emergence in the British popular music scene cannot be thought of as independent of what was going on around her. The punk subculture provided its artists with an environment characterized by anti-authoritarianism, anti-sexism, anti-homophobia and a DIY ethic. Throughout the late 1970s, female punk rockers such as Ari Up and The Slits, Poly Styrene and the X-Ray Spex and Siouxsie Sioux of Siouxsie and the Banshees helped to make popular music a site in which women could revolt against the existing social, cultural, artistic and political systems by exploring and exposing their repressed anger and aggression. This socio-cultural environment gave Bush the freedom to explore and put forward her confrontational and individual artistic expression. Bush's choice to represent herself in her first video as a ghost - in other words, a dead woman - also resonates well with the late 1970s' nihilistic climate. There could be no future for a ghost woman, hysterically dancing and claiming her lover's soul, just as there was 'no future' for punks. Bush's appearance (especially in the video of 'Wuthering Heights'), her singing technique and the subject matter of most of her songs were in some respects as attention-grabbing as any other punk era product.

Despite punk's critique of the traditional conceptions surrounding female musicians, Bush, at the end of the 1970s, appeared to be conscious of the danger of her work being judged only on the basis of her gender and, consequently, unfairly thought of as inferior to that of male artists. As a result, despite her high-pitched voice and the ways in which her femininity is emphasized in her early cover art and music videos, like Mitchell, Bush chose to identify herself with 'the male'. On every occasion, she talked about the impact of male musicians on her work, such as David Gilmour who produced her first demo tape and introduced her to EMI and Peter Gabriel. Apart from these names, as noted by both Jovanovic and Moy, David Bowie, Bryan Ferry and Roxy Music, Elton

John, Captain Beefheart, Frank Zappa, Steely Dan and Rolf Harris are some of the figures heralded to have influenced Bush.<sup>16</sup> According to Reynolds and Press, ‘because she wanted to make serious music like [Pink Floyd and Peter Gabriel], rather than the kind of “girly”/girl-targeted music that no rock critic would ever take seriously, she had to imagine herself as male in order to create’.<sup>17</sup> In 1978, she told Harry Doherty:

When I’m at the piano writing a song, I like to think I’m a man, not physically but in the areas that they explore (...) most male music — not all of it, but the good stuff – really lays it on you. It’s like an interrogation. It really puts you against the wall, and that’s what I’d like to do.<sup>18</sup>

Although she found it ‘hard to explain’<sup>19</sup> the reason for this attitude was, I suggest, mainly to emphasize the seriousness of her music. According to her, ‘[e]very female you see at the piano [was] either Lynsey DePaul, Carole King...that lot...That stuff [was] sweet and lyrical, but it [didn’t] push it on you’.<sup>20</sup> However, in another interview in 1979, she famously declared, ‘I think that I’m probably female-oriented with my songs because I’m a female and have very female emotions’.<sup>21</sup> Thus, while rejecting the socio-politically constructed position of female musicians in the industry, she demonstrated an understanding of the role that her femininity played in her work.

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<sup>16</sup> See Rob Jovanovic, *Kate Bush*, p. 124, and Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *Sex Revolts*, p. 241.

<sup>18</sup> Kate Bush quoted in Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *Sex Revolts*, p. 240. See also Harry Doherty, ‘The Kick Outside’, in *Melody Maker* (June 3, 1978), at <http://kbarchives.org/articles/1978-2/melody-maker-the-kickoutside-by-harry-doherty-june-3-1978> (last accessed 23/09/2011).

<sup>19</sup> Kate Bush quoted in Harry Doherty, ‘The Kick Outside’.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240. Although Bush only referred to male figures as a source of inspiration, I would suggest that Laura Nyro, as a female singer-songwriter, could also be regarded as a model for Bush’s art, especially given some of her late 1960s piano-based songs, such as ‘Captain for Dark Mornings’ (*New York Tendaberry*, 1969). Besides making the piano the primary instrument around which her songs were constructed, Bush’s use of a high-pitched vocal register to sing all main melodic lines and her adoption of the technique of using her own voice (by multi-tracking it) to sing backing vocals are reminiscent of what Laura Nyro did in her early recordings. Furthermore, she can also be shown as an influence on Bush as the first female singer-songwriter who claimed total control of her work both in the studio and on the stage, challenging the well-established role(s) of women in the Anglo-American popular music industry. However, in terms of songwriting, in the late 1970s, Bush was far from Laura Nyro’s avant-gardism. Unlike Nyro’s songs, structurally most of the tracks in *The Kick Inside* were close to standard pop songs of the time.

<sup>21</sup> Kate Bush quoted in Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, p. 74.

According to Moy, '[femininity] is stated to be an important dimension in the artist's work'.<sup>22</sup> The masquerade may be regarded as one of the key concepts giving way to the exploration of the ways in which femininity affects Bush's work.

Throughout her career, Kate Bush created numerous personae, such as the passionate heroine in 'Wuthering Heights', the mistrustful wife in 'Babooshka', and the ill-fated protagonist in 'Red Shoes', by tracing women's experiences through mythology, history and literature, primarily to explore and reflect different aspects of femininity. In most of her videos, she appeared in costumes and settings devised to reveal the psychology of the songs' central characters. In her only tour, 1978's Tour of Life, she performed each song in a different costume to give the effect of becoming a different person according to the story about which she was singing. Unlike many other rock and pop stars, during her show she did not talk to the audience, arguing that 'on stage I'm not me, I'm trying to create a mood and character. I was speaking in so many other ways that words were not really worth their money'.<sup>23</sup> Reynolds and Press claimed that for Bush, 'femininity is not a fixed set of characteristics (...) but rather a wardrobe of masks and poses to be assumed'.<sup>24</sup> Regarding the practice of playing with cultural representations of female subjectivities through role-play, as a possible way of reaching the feminine self and a kind of feminine writing, manipulating the patriarchal gaze, I propose to link Bush's approach of creating personae to the notion of masquerade and that of *écriture féminine* as developed by feminist thought, which will now be discussed in turn.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>23</sup> Kate Bush quoted in Rob Jovanovic, *Kate Bush*, p. 103.

<sup>24</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *The Sex Revolts*, p. 233.

### 3.2. Womanliness as a masquerade and *écriture féminine*

The term masquerade was originally proposed by Joan Riviere to define and theorize femininity. In her seminal article ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade’,<sup>25</sup> published in 1929, she famously likened womanliness to a mask. Throughout the article, Riviere is concerned with ‘a type of intellectual woman’.<sup>26</sup> She argues that, although at the time such an attitude had started to change, ‘not long ago intellectual pursuits for woman were associated almost exclusively with an overtly masculine type of woman, who (...) made no secret of her wish or claim to be a man’.<sup>27</sup> She describes the case of one of her patients, whose work involved writing and public speaking. As a result of her need for reassurance, at the end of a successful lecture, this patient would start ‘to seek some attention or complimentary notice from a man or men at the close of the proceedings in which she had taken part or been the principal figure’<sup>28</sup> by flirting and coquetting with them. Riviere argues that this woman used womanliness as a mask to avoid the retribution she expected from males for her claiming a masculine role. Riviere explains this as follows:

Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it —much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the ‘masquerade’. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial. They are the same thing.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Joan Riviere, ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade,’ in *Formations of Fantasy*, edited by Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 35-44.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.



Since the publication of ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade,’ the concept of masquerade has been widely discussed, critiqued and interpreted by several scholars. Furthermore, as a conceptual tool, it has been applied to numerous analyses of cultural productions, especially in film theory. As a result, today there is a wide-ranging feminist literature on masquerade. Some critics consider masquerade as a submissive theory that rejects the idea of a given femininity, by emphasizing the fictional nature of womanliness. However, for others, masquerade is a liberating theory due to its potential to challenge patriarchal norms. To acknowledge the breadth of views that have emerged on masquerade, I shall briefly summarize some of the main approaches that appeared throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In her introduction to *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne* (1985), Jacqueline Rose states that for her, the term ‘masquerade’ indicates a ‘failed femininity’,<sup>30</sup> since it is constructed by referencing ‘a male sign’.<sup>31</sup> Irigaray also takes issue with the term, saying that masquerade underlines the *process* of becoming a woman while securing the idea that ‘a man is a man from the outset’.<sup>32</sup> For her, the term also signifies the rejection of woman’s desire:

Psychoanalysts say that masquerading corresponds to woman’s desire. That seems wrong to me. I think the masquerade has to be understood as what women do in order to recuperate some elements of desire, to participate in man’s desire, but at the price of renouncing their own. In the masquerade, they submit to the dominant economy of desire in an attempt to remain “on the market” in spite of everything. But they are there as objects for sexual enjoyment, not as those who enjoy.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Jacqueline Rose, ‘Introduction – II,’ in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*, p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 134.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 133-4.

Thus, in Irigaray's theory, masquerade is seen as serving patriarchy by rejecting the idea of a feminine desire. As a result, it contributes to paternal thinking, by positioning women as the objects of men's desire.

However, unlike Irigaray and Rose, theorists such as Claire Johnston and Marie Ann Doane regard masquerade as a feminist strategy subverting patriarchal views of femininity. For instance, Doane, drawing on Riviere's theory, defines masquerade as a liberating act for women, in her exploration of female spectators in cinema:

The masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance. Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed. The masquerade's resistance to patriarchal positioning would therefore lie in its denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as presence-to-itself, as precisely, imagistic (...) Masquerade (...) involves a realignment of femininity, the recovery, or more accurately, simulation, of the missing gap or distance. To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image (...) masquerade is anti-hysterical for it works to effect separation between the cause of desire and oneself (...)

(...) masquerade is (...) a type of representation which carries a threat, disarticulating male systems of viewing.<sup>34</sup>

Doane's theory claims that the masquerade enables women to create a gap between the self and a constructed image. According to her, this gap gives women the opportunity to subvert the masculine gaze and its constructions. As Doane notes, there is a similarity between her interpretation of the masquerade and Irigaray's concept of mimicry. For

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<sup>34</sup>Marie Ann Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator,' in *Screen*, no. 23, nos. 3-4 (September - October, 1982), pp. 81-2.

Irigaray, ‘there is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one “path,” the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of *mimicry*’.<sup>35</sup> She continues as follows:

One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. Whereas a direct feminine challenge to this condition means demanding to speak as a (masculine) “subject,” that is, it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual indifference.

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it.<sup>36</sup>

In Doane’s reading, masquerade is, when used deliberately (like Irigaray’s mimicry), transformed into a strategy of resistance. I suggest that masquerade as observed in Bush’s selected songs takes the form of an intentional play by giving way to the subversion of the masculine gaze and patriarchal language. It is in this respect, as we shall now see, that it will come into a crucial interplay with Cixous’s theory.

Cixous coined the term *écriture féminine* in her seminal essay ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ (1975),<sup>37</sup> in which she uttered a passionate call to action:

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 76.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>37</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1976), pp. 875-893.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 875.

For Cixous, women have hitherto written and spoken from a masculine position, aligning themselves with the phallus. Now, she says, they must write to overcome the Lacanian Symbolic order, which is phallogocentric (a term coined by Jacques Derrida to denote the privileged status of the phallus in the construction of meaning in language). This female writing will become, for women, ‘the antilogos weapon’.<sup>39</sup> Cixous laments the small number of woman writers and argues that this is ‘because so few women have as yet won back their body. Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetoric, regulations and codes’.<sup>40</sup> According to her, by writing, women will no longer be condemned to silence.

Cixous contends that it is impossible truly ‘to *define* a feminine practice of writing’ by reducing it to a fixed concept, in an attempt to categorize it and place it under (male) control, for ‘it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system’,<sup>41</sup> and by definition its nature will be subversive. But does *écriture féminine* imply some kind of regression to a strict binary opposition between man and woman, between whom there can be no meaningful communication? Although Cixous states that woman has to write woman, and man has to write man,<sup>42</sup> she regards this as a necessary postulate for the time being, given the current position of women and men in the Symbolic order. However, she qualifies her statement, recognising that woman is forced to struggle ‘against conventional man’,<sup>43</sup> that is, not against man per se, as shown by the example of some men, most notably poets, who are also engaged in their own struggle against the strictures of male-dominated discourse, men who oppose women’s

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 880.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 885-886.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 883.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 877.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 875.

oppression and see them as their equal. But, crucially, it is something that women must do for themselves in the first place, and that only they can do.

For Cixous, this female writing should represent female desire and sexuality: ‘Let the priests tremble, we’re going to show them our sexts’.<sup>44</sup> A hybrid of “sex” and “text”, this expression used by Cixous denotes a sex which is textualised and thus escapes repression. It is no coincidence, of course, that she refers to priests, who historically have been among the male guardians of the Symbolic order. We will shortly see that all the songs of Bush selected for analysis in this chapter can meaningfully and fruitfully be described and interpreted drawing upon aspects of these two theories, shedding light on the artist’s gendered specificity and her depiction of different aspects of female subjectivity and sexuality.

### 3.3. Writing the feminine

This section shall examine the role of masquerade, and the ways in which *écriture féminine* displays itself in Bush’s lyrics by taking three issues into consideration. In the analysis of ‘Wuthering Heights’ I shall focus on how Bush’s change of Brontë’s narrative technique in the song provides her with the possibility of manipulating the rules of patriarchal society and language. In ‘Babooshka’ I shall examine the way in which Bush plays with conventional positions of husband and wife through a fictional character. Finally, in ‘Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)’ I shall discuss how Bush’s reverse masquerade gives way to the questioning of roles traditionally attributed to the female and the male in a relationship.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 885.

Kate Bush's debut single, 'Wuthering Heights', may be regarded as the earliest example of the artist's engagement with literature and cinema in creating her songs. Throughout her career, Bush took inspiration from an array of cinematic and literary works.<sup>45</sup> The main sources of inspiration for the song 'Wuthering Heights' are a 1970 film adaptation of Emily Brontë's novel<sup>46</sup> of the same title and the novel (first published in 1847) itself. Her choice of Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* gave Bush the opportunity to write lyrics that reimagined and reawakened Brontë's images and the issues she explored. By doing so, Bush created a narrative referencing the work of a woman writer whose only novel was concerned about the oppression endured by women in that era. This choice can be read as the result of Bush's desire to be a part of an imaginative continuum<sup>47</sup> which, for feminist literary criticism, is a way of creating a female mode and tradition of writing.

Although it is possible to detect some similarities between Brontë's novel and Bush's song, such as the setting in which the story takes place and the names of the characters, the features of Bush's work can primarily be defined by the differences that make her masquerade suitable for a feminist discussion. As Juliet Mitchell argues, Brontë never aimed to write a novel that opposed patriarchal order, instead 'she clearly work[ed] within the terms of a language which has been defined as phallogentric'.<sup>48</sup> Although the same can be said for Bush, the way she changes Brontë's narrative technique in the

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<sup>45</sup> Among others, Hans Christian Andersen's 1845 fairytale *The Red Shoes*, Henry James's 1898 novella *The Turn of the Screw*, J. M. Barrie's 1904 play *Peter Pan; or, the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*, James Joyce's 1922 novel *Ulysses*, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's 1948 movie *The Red Shoes*, Jack Clayton's 1961 movie *The Innocents* and Francois Truffaut's 1968 movie *The Bride Wore Black*.

<sup>46</sup> *Wuthering Heights* (1970) directed by Robert Fuest.

<sup>47</sup> According to many feminist scholars, *imaginative continuum* is the determination of specific images, questions, problems, and themes in woman writers' works written in different centuries or decades. For a more in-depth analysis, see Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination: A Literary and Psychological Investigation of Women's Writing* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976), p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Juliet Mitchell, 'Femininity, Narrative and Psychoanalysis', in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, edited by Mary Eagleton (Basil: Blackwell, 1996), p. 154.

song seems to make it manipulate phallogocentric thinking and discourse with regard to its positioning of female desire.

In the novel, Brontë tells the story through the use of both male and female narrators, Mr. Lockwood and Nelly Dean. We are even introduced to Cathy for the first time through her dairies as read by Mr. Lockwood, in other words, it is through Mr. Lockwood's voice that we gain access to Cathy's world. However, in the song, Bush uses no narrator, directly giving voice to Cathy and enabling her to speak and tell the story: 'Heathcliff, it's me, Cathy, come home/I'm so cold /.../ You know it's me, Cathy'.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, Cathy in the song is transformed from a victim of societal rules to a figure who can transcend the norms of patriarchy and the limits of the Symbolic. Thus, even though Bush's language in 'Wuthering Heights', at least at first glance, might be seen as phallogocentric, her masquerading of Cathy, as will become clearer momentarily, enables her to write a song manipulating the workings of the Symbolic order.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, for Lacan it is not possible for a woman to speak about her desire (*jouissance*) which is defined as being beyond the phallus. Since *jouissance*, which has a primary role in one's process of becoming a speaking subject, is marked by the Phallus, women in the Symbolic, from the outset, are exiled from any linguistic signifying system. What happens to Cathy in the novel seems to resonate well with Lacan's arguments: she dies unhappy and unfulfilled because of her suppressed or inexpressible desire. Despite her love for Heathcliff, Brontë's Cathy

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<sup>49</sup> From this point on, all lyrics quoted (unless otherwise stated) are taken from Bush's albums, namely *The Kick Inside* (EMI, 1978), *Never for Ever* (EMI, 1978) and *Hounds of Love* (EMI, 1985).

marries Edgar Linton because of 'her conventional feminine choice'<sup>50</sup> requiring the suppression of her desire, a choice imposed by society. However, Bush's masquerade of the same desire and, more importantly, Cathy's ability to speak about this desire, make her come back to life: 'How could you leave me / When I needed to possess you / I hated you, I loved you too'. In other words, Bush's change of narrative technique in the song enables her to bring the novel's dead heroine back to the material world, in the shape of a ghost-woman who is free from the rules of the society. Here, it should be noted that Brontë also made Cathy appear as a ghost in the novel. However, this appearance is not unproblematic. As a ghost, Cathy, at the beginning of the novel, visits her old bedroom in which Mr. Lockwood is sleeping at the time. Thus, she appears in front of not Heathcliff's but Mr. Lockwood's window. However, Cathy's appearance as a ghost in the novel is not considered by Mr. Lockwood to be a real experience, but a nightmare. Similarly, it is also never clarified by Brontë that this appearance is real. Moreover, unlike in Kate Bush's song, Cathy's attempt to communicate with Heathcliff in the novel definitely fails. When she begs Mr. Lockwood to be let in, she is refused by him: 'Begone! (...) I'll never let you in, not if you beg for twenty years'.<sup>51</sup>

Coming back to Bush's 'Wuthering Heights',<sup>52</sup> unlike in Brontë's novel, Cathy in the song directly goes to Heathcliff's window to communicate with him and asks to be let in: 'let me in-a-your window'. Metaphorically, she is asking to be let back into life. Crucially, she does so by speaking about her desire in a sexed language, a *sext*, where her real needs and wishes are laid bare since she is talking beyond the limitations of the Symbolic, as a ghost. As Cixous reminds us, '... women return from afar, from always:

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<sup>50</sup> Juliet Mitchell, 'Femininity, Narrative and Psychoanalysis', p. 156.

<sup>51</sup> Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2000), p. 17.

<sup>52</sup> For the lyrics of 'Wuthering Heights', see Appendix C1, pp. 287-8.



from “without”... from below, from beyond “culture””.<sup>53</sup> Cathy is able to claim an identity by speaking her body and her desire, and in so doing both she and the language in which she is positioned as an object change: Cathy becomes a subject and tells her story. The lyrics also show that, as will be further elucidated in the video analysis section, Cathy is no benevolent ghost. She is a wronged woman, deprived of her life, happiness and self-realization, by man and the laws of his Symbolic order. So she sings ‘let me grab your soul away’, and that she is ‘coming back to his side to put it right’. Love and hate are conjoined since out of her love, death came. According to Cixous, men equate women and death as the two truly ‘unrepresentable things’,<sup>54</sup> but only by writing can women occupy a space other than silence; and by writing Cathy, Bush also gave her a voice and allowed her to be remembered not as another amorphous, faceless victim of men’s laws, but as a subject in her own right.

Moving on to the second of the selected songs for this lyric analysis, ‘Babooshka’, Kate Bush released her third studio album, *Never for Ever* in 1980, co-producing it with Jon Kelly. Throughout the album, her theatrical approach to singing, and her literary and cinematic influences were again prominent. Since *Never for Ever* saw Bush creating several personae, such as the little army boy of ‘Army Dreamers’, we may understand masquerade to be her primary identificatory strategy. The album was recorded at London’s Abbey Road studios over a five-month period, starting in January of its year of release. Following the recording sessions, Bush and her company decided to release two singles in advance of the album, ‘Breathing’ and ‘Babooshka’, in that order.

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<sup>53</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, p. 877.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 885.

The album's second single, 'Babooshka', tells the story of a woman who attempts to test her husband's loyalty.<sup>55</sup> In order to do this, the main character decides to send letters to her husband, masquerading herself in the guise of a younger woman, under the pen name 'Babooshka':

She wanted to test her husband  
She knew exactly what to do:  
A pseudonym to fool him  
She couldn't have made a worse move.

What is particularly noteworthy is that listeners are not given the female character's real name anywhere in the song. On the contrary, she is spoken of in the third person. At this point, we should recall how Lacan's theory defines women: woman is the one who is not representable in the Symbolic. She is the one who has no name. Conversely, the wife in the song names the other fictional woman as 'Babooshka', enabling her to gain both power and visibility. Here, at this point in the song, womanliness becomes a plaything. It is not the real thing. Babooshka functions as a mask covering the desire of the wife. The wife becomes a woman only through this masquerade. More importantly, Bush uses these masks to create a distance between herself and constructed images, resisting becoming a passive object of masculine discourse.

In the song, the wife manipulates the husband into certain situations through writing, but not just any form of writing. We know from history and literature that, in the past, women were largely confined to domestic settings and utterly powerless when important decisions were taken about their life and their future. One of the few outlets left to them was the writing of letters, diaries, stories or novels. In 'Babooshka,' too, we

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<sup>55</sup> For the lyrics of 'Babooshka', see Appendix C2, p. 289.

see that the wife writes letters to her husband. However, here she employs a practice of feminine writing, using female cunning, sexualising her text in her 'scented letters'. Her active role, therefore, comes about through writing her body, through sexts which will play a subversive role by testing her man and giving her the truth and the answers she needs for herself, in order to understand what she really means to him. Through a kind of feminine writing, moreover, she takes on the guise – as the video analysis will further describe – of a younger, stronger and more beautiful woman who is, seemingly, the opposite of herself but ultimately the very same woman: 'and when he laid eyes on her/he got the feeling they had met before/uncanny how she/reminds of his little lady'. As well as further evidence of woman's multiplicity, which was extensively discussed in the previous chapter, this seems to imply that only by writing as a woman and escaping the constraints of her position in the Symbolic order can the wife in 'Babooshka' stop being 'a little lady' and go back to being a powerful, beautiful and sensual being: 'before she freezed on him'.

Cixous argues that 'woman, writing herself, will go back to this body that has been worse than confiscated, a body replaced with a disturbing stranger, sick or dead, who so often is a bad influence, the cause and place of inhibitions'.<sup>56</sup> Applying this theory to the song, when Bush's masquerading character signs the letter, according to Cixous's argument she goes back to her body and destroys the body created by her husband. Thus, in this song Bush uses masquerade both to reproduce 'patriarchal modes and fantasies',<sup>57</sup> to use E. Ann Kaplan's words, and to disrupt them.

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<sup>56</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays', in *The Newly Born Woman*, translated by Betsy Wing (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 87.

<sup>57</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, 'Madonna Politics: Perversion, Repression, or Subversion? Or Masks and/as Master-y', in *The Madonna Connection: Representational Politics, Subcultural Identities, and Cultural Theory*, edited by Cathy Schwichtenberg (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1993), p. 160.

Finally, coming to the third song, 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)', in 1985 Bush released her fifth studio album, *Hounds of Love*. As Moy puts it '*Hounds* was the artist's first album to stake a claim being a "concept work"' which clearly found its roots in some early 1970s progressive rock albums.<sup>58</sup> The album, conceptually, consists of two sides that have two different titles: *Hounds of Love* (side A) and *The Ninth Wave* (side B). Whereas side A contained five separate songs which dealt with questions of love and relationships, side B contained a suite-like song-cycle consisting of seven songs. The album's first single, 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal with God)', was released in August 1985 and reached number 3 in the UK charts. The song was originally entitled 'A Deal with God'. However, representatives at EMI convinced Bush to change it to 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)', as they feared that the religious connotations of the title could prompt some countries to refuse to play the song. Although Bush was known as an inflexible artist when it came to her decisions about her work, as Jovanovic explains, 'because of the perceived failure of *The Dreaming* [1982], she has to give the album every chance of being of a success and not be so stubborn over the title of a song'.<sup>59</sup> 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)' became Bush's biggest hit since her debut single 'Wuthering Heights' (1978). In addition, the 12-inch mix version of the song gave Bush her highest single peak to date in the US, reaching number 30 in the charts. The album itself reached number 1 in the UK and number 30 in the US.

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<sup>58</sup> Ron Moy, *Kate Bush*, p. 39. According to Moy '[i]n the mid-1980s the concept album was still resolutely unfashionable'. Ibid., p. 40. Bearing this in mind and recalling Bush's admiration for progressive rock groups such as Genesis and Pink Floyd, that achieved both commercial and critical acclaim with conceptual albums such as the *Dark Side of the Moon* (Pink Floyd, 1973) and *Tales from Topographic Oceans* (Genesis, 1974), I suggest that *Hounds of Love* was structurally inspired by progressive rock era albums.

<sup>59</sup> Rob Jovanovic, *Kate Bush*, p. 162.

‘Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)’ essentially deals with the problems occurring in male-female relationships.<sup>60</sup> According to the song, it is impossible for a man and a woman to understand each other completely, because of the different positioning and experiences of their respective genders in the Symbolic order. This idea can be read in parallel with Cixous’s belief that people from opposite sexes cannot access each other’s sex-specific experiences. She argues that ‘all women feel in the dark or the light, what no man can experience in their place, the incisions, the births, the explosions in libido, the raptures, the losses, the pleasures in our rhythms’.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, she argues that it is not possible for a woman to understand the sensations or experiences a man goes through.<sup>62</sup> Thus, if a man and a woman are not able to gain access to the other’s sex-specific experiences, every man-woman relationship inevitably suffers from misunderstandings. Despite the strictly heterosexual and man-woman binary opposition articulated in the song, in an interview given in 1985 Bush appeared to imply a more general problem of misunderstanding between people in love:

It seems that the more you get to know a person, the greater the scope there is for misunderstanding. Sometimes you can hurt somebody purely accidentally or be afraid to tell them something because you think they might be hurt when really they'll understand. So what that song is about is making a deal with God to let two people swap place so they'll be able to see things from one another's perspective.<sup>63</sup>

I would argue that this apparently impossible understanding ensues – as the lyrics of the song suggest – only if both parties involved insist in entrenching themselves in their respective gendered roles. According to the lyrics, ‘swapping places’, in other words,

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<sup>60</sup> For the lyrics of ‘Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)’, see Appendix C3, pp. 290-2.

<sup>61</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*, edited by Deborah Jenson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 56.

<sup>62</sup> For further discussion, see Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Helene Cixous: Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 53.

<sup>63</sup> Kate Bush quoted in Mike Nicholls, ‘The Girl who reached Wuthering Heights’ in *The Times* (August 27, 1985). See also [http://gaffa.org/reaching/i85\\_ti.html](http://gaffa.org/reaching/i85_ti.html) (last accessed 26/09/2011).

the practice of masquerade, may solve this problem. However, as will become clearer in the following discussion, here Bush proposes an unconventional way of using masquerade.

The song opens with the lines ‘it doesn’t hurt me / do you want to feel how it feels / do you want to know: know that it doesn’t hurt me’. As the analysis of the video for ‘Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)’ will show, during these lines Bush and her male counterpart appear in a constantly mutual and reciprocal relation, entwined in a dance. This dialectic relation seems to be reflected here, where we understand from the lyrics that the female character uses masquerade in two different and unconventional ways. On the one hand, she reassures the male, by masking her femininity, that she feels no pain, and on the other hand she asks him whether he would like to experience feelings from her (a woman’s) perspective. Thus, in this song Riviere’s masquerade is reversed. It is, first of all, used to provide the male with reassurance (in Riviere’s patient’s case, the woman wore womanliness as a mask to seek reassurance), and secondly it is proposed to him as a strategic gesture to save his relationship. Thus, whereas Bush uses masquerade to veil her femininity (in Riviere’s patient’s case, the woman used it to hide masculine aspects of her character), it is suggested that her partner veil his masculinity by putting on a mask of womanliness.

In the chorus, Bush proposes the idea of ‘a deal with God’: ‘if I only could / I’d make a deal with God / and I’d get him to swap our places’. Here we find ourselves in the realm of fantasy as the thought of masking femininity with the mask of masculinity is once more at stake. These lines can be interpreted as Bush’s desire to claim her status as a subject. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, in Lacan’s theory sexual

positions within the language are produced according to the Phallus. In this psychoanalytic scheme, whereas the position of ‘having’ the Phallus signifies the position of men, the position of ‘being’ the Phallus signifies the weak position of women. According to this theory, woman is defined as the object of man’s desire.

In one of her case studies, Riviere talks about an intellectual woman who wants to take the place of men. This patient, who is not a homosexual woman, according to Riviere, claims to be the equal of men. Riviere further argues that this kind of women, in fact, want ‘to be man themselves’.<sup>64</sup> In this respect, to veil femininity with the mask of masculinity or any kind of claim about being equal of or superior to men can be interpreted as an effort to escape from the position of ‘being’ the Phallus. In an interview, in discussing the meaning of the song’s lyrics, Bush explains: ‘you know, I thought a deal with the devil (...). And I thought “well, no, why not a deal with God!” You know, because in a way it’s so much more powerful[,] the whole idea of asking God to make a deal with you’.<sup>65</sup> As this quotation also clarifies, Bush, asking God to make a deal, claims a ‘much more powerful’ position within the Symbolic.

### **3.4. Composing the feminine**

This section on music analysis will seek to create a link between the masquerade and music through examining certain aspects and elements of Bush’s selected songs, such as harmony, use of vocal timbre, as well as instrumentation. Since the theme of masquerade is, primarily, bound to the visual domain, that of the ‘image’ (whether visual or not) and the imaginary, I shall mainly focus on how Bush’s music supports her masquerade by looking at the relationship between the images created by her lyrics and

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<sup>64</sup> Joan Riviere, ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade’, p. 37.

<sup>65</sup> Kate Bush quoted in Rob Jovanovic, *Kate Bush*, p. 154.

the images produced by her music. To do so, I shall start my analysis by taking into consideration the harmonic structure of 'Wuthering Heights'. In the analysis of 'Babooshka', by drawing upon Roland Barthes' theories about 'the grain of the voice', I shall extend my discussion to the realm of vocal timbre, without which no reading of Bush's music would be complete, given the highly distinctive nature of her voice and its theatricality, which is supportive of her masquerade. Finally, in the reading of 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)', I shall look at the symbolic relationship between Bush's use of digital samplers instead of acoustic instruments and her unconventional way of using masquerade as observed in the lyrics of the song.

As discussed in the lyric analysis section above, Cathy in the song is a ghost woman coming from the other world to the material world, to take Heathcliff's soul away. The ethereal characteristic of Bush's persona is, symbolically, signalled by the introductory motif of the song. This simple motif is firstly played in the middle register of the piano. Following this, the same motif is repeated in a higher register accompanied by the echo of a glissando played by celeste (Figure 3.1).<sup>66</sup> The dream-like effect of this glissando and the use of a higher octave to repeat the motif, according to Nicky Losseff, take the listeners to 'the realms of the spirit'.<sup>67</sup> Playing the same melody in two different octaves, I suggest, may also be regarded as a musical gesture reflecting the two different worlds of the song audibly.

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<sup>66</sup> See the seventh track on the CD accompanying this thesis.

<sup>67</sup> Nicky Losseff, 'Cathy's Homecoming and The Other World: Kate Bush's Wuthering Heights', p. 230.





**Figure 3.1.** The opening line of 'Wuthering Heights' presented by the piano and celeste

Although an exploration of the harmonic structure of 'Wuthering Heights' lies beyond the scope of this chapter, a brief discussion about the relationship between the song's chord progression and Bush's narrative would, I believe, be helpful in demonstrating how masquerade functions in Bush's music. The song opens with an A major chord. In the verse, the chords A major, F major, E major and C# major are repeated three times (Figure 3.2). As a result of Bush's continuous use of the chords A major and E Major (I-V), the prevailing tonality of the verse aurally appears to be A major. A conventional chord progression within a section composed in A major would yield diatonic secondary chords including F# minor (vi) and C# minor (iii). However, Bush, by featuring instead the chords F major (the flattened sixth chord) and C# major (the mediant major), creates a modal feel throughout the verse (Figure 3.2). The bridge ('Bad dreams in the night / They told me I was going to lose the fight') starts with the chord E b min7. The chord that provides the link at the end of the verse is G# major, and its enharmonic equivalent A b major. In this section, the chords E b min7, G b major and Fsus4 are heard three times (Figure 3.3). Although the chord of G b major is used in each bar of the bridge, the dominance of the chords E b min7 and Fsus4 (instead of an F major chord) during this section, gives the bridge a minor feel. At the end of this section, the music moves chromatically (from F to G b) to the chord of G b major for the chorus. D b major is established as the prevailing tonality in this section. Finally, the coda starts with a minor chord, B b minor. Although we are still in D b major (B b minor

is used as its sixth degree, followed by A ♭ major, G ♭ major and E ♭ minor), the dominant feel here is minor again (Figure 3.4). Thus, the harmonic scheme of the song can be summarized as follows:

The verse: A major with a modal feel

The bridge: D ♭ major but sounding as if in a minor tonality, as a result of Bush's incessant use of the chords E ♭ min7 and Fsus4

The chorus: D ♭ major established by a perfect cadence

The coda: D ♭ major but sounding as if in a minor tonality, since it starts and ends with a B ♭ minor chord.



**Figure 3.2.** The chords A, F, E and C# repeated three times throughout the verse



**Figure 3.3.** The chords E ♭ min7, G ♭ major and Fsus4 repeated three times throughout the bridge (EMI/Kate Bush)



**Figure 3.4.** The coda of 'Wuthering Heights' (EMI/Kate Bush)

Turning now to the relationship between the harmonic structure of the song and its narrative: firstly, as can be understood from the lyrics, Bush uses the verse to give listeners the constitutive elements of Cathy the ghost's character (longing, desire and passion). In other words, the verse is where we are introduced to Cathy. Thus, Cathy in the song is, musically, identified with the chords of the verse. What makes this section a supportive part of Bush's masquerade is its harmonic ambiguity and the prevalence of mediant chords. I suggest that the modal feel that disrupts the verse's tonality musically symbolizes Cathy's positioning as a ghost somewhere in between the two worlds and her vague existence. Secondly, when we hear Cathy talk about her fears in the bridge section ('Bad dreams in the night / They told me I was going to lose the fight') and claiming Heathcliff's soul in the coda ('Oh! Let me have it / Let me grab your soul away'), the major tonality of the song is undermined by minor chords. Recalling that, traditionally, minor chords are mostly identified with sadness or dark feelings in general, I argue that the music, in these sections, also strengthens Bush's masquerade by reflecting through the harmony the fear and threat conveyed by the lyrics.

The chorus takes a noticeably different path, shedding the modal feel of the verse and the minor chords of the bridge. Instead, it establishes a conventional major harmonic progression:  $G\flat$  (IV),  $E\flat m7$  (ii),  $A\flat 7$  (v)  $D\flat$  (i). Cathy in the chorus appears outside Heathcliff's window asking him to be let in. It is the moment around which the whole story is built. As noted, the first image that inspired Bush to write a song about

*Wuthering Heights* was a scene from a 1970 movie adaptation of the novel, starring Timothy Dalton. In the film, like in the novel, this is the scene in which Cathy's ghost pleads in front of Mr. Lockwood's window.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the window in Bush's version has a crucial role. It is where Cathy exists. More importantly, it is that window which can provide her with what she needs to satisfy her desire, functioning as a passageway between the real world and the other world. Hence, it signifies Cathy's desire and hopes. In this respect, I maintain that the major tonality dominating this section represents the meanings embedded in that window and is used by Cathy as a part of her masquerade to convince Heathcliff to follow her to the other world.

Turning now to the analysis of 'Babooshka', Bush's voice, especially in her early years, has been regarded as distinctively high-pitched within popular music. For instance, while analyzing Bush's second album, Debi Whithers argues that 'Kate Bush is of course famous for her piercingly high vocals and on *Lionheart* her vocals seem at times uncomfortably high pitched'.<sup>69</sup> However, as Losseff states, by comparison with Minnie Riperton's extremely high-pitched vocal range in her song 'Loving You', recorded a few years earlier than 'Wuthering Heights', it was only a misleading impression, 'since Kate Bush simply uses [in 'Wuthering Heights'] the vocal range normal for the average female voice –between e' and e" -going down to an a b with a top note of only f'#!'.<sup>70</sup> I suggest that what makes Bush's vocal performance distinctive is not only her vocal range or use of pitch, but her ability to use her voice to create different timbres.

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<sup>68</sup> As explained in the lyric analysis section, the setting of this scene differs between Brontë's original novel and Kate Bush's song.

<sup>69</sup> Debi Whithers, 'Kate Bush: Performing and Creating Queer Subjectivities on *Lionheart*', in *Nebula*, Vol. 3 No. 2 (September, 2006), p. 127.

<sup>70</sup> Nicky Losseff, 'Cathy's Homecoming and The Other World', p. 229.

The second chapter of this thesis, on Laura Nyro, contained a fuller discussion of the concepts of ‘pheno-song’, ‘geno-song’ and ‘grain’ proposed by Roland Barthes,<sup>71</sup> however it can be argued that Bush’s songs and vocal timbre also represent obvious examples of geno-songs and distinctive grain, respectively. According to Moy, geno-songs ‘carry clear echoes .... of *jouissance* ... that connotes feelings such as ecstasy, loss and chaos, even orgasm’.<sup>72</sup> As should be clear from the analysis in this chapter so far, Bush, due to the highly dramatic, expressive and theatrical quality of her performance, is uniquely able to convey the deepest and most nuanced feelings embedded in her lyrics, through imagery, music and, especially, the range and, most importantly, sudden variations of her vocal timbres.

As for the ‘grain’ of Bush’s voice, Barthes argued that this concept cannot be equated merely with timbre but has to be defined ‘by the very friction between music and [...] language’.<sup>73</sup> For him the grain is to be understood as the body embedded in the singer’s voice as s/he sings. Moreover, according to Moy ‘there is some intrinsic link between the degree of grain and the affective response imbued in that voice’.<sup>74</sup> Then, it is undoubtedly the case that Bush’s vocal delivery cannot but affect and involve listeners, and can hardly elicit a neutral response. Whilst this is true for most of her songs, I shall provide a closer analysis of Bush’s vocals by focusing on the song ‘Babooshka.’

Starting with her third studio album, *Never for Ever* (1980), Bush began to explore the full range of her vocals, especially in terms of timbral qualities. Although she continued to employ her idiosyncratically childish voice in *Never for Ever* to perform the songs

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<sup>71</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 179-189.

<sup>72</sup> Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, p. 63.

<sup>73</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, p. 185.

<sup>74</sup> Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, p. 63.

‘Infant Kiss’ and ‘Army Dreamers’, songs such as ‘Babooshka’ and ‘The Wedding List’, as Holly Kruse claims, ‘were clearly the products of an adult mentality’.<sup>75</sup> As a result, instead of using a childish vocal timbre throughout, Bush preferred to perform these songs by continuously altering her vocal timbre.

She opens ‘Babooshka’ singing in the middle register (e' ḅ). Here, we hear Bush (as the narrator) telling the story with a mysterious and malevolent expression dominating the first verse.<sup>76</sup> Her vocal timbre when she sings the line ‘she couldn’t have made a worse move’ with an emphasis on the word ‘worse’ going down from e ḅ to b ḅ suggests that something ominous is about to take place at the end of the story, introducing a menacing atmosphere. The same expression continues until she sings ‘and he received them with a strange delight’. Starting with the word ‘delight’ she begins to sing about the husband’s nostalgia for the old days when his wife was young and beautiful: ‘but how she was before the tears / and how she was before the years flew by / and how she was when she was beautiful’. Although, throughout these lines, she uses her voice primarily to reflect the husband’s longing and tenderness with a fragile tone, these expressions are distorted once she sings ‘years flew by’ and ‘she was beautiful’. Suddenly, with the appearance of Babooshka in the song, Bush starts to use a high-pitched voice, almost shouting to convey the bursting out on the scene of young, beautiful and fierce Babooshka. The grain of Bush’s voice, as we shall shortly see, will reach its expressive zenith in the second chorus, but at this point in the song it takes on the character of a primitive cry, which I believe also contributes to draw attention to the sensual nature of Babooshka with its rawness.

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<sup>75</sup> Holly Kruse, ‘In Praise of Kate Bush’, p. 391.

<sup>76</sup> See the eighth track on the CD accompanying this thesis.

When we hear the chorus for the second time, which in terms of lyrics and music is identical with the first, Bush uses her voice to signify a completely different feeling. Whereas the first chorus was sung by the wife, who signed her letters as Babooshka, in the second chorus it is the husband who shouts 'I'm all yours Babooshka'. In the story, this confirms to the wife her husband's betrayal and his surrender to the allure of Babooshka. Suddenly, her voice reaches its utmost intensity and fury. Taking on a rasping quality, this is the voice of a wounded animal, of a wronged woman who will now exact her revenge. It's also the fearful shriek of the husband, for in the video at this very point Babooshka's image on screen becomes that of a vengeful warrior, brandishing a sword with a crazed look in her eye. As mentioned before, this is also when Bush's grain is at its fullest, where really we can hear the body, her whole physical being, as she sings and where her voice's powers of affectivity are fully unleashed.

The plurality of Bush's vocal timbre opens up possibilities for a discussion of masquerade. As the analysis above suggests, in 'Babooshka' Bush uses her voice to enforce her masquerade by manipulating it in order to reflect different aspects of the song's two main characters, through different timbres. Hence, I suggest that in this song Bush's highly versatile vocal timbre becomes an additional expressive device which both contributes to characterise more fully the various personae she takes on, and also increases the potential and power of masquerade in expressing their individual traits and features. In fact, it could be argued that Bush's voice becomes a 'vocal mask', allowing her to delve really quite deep into the psyche of her assumed personae whilst always remaining behind it and, therefore, hidden from patriarchal discourse.

For the first time in her career, while working on *Never for Ever*, Bush decided to try some new methods both to compose and record her songs. Just after she began working on her new material at Abbey Road studios, she was asked to sing on two Peter Gabriel songs, 'Games without Frontiers' and 'No Self Control', recorded for his third self-titled album also known as *Melt* (1980). Bush, a self-confessed admirer of Gabriel's music, was highly influenced by what Moy has described as his 'way of writing and recording',<sup>77</sup> especially his use of drum machine and digital sampling synthesizers to compose his songs. Her collaboration with Gabriel laid the foundations of the new synthetic sound that would dominate her future work. As a result, instead of piano, Bush used Fender Rhodes and Yamaha C.S.80 synthesizers in the arrangements of the songs of *Never for Ever*, thereby creating a sonic atmosphere different from her first two albums and reflecting a constructed sound world. I will demonstrate the role of Bush's constructed sound world in her masquerade by analysing 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)', since I suggest that the sound of many instruments in the song functions as a mask that participates in the artist's masquerade as seen in her lyrics.

Bush's use of digital sampling synthesizers and her search for new methods of composing and recording her songs reached its peak in *Hounds of Love*. Her new method was to set up the rhythm track first and build up the layers of other sounds (whether acoustic or electric) on top. This provided Bush with the opportunity of constructing her songs via the exploration of what were (to her) new studio techniques and sounds. By the time she started to work on *Hounds of Love*, Bush was at the peak of her powers as an artist. Through to the end of 1983, she rebuilt her home studio and upgraded it from an 8-track demo studio to a 48-track professional studio. More

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<sup>77</sup> Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, p. 28. Moy argues that 'Gabriel's own groundbreaking third album (...) released earlier in the same year as *Never for Ever* (...) and [its] timbral influences made a deep impression on Kate Bush's *modus operandi*'. See Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, p. 78.



importantly, by that point she and her partner Del Palmer, as a result of their exploration of digital instruments while recording *Never for Ever* and *The Dreaming*, were confident enough with Fairlight digital sampling synthesizers. Having her own studio and being able to use Fairlight confidently provided Bush with a considerable level of freedom in utilizing technological equipment (albeit mostly with the assistance of Palmer or some other male figures, such as Richard Burgess and Nick Launay), for a female musician.<sup>78</sup>

Traditionally, within patriarchy in general, and the popular music industry more specifically, technology has always been largely the domain of male technicians.<sup>79</sup> The same is true for the role of music producer – a powerful position that has customarily been the reserve of men. Emma Mayhew argues that ‘globally successful female performers are more likely to take up this role when they have reached a certain commercial longevity’.<sup>80</sup> Bush was, in fact, one of the female musicians to be financially able to afford the relevant technology and studio equipment. This, and her talents and knowledge as a musician, allowed her to take control of her albums, not only as singer and songwriter but also as producer. It should be noted that, exceptionally, both Laura Nyro and Joni Mitchell acted as co-producers or producers of all of their albums starting from 1968. Moreover, Nyro built her home studio nearly a decade earlier than Bush. Thus, here the credit should be given firstly to Nyro and secondly to Mitchell as the earliest females who produced their own work.

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<sup>78</sup> See Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, pp. 74-81.

<sup>79</sup> For a discussion see Emma Mayhew, ‘Positioning the Producer: Gender Divisions in Creative Labour and Value’, in *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity*, edited by Sheila Whiteley, Andy Bennett and Stan Hawkins (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 149-62 and Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, pp. 72-81.

<sup>80</sup> Emma Mayhew, ‘Positioning the Producer’, p. 140.

Turning to the analysis of ‘Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)’, the song opens with a C minor chord played by a Fairlight synthesizer. Chords C minor, A ♭ major (vi) and E ♭ major (iii) are repeated throughout the song. The ‘plastic’ sound created by Fairlight is further supported when the drums join in. As Ron Moy points out, ‘[b]y the time of the album’s release, technology had advanced sufficiently to blur the line between “played” drums, “programmed” drums and drum machines’.<sup>81</sup> Thus, it is not easy to be certain about the techniques used in the process of recording the song’s rhythm track, based on the evidence of the sound alone. However, drawing on Bush’s statement that ‘Del (...) wrote this great pattern on the drum machine’<sup>82</sup> and taking into consideration that in the booklet accompanying the album, Stuart Elliot is credited as the drummer, it seems plausible that the song’s drum sound, as Moy claims, was created using a combination of “played” drums and “programmed” drums.<sup>83</sup> The constitutive melodic motif heard in the introduction of the song is also the product of technology, being played on synthesizers. Thus, the representational artifice within Bush’s masquerade gains a further, musical artificiality: while she acts out different identities in most of her songs, in ‘Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)’ some of the most important elements of her music can also be regarded as an artifice supporting her masquerade constructed through the use of studio technologies.

Here I should stress that, as discussed above, I do not contend that Bush’s use of synthesizers and drum machines was in any way unusual *per se* in popular music.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, p. 43.

<sup>82</sup> Bush talks about her album *Hounds of Love*, see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00fjh2b> (last accessed 20/09/2011).

<sup>83</sup> For more on this point see Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, p. 43.

<sup>84</sup> As Andrew Goodwin states, since the mid-1970s, digital instruments have been frequently used in the Anglo-American popular music industry to ‘simulate the sound of conventional instruments’, mainly by progressive rock groups like Genesis, Pink Floyd and Yes. Throughout the 1980s, digital samplers, synthesizers and drum machines became one of the most important parts of the mainstream industry. See

Rather, the point relevant to my arguments here concerns the male-relatedness of this sound and the impact of male musicians on Bush's employment of digital samplers. I suggest that it is the male-related characteristic of this sound (at least in Bush's case), and the fact that Bush borrowed this technique from a male musician, that makes the song's musical elements a part of the artist's masquerade. As the lyric analysis showed, Bush reverses the concept of masquerade in 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)' by adopting a masculine tone. In other words, in the song, Bush hides her femininity under the mask of masculinity to manipulate patriarchal thinking and to dismantle the position attributed to women in the Symbolic. What happens in the song in terms of music is also very similar. By constructing a sound world using a technique borrowed from male musicians, such as Burgess and Gabriel, and creating a sound mask produced by an instrument (historically) used widely by men, Bush reverses the classical functioning of masquerade sonically, in parallel with the song's lyrics (Goodwin refers to the use of a Fairlight as an attempt 'to steal a sound'.<sup>85</sup>) Perhaps significantly, Bush also used Fairlight when singing 'let me steal this moment from you now' in 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)'. It is in this respect, I suggest, that this song functions musically as a supportive part of Bush's masquerade.

### 3.5. Visualizing the feminine

Starting with Kate Bush in this chapter, and continuing with Tori Amos in the following chapter, the analysis of the music videos accompanying the songs selected as case studies for both artists will constitute a significant part of my analysis. For this reason, before turning to the visual analysis of the three songs discussed in this chapter, I shall

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Andrew Goodwin, 'Sample and Hold: Pop Music in the Digital Age of Reproduction', in *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, p. 260.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

give a brief overview of the advent of music videos in the Anglo-American popular music industry. Early attempts to create videos to promote music in the United Kingdom include The Beatles' 'We Can Work it Out' (1965), 'Rain' (1966), 'Paperback Writer' (1966), 'Strawberry Fields Forever' (1967) and 'Penny Lane' (1967), The Who's 'I Can't Explain' (1965) and 'Happy Jack' (1966), The Small Faces' 'Happy Girl' (1966) and 'Get Yourself Together' (1967), Rolling Stones' 'Have You Seen Your Mother Baby, Standing in the Shadow?' (1966) and 'We Love You' (1967), and David Bowie's 'John, I'm Only Dancing' (1972), 'Jean Genie' (1972), 'Space Oddity' (1972) and 'Life on Mars' (1973). However, it was in the later 1970s that music videos gained real importance as a promotional tool; one of the most notable examples was the video for Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody', produced in 1975 and shown on British music programme *Top of the Pops*. With the arrival of the US television channel MTV in 1981, music videos became a vital part of music production. The genre provided artists with the possibility of visually representing themselves and their work as they intended, and hence exerting greater control over their image and the consumption of their music. Queen and David Bowie's 'Under Pressure' (1981), Michael Jackson's 'Thriller' (1983) and Madonna's 'Material Girl' (1985) may be cited as important examples of music videos in the first half of the 1980s.

Kate Bush was one of the first artists who took full advantage of the possibilities offered by this new medium, transforming videos from a mere promotional tool into an art form complementing her work. By producing and sometimes directing her own clips, she has arguably found in video a very fruitful medium, since it allows her to use the full expressive powers of her body – something that she has always been keen to do. To discuss Bush's videos means discussing her body-as-text. I would like to preface this

section by saying that my video analysis will be conducted in parallel with and by cross-referencing Bush's lyrics for the songs in question, since I believe that this method is more appropriate to my discussion of the masquerade. The music will be mentioned only where relevant or particularly significant.

For 'Wuthering Heights', the official video<sup>86</sup> is unified by an underlying ethereal tone. Its frames are somewhat "static" compared to other videos by Bush, invariably showing one character (Bush as Cathy) dressed in a white floaty dress and dancing. The video is set in an undefined place, which appears to be at the intersection between the afterlife and the material world, to symbolise the ghostly status of Cathy, actually a dead woman but a spirit who is certainly not at peace and yearns to come back to life. This 'non-place' also readily evokes a feminine space, outside the established order and as such more conducive to a representation of the unconscious and of feminine desire. This atmosphere is accentuated by images such as white clouds, haze and a rainbow created through lighting effects (Figure 3.5, upper left).

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<sup>86</sup> Kate Bush released a subsequent video for this song, sometimes called the 'red dress version', in which she is seen dancing in a field. However, it is the original video (the 'white dress version') with which I shall be concerned in the above analysis.



**Figure 3.5.** Screenshots from Kate Bush's video for 'Wuthering Heights'  
(Picture Music International)

Bush's long white dress and her soft, almost dreamy dance moves could, at first sight, inspire feelings of peace, innocence and grace, but these initial impressions are quickly dispelled by Cathy/Bush's crazed gaze and exaggerated (almost grimacing) facial movements, which immediately reveal a woman in an unbalanced and troubled state (Figure 3.5, upper right). During the video, which is dominated by Bush's physical expressivity, especially through the use of her face and arms, Cathy's body splits in two, only to rejoin again and again in a unitary whole. This further underlines both her status as a being between two worlds and a woman not at peace with herself, and the lack of fixed boundaries that denotes femininity, but also reflects the ambivalence of her love-hate relationship with Heathcliff, already discussed in the lyric analysis.

Cathy is not at rest and appears almost crazed at times in this video because, so to speak, she has unfinished business. Despite being on the outside, she pleads to be let

into life again, so that her obsessive passion for her former lover, whom she rejected in favour of respectability and social status and acceptance, may be fully played out – so that she may grab his soul away and possess him at least now, since she was prevented by patriarchal rules from doing so in life (Figure 3.5. lower left). The contrast between the white, ethereal and graceful image of Cathy/Bush in this video and the distinctly dark subject matter is therefore fully exploited by the video, which conveys an underlying current of danger and threat. Bush's voice punctuates with its variations and changes of pitch the conflicting emotions expressed by Cathy in the lyrics.

As with the lyrics, the notions of masquerade and feminine writing play a very prominent role in the interpretation of the video imagery. Masquerading as a ghost and writing her body, Cathy is finally able to tell Heathcliff what she felt and still feels for him, free from social constraints. Since she is beyond life and, therefore, beyond the Symbolic order, she can draw from her inner, unrepressed feelings and show the full power of her unbridled sexuality and desire, almost bordering on hysteria.<sup>87</sup> But as Bush's hands repeatedly demonstrate in the video, her yearnings are impossible: just as the character's ghostly appearance in the novel was depicted as being outside a window, in a vain attempt to be let into *Wuthering Heights*, so the ghost of dead Cathy is condemned to be shut out of life forever (Figure 3.5. lower right).

As for the second song in this analysis, 'Babooshka' was released in 1980 as a single together with a music video. The video opens showing Bush holding a double bass. Bush represents the wife, whereas the double bass symbolizes the husband. What is

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<sup>87</sup> In psychoanalysis, hysteria as a state is understood as being in a close relation to the unconscious, and for Cixous *écriture féminine* directly taps into women's unconscious.

significant here is the way in which the video positions the female body. ‘Babooshka’ starts with a close up of Bush’s face. However, the face viewers see is a woman’s face that is covered by a veil. She is the older wife in the song who – perhaps to emphasize even further the difference between her age and looks and those of Babooshka, who is yet to appear at this point – is dressed plainly and demurely in black. As the song progresses and her story unfolds, the choice of black perhaps comes to signify sadness and mourning for her lost love and faith in her husband. In fact, when the camera starts to zoom out to reveal her body, since the video is dominated by only one colour, which is black, the female body becomes imperceptible. Recalling that according to Lacan, ‘[the phallus] can play its role only when veiled’,<sup>88</sup> I suggest that this veiled image of the female body enables Bush to act in place of the phallus. In so doing, we have the first instance of masquerade in the video.

Although throughout the video the husband is symbolized by a phallic object (a double bass), as discussed above in the lyric analysis it is the wife who manipulates him. From the beginning, viewers see Bush pushing the double bass away, pulling it closer, putting her arms around it, and turning it around (Figure 3.6. left) In other words, throughout these shots, the husband is controlled and positioned by the wife. At this point, we may recall Cixous’s argument that in all oppositions, woman represents the passive or negative partner, having the power to control neither her own nor anyone else’s destiny. However, in ‘Babooshka’, as the lyric analysis reveals, the narrator sets her husband a test and so manipulates his destiny as well. Hence, by subverting through her masquerade the binary oppositions inherent in the Symbolic order that are imposed

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<sup>88</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 319.



upon women, Bush attempts to create a new system in which the traditionally passive terms gain the active role.



**Figure 3.6.** Screenshots from Kate Bush's video for 'Babooshka'  
(Picture Music International)

At the chorus, the invisible female body of the verse becomes the most important feature of the video. When it starts, Bush is transformed from an ageing wife into a seductive young woman (Babooshka) who is dressed provocatively, warrior-like and armed with a sword (Figure 3.6, right). The choice of the name 'Babooshka' may also be ironic here, since in Russian it denotes an old woman, often a grandmother. Perhaps it is meant to suggest that, despite appearances, the older wife and the younger Babooshka are in fact one and the same. As discussed above, Babooshka is a fictional character even within the song itself. Likewise, the body we see on screen is also a fiction. The moment Bush removes the veil from her face, it becomes apparent that everything is a masquerade, since we realize that throughout the video we see only masks functioning in different ways to hide the female body.

In the lyric analysis for this song, I discussed the significance of masquerade as a strategy for the wife to learn the truth about her husband's feelings for her and, more generally, to represent the multiplicity that characterises her. It is worth mentioning that the Russian babushka is also a nested doll, containing a set of dolls decreasing progressively in size, down to a baby doll. Babushkas, also called matryoshkas,

metaphorically denote an object (traditionally depicted as female) contained within another similar object. I think it is a fitting image to describe the multiplicity of women, which cannot be reduced to fixed roles such as ‘the wife’ or ‘the young lover’, as in this song, but contain within them the elements of all such roles.

Coming now to the last song to be analysed, ‘Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)’, in 1986 Bush released a videotape entitled *The Hair of the Hound*, as a companion to the album *Hounds of Love*. The video consists of four tracks taken from the first side of the album: ‘Running Up That Hill,’ ‘Hounds of Love,’ ‘The Big Sky’ and ‘Cloudbusting’. According to Moy, ‘for several obvious reasons relating to time, money and conceptual difficulty’,<sup>89</sup> Bush decided not to make a music video for the suite-like song cycle, ‘The Ninth Wave’, which forms the second side of the album. *The Hair of the Hound* heralds an advancement in Bush’s control over her work since she is credited as the director of two music videos, ‘Hounds of Love’ and ‘The Big Sky’.

Even though Bush mostly released videos based on fictional narratives, ‘Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)’ is different from the other music videos included in *The Hair of the Hound* given its lack of narration. The whole video is based on Bush’s and her dance partner Michael Hervieu’s choreographed performance. As some of her early videos, such as ‘Wuthering Heights’ and ‘Them Heavy People’ (1978) demonstrate, from the outset of her career, dance and mime played a crucial role in Bush’s artistic self-expression. Although ‘Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)’ has no narrative

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<sup>89</sup> Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, p. 98.

structure, Moy argues throughout the video that Bush and Hervieu ‘symbolize the dialectical struggles of the lyric’<sup>90</sup> through their bodily movements.

The video opens with a close-up of Bush’s hand seizing Hervieu’s neck. As the male partner’s movements suggest, this action reflects the start of the struggle narrated in the lyrics. Both Bush and Hervieu are dressed in an identical way, suggesting perhaps their equal status in this struggle, which becomes progressively clear during the video itself. At 10 seconds, the viewing audience sees Bush clinging to her partner’s body. He holds her upside down by her legs as she turns around his upright body. I suggest that this image is evocative of Cixous’s arguments about binary oppositions based on the couple (i.e. man/woman) since the woman, in this system, is always defined as the negative of man.

At the end of the first verse (at 37 seconds), we see Hervieu put Bush to sleep on the floor (Figure 3.7, upper left). There, her image becomes that of one of the women described by Cixous: ‘[s]he sleeps, she is intact, eternal, absolutely powerless. He has no doubt that she has been waiting for him forever’.<sup>91</sup> What follows is also reminiscent of Cixous’s description quoted below:

The secret of her beauty, kept for him: she has the perfection of something finished. Or not begun. However, she is breathing. Just enough life - and not too much. Then he will kiss her. So that when she opens her eyes she will see only him; him in place of everything, all-him... He leans over her... Cut. The tale is finished...Once awake (...) it would be an entirely different story.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>91</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘Sorties’, p. 66.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

At 43 seconds, the viewing audience sees Bush's partner leaning over her. When she opens her eyes she sees only him. When she stands up, she finds herself imprisoned in his arms. In the shots that follow, Bush is seen struggling to detach herself from his body. When she is free, the first thing she does is to push him away. However, he is always there, following her wherever she goes.



**Figure 3.7.** Screenshots from Kate Bush's video for 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)' (Picture Music International)

The idea of swapping each other's roles and the dialectic interaction between the male and the female are indicated for the first time in the video when Bush passes between her partner's legs at 1'33". Surprisingly, at the end of this shot, viewers see not Bush but her partner completing this action. However, when he stands up what we see is not his face and body but Bush's face and body. I maintain that these scenes can be considered as the first sign of masquerade that will become one of the most significant conceptual aspects of the video.

At 1'57", Bush can be seen trying to escape from her partner again. However, in the following shot, Bush appears lying on the floor, trapped by him. Throughout the first half of the video, we see Bush and Hervieu positioned in a dusky room. This confined environment is the place where Bush's struggle takes place. We are aware of the existence of an exterior only through daylight coming in from the windows. However, when Bush is trapped by her partner we realize that the interior becomes the exterior. Thus, starting at this moment, two visual worlds interact in the video. In the following shot, the pair appear lying on a narrow road where a surreal event takes place. Both Bush and Hervieu leave their bodies on the floor as their two ghost-like images rise to run from where they lie (Figure 3.7, upper right). Here, we see that this time it is Bush who runs after and traps her partner. Thus, when they are outside, the roles are swapped. In other words, when Bush is outside the room, she becomes active. In this respect, I argue that the room represents the Symbolic world, whereas the outside represents a new kind of system in which the female is able to present herself as the opposite of how she is defined in the Symbolic.

While discussing the relationship between the video and musical text, Moy maintains that 'for the most part they [Bush and Hervieu] are free from the rhythmic and tempo constraints of the song (...) here the moves themselves symbolically circle around the musical text, sometimes diverting into parallel or disconnected routes'.<sup>93</sup> Taking into consideration the song's monotonousness in terms of rhythmic and harmonic structure (harmonically only three chords are used: C minor, A  $\flat$  major and E  $\flat$  major), I suggest that from 2'01" onwards, the video contradicts the musical text through its spatial duality and the reflection of two different Bushes and Hervieus. At 3'02", we see Bush

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<sup>93</sup> Ron Moy, *Kate Bush and Hounds of Love*, p. 100.

trying to run while being swept away down a corridor in the opposite direction by a group of female bodies carrying Hervieu's picture as masks on their faces (Figure 3.7, lower left). It is at this moment in the video that the fantasy of hiding femininity with a mask of masculinity both in the lyrics and music of the song is explicitly visualized. Through to the end of the video, we see a group of male bodies walking through a long hall wearing masks that are pictures of Bush's face (Figure 3.7, lower right). Bearing in mind that most of the sounds created through the use of Fairlight also function as male sound masks hiding the real sound of the acoustic instruments, I suggest that these scenes create a strong link between the music video and the music itself, by supporting the masquerade observed both in the lyrics and music of 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)'.

I believe that these masked crowds that separate Bush and Hervieu and prevent them from being joined again may suggest that only by staying true to their respective selves will the two lovers find understanding and reciprocity. The video progressively displays more interaction and equality between the man and the woman, now operating outside of the Symbolic as explained above. From the initial images, where the male appeared to dominate and constrain the female, their dance moves become more parallel and almost a mirror image of each other. This also reflects the dialectic nature of Bush's lyrics, which are constantly in the plural, considering both partners' points of view and admitting that just as the man is not aware that he is hurting her, she too is unaware that she is tearing him asunder. So, we start to see them more and more on an equal footing, and also in a similar predicament: just as Bush cannot reach Hervieu because of the intervening masked figures, the same holds for Hervieu in his yearning for Bush. The closing shots of the video are also worthy of note: by this time, both partners are shown

as totally equal, each of them miming repeatedly throwing arrows, which on the surface could signify Cupid's arrows (that is, love), but, both due to the grave expressions on their faces and the seemingly large size of their bows, may also suggest a hostile strike against a target. This seals the theme of the dialectical struggle between the male and the female in this song.

### 3.6. Conclusion

Gender and sexuality-related themes can be observed not only in the lyrics and videos of the songs analyzed in this chapter, but throughout Bush's entire *oeuvre*. As discussed above, the artist's first album was full of references to a growing female body, and to sexuality. Besides 'Wuthering Heights', the song 'The Kick Inside' also saw Bush masquerading, this time as a young girl who commits suicide after becoming pregnant by her brother. Similarly, as can be seen in the videotape *Live at Hammersmith Odeon*,<sup>94</sup> for the song 'James and the Cold Gun', Bush impersonated a character inspired, as Jovanovic states, by 'the stories of the James Gang'.<sup>95</sup> This song can be considered an early example of the artist's practice of putting on a masculine mask, discussed in detail in my analysis of 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)'.

Bush was pictured barefoot on top of a box in a lion costume for the cover of her second album, *Lionheart*. Regarding the lion as a male image and a signifier of power and courage, I suggest that this cover can also be read as a clear indication of Bush's use of a kind of reverse masquerade playing with the masculine discourse in order to manipulate the sexual politics of patriarchal society. Bush's subversion of the traditional

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<sup>94</sup> Kate Bush, *Live at Hammersmith Odeon* (Picture Music International, 1981).

<sup>95</sup> Rob Jovanovic, *Kate Bush*, p. 64. The James Gang was a group of outlaws in 19<sup>th</sup> century America that counted Jesse James among its members.

positioning of women through masquerade came to the fore, once again, in *Lionheart*, as she chose Peter Pan, a genderless figure, as a source of inspiration for the album's second track, 'In Search of Peter Pan'. As Marjorie Garber argues, Peter Pan can be regarded as the 'ego-ideal'<sup>96</sup> of Wendy, the female protagonist of the story (an Edwardian schoolgirl), since he represents everything forbidden to her. In this respect, Bush's masquerading of Peter Pan can also be read as a symbolic gesture aiming at the subversion of patriarchal views of femininity.

Bush released three singles from the album *Never for Ever*: 'Breathing', 'Babooshka' and 'Army Dreamers'. Jovanovic asserts that the first of these three singles 'caused a mini socio-political storm with its images of nuclear war'.<sup>97</sup> What is more important for my arguments is that Bush, in the song, by using masquerade gave voice to an unborn baby who sang about the effects of nuclear war from her mother's womb: 'outside / gets inside / through her skin / I've never been out before / but this time it's much safer in'. In the video of the song, Bush acted as the baby breathing through a plastic umbilical cord in a plastic bubble, representing the womb. Recalling that the Symbolic signifies the child's entry into the language and social systems constructed by patriarchy, a baby positioned in his/her mother's womb can be regarded as an image that has no relation to the Symbolic. Thus, in 'Breathing', Bush, through masquerade, created a character who is positioned outside of the gendered linguistic and social frameworks. In the music video for 'Army Dreamers', Bush is dressed as an army boy manipulating the masculine gaze to play with patriarchal norms. Thus, throughout the three singles released from *Never for Ever*, Bush also explored the possibilities of the masquerade.

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<sup>96</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 161.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.



Like the video for 'Army Dreamers', the video for 'Cloudbusting' from the album *Hounds of Love* showed Bush acting as a young boy. Throughout the second side of the album, which consists of seven songs under the title *The Ninth Wave*, Bush tells the story of a girl who is trying to keep herself awake in the sea in order not to drown. Cixous, in 'Sorties', draws on nature and the ocean to symbolize female subjectivity. Like Irigaray, she claims a relationship between fluidity and femininity. In this respect, I suggest that in *The Ninth Wave*, Bush's masquerade, with its direct references to nature and water, can be read in parallel with both Irigaray's and Cixous's arguments about the link between female subjectivity, feminine writing and fluids, which are more fully explored in the chapter on Joni Mitchell.

Bush released her sixth studio album *The Sensual World* in 1989. It was considered to be her 'most explicitly female-identified statement'<sup>98</sup> by writers such as Reynolds and Press, and Whiteley. Bush also defined *The Sensual World* as her most feminine album: 'This is definitely my most personal, honest album. And I think it's my most feminine album, in that I feel maybe I'm not trying to prove something in terms of a woman in a man's world'.<sup>99</sup> In terms of the album's relationship with female sexuality, its cover art is emblematic. It depicts Bush's face, her lips hidden behind a large rose in full bloom. I have already discussed, in the chapter on Mitchell, the very important imagery of the 'two lips' proposed by Luce Irigaray. As mentioned, the two lips symbolize both the multiplicity and the constantly open-ended nature of femininity and female sexuality. As Canters and Jantzen have commented, this is also exemplified by the flower opening and closing, with petals spreading only to curl upon themselves again, touching each

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<sup>98</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *The Sex Revolts*, p. 380. See also Sheila Whiteley, *Too Much Too Young* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 81.

<sup>99</sup> Kate Bush quoted in Phil Sutcliffe, 'Iron Maiden', in *Q* (November, 1989), at [http://gaffa.org/reaching/i89\\_q3.html](http://gaffa.org/reaching/i89_q3.html) (last accessed 26/09/2011).

other.<sup>100</sup> Being multi-layered, the rose is a prime example of this imagery. It is significant, I suggest, that a woman's lips, which by themselves symbolize sexuality, are hidden behind or masked by a rose on Bush's cover for *The Sensual World*. The juxtaposition of womanliness and nature, in the form of the flower, could also serve to emphasize woman's closeness to nature, in opposition to the Symbolic order, as well as a further demonstration of the similarities and parallels between them.

The title song of the album also bears importance for my arguments. Bush originally wrote the lyrics of the song 'The Sensual World' by directly quoting the famous closing soliloquy from James Joyce's *Ulysses*,<sup>101</sup> where Molly Bloom remembers the moment she gave herself, sexually, to her husband Leopold Bloom. However, the writer's estate refused Bush permission to use the text in her lyrics. Hence, she rewrote them only by taking Molly Bloom's 'Mmh' for the chorus of the song. Recalling that according to both Cixous and Kristeva, the semiotic comes into being before acquiring language (pre-Oedipal) in the domain of the maternal body and surfaces only as a break in the Symbolic, I suggest that Bush's choice of using Bloom's meaningless 'Mmh' can be considered as Bush's attempt to reflect feminine *jouissance*.

In fact, James Joyce's *Ulysses* and in particular the female character of Molly Bloom, culminating in her monologue at the very end of the book, were praised for their potential subversiveness both by Kristeva and Cixous as an instance of poetic language created by a male author. According to Cixous, when Molly says 'yes' she carries '*Ulysses* off beyond any book and toward the new writing'.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, this monologue also signifies a kind of masquerade. According to Kimberly J. Devlin,

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<sup>100</sup> See Hanneke Canters and Grace M. Jantzen, *Forever Fluid*, pp. 110-12.

<sup>101</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin Books, 1992).

<sup>102</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p. 884.

Joyce, in writing Molly's stream-of-consciousness soliloquy in *Ulysses*, actually adopts female masquerade himself, and this constitutes an 'act of male female impersonation'.<sup>103</sup> She continues as follows:

It is significant, if not surprising, that only in [this way] was Joyce enabled to feel the discomforts of the construct [...] and to find a way out of its confines in subversive gender play... to articulate one of his canniest critiques of the ideology that produces the oppressive categories themselves.<sup>104</sup>

Thus, what Joyce did in writing Molly Bloom's soliloquy was very similar to what Bush suggested, more than 60 years after the novel's publication, in 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)' since Joyce, in a sense, swapped places. Bush again requested permission to quote Molly Bloom's soliloquy, as written by Joyce, in her 2011 album *Director's Cut* and finally the writer's estate relented. Therefore, the new version not only reproduces the quotation from *Ulysses* faithfully, but Bush also went as far as changing the song's title to 'Flower of the Mountain', which appears as part of Joyce's original text.

In the song, Bush sings the lyric 'stepping out of the page into the sensual world'. This 'stepping out' happens when woman writes herself, in one of possibly the most explicit sexts, such as Molly's soliloquy. Despite that, this sext is not a fully-fledged example of *écriture féminine* since it was written by a male author, Joyce, but it crucially shows that when a male artist (through using female masquerade) steps outside the Symbolic and is able to understand woman and her desire, subversion is nevertheless possible and the

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<sup>103</sup> Kimberly J. Devlin, 'Pretending in "Penelope": Masquerade, Mimicry, and Molly Bloom', in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Autumn, 1991), p. 89.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

potentialities for a future in which both woman and man escape the strictures of their respective gender roles are clear to see.

In 1993, after four years of silence, Bush released her seventh album, *Red Shoes*. Literature and the cinema were once again the main sources of inspiration for the artist. The song 'Red Shoes' was inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's famous fairytale and Michael Powell's 1948 musical movie of the same name. As she did in 'Wuthering Heights', while rewriting the fairytale in the form of a song, Bush reconfigured the original text by emphasizing the power of the female protagonist. To do so, she appropriated Andersen's ill-fated Karen through masquerade in such a way that the punishment for the desire of the red shoes is shifted towards a pseudo-masochistic celebration of feminine *jouissance* that embraces death rather than the Law.

One of the 'most talked about songs'<sup>105</sup> of Bush's 2005 release *Aerial* was 'Mrs Bartolozzi'. According to Jovanovic, 'in many ways it's the quintessential Kate Bush track'.<sup>106</sup> In the song, we hear Bush sing as Mrs Bartolozzi, who starts to have an erotic dream while watching her and her lover's dirty clothes in the new washing machine 'go round and round' and become entangled. As Bush also confirms, the song was based on her experiences as a housewife and mother, as she spent most of her time between 1998 and 2005 at home to raise her son: 'I was spending a lot of time in the washing room',<sup>107</sup> she explained in an interview. Thus, in this song, Bush creates a persona to tell a story influenced by her own experiences. In this respect, it can be suggested that 'Mrs Bartolozzi' is one of her songs in which she blurs the line between the genuine and fictitious womanliness.

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<sup>105</sup> Rob Jovanovic, *Kate Bush*, p. 210.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p.210.

<sup>107</sup> Kate Bush quoted in Rob Jovanovic, *Kate Bush*, p. 210.

To sum up, Bush can be positioned within the history of Anglo-American popular music as a leading figure who has been using masquerade to celebrate female imagery and iconography. Throughout her career, she has created several personae to reflect different aspects of femininity, by tracing women's experiences back through history, mythology, film and literature. The direct references to the fictional characters in her lyrics and the visibility of her performance in her music videos trigger the question of whether Bush uses masquerade consciously or not. Similarly, her statements about her consciousness about the relationship between her music and the meanings of her songs strengthen the possibility of the artist's use of some techniques strategically. Losseff also makes a similar point while discussing Bush's use of musical elements in 'Wuthering Heights':

...the relationship between the musical content and meaning in her songs is something of which she herself was quite conscious. In one 1978 article she was quoted as saying 'the chords almost dictate what the song should be about because they have their own moods'; and in another, 'I just start playing the piano and the chords start telling me something'.<sup>108</sup>

As is the case with many artists, we cannot be sure of Bush's conscious intentions in her creative output and, in the absence of any statement or comment by her to this effect, it is not possible to ascertain Bush's awareness and deliberate use of masquerade and its expressive devices. Therefore, the unified reading of her lyrics, music and videos I have proposed in this chapter through masquerade should merely be regarded as just one of many possible valid interpretations. Nevertheless, I feel that – both in light of Bush's own comments above, and the fact that these themes seem to be a thread running through her entire career – it is justifiable to regard her songs as an important signifier

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<sup>108</sup> Nicky Losseff, 'Cathy's Homecoming and The Other World', pp. 236-37.

of masquerade enabling iconographic possibilities by means of inventing transgressive narrative modes, not only through her lyrics and visual representation, but also through her music.

## CHAPTER 4

### Songs Under a *Black Sun*: Tori Amos in ‘Silent All These Years’, ‘Pretty Good Year’ and ‘Hey Jupiter’

#### 4.1. Introduction

Although throughout the 1980s female singer-songwriters were overshadowed by the late 1970s’ punk and early 1980s’ synthpop movements, as Lucy O’Brien states, ‘they re-emerged in 1987 when [Suzanne Vega] made female acoustic songwriting Big News again’.<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Vega may be considered the first major female singer-songwriter coming to prominence towards the end of the 1980s. The commercial success of her early singles prompted record companies to look for other female artists who could write and compose their own songs. While at the time of her first album there were only a handful of artists performing in the singer-songwriter tradition of the late 1960s and 1970s, the end of decade saw numerous female artists, such as Tracy Chapman and Sinéad O’Connor, working from the same foundations and topping the charts. Their success paved the way for a new era of singer-songwriters who would emerge in the 1990s.

Another trend which also continued throughout the late 1980s was the readiness by the media to bracket female artists together. Like Joni Mitchell and Kate Bush before them, new generations of female singer-songwriters felt uncomfortable with this attitude. Many thought that it served to position women as excluded or secondary figures within the music industry. Since male artists were the norm, it was quite unusual to group them together collectively. When it comes to women artists, however, even today, it is commonplace for them to be defined by their sex first. Vega explained this as follows,

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy O’Brien, *She Bop II*, p. 109.

‘the media has insisted on putting women together. No one thinks of male singer/songwriters. Women have different characters – there’re huge differences between, say, me and Sinéad O’Connor. We have to stop being defined in terms of each other’.<sup>2</sup>

Although at the end of the 1980s women had gone some way in articulating these issues, the media persisted in emphasizing the sex of the artist by labelling women artists as female and grouping them together regardless of their differences. The May 1994 cover of *Q* magazine is an emblematic example of this tendency. Under the headline ‘HIPS. LIPS. TITS. POWER’,<sup>3</sup> three of the most significant female figures of the 1990s, Tori Amos, Björk and P J Harvey, were shown together. However, as Amos told the interviewer, they had little in common other than their sex: ‘If you think about Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page and Eric Clapton they were all much more similar to each other than we are. We have tits. We have three holes. That’s what we have in common. We don’t even play the same instruments’.<sup>4</sup> The other thing they had in common was their success in the Anglo-American music scene, not only artistically but also commercially.

As O’Brien argues, ‘though she has found the term feminism problematic (...), Amos is the most explicitly feminist of three’.<sup>5</sup> This claim would be explained by Amos’s explicit use of the autobiographical, especially in her early albums. Besides, her statements about gender issues, as recorded in interviews and her written biographies, confirm that she defines herself as a feminist. For instance, in *Tori Amos Piece by Piece*

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<sup>2</sup> Suzanne Vega quoted in Lucy O’Brien, *She Bop II*, p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> *Q* Magazine (May 1994/092).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>5</sup> Lucy O’Brien, *She Bop II*, p. 205.



she declares that '[she] was born a feminist'<sup>6</sup> and elsewhere she goes as far as referring to her tracks as 'Song-Girls'.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout her career, Amos, a classically trained pianist, created a body of work primarily by drawing from the possibilities offered by Western classical music. For instance, she has described her latest release, *Night of the Hunter* (2011), as 'a 21<sup>st</sup> century song cycle'<sup>8</sup> influenced by the works of composers such as J. S. Bach, Chopin, Debussy and Stravinsky. This ability enabled her to create a multi-layered musical language, which, as discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis, could reflect the multiple characteristic of the female body contrasting with the "oneness" of the phallus. The ways in which she multi-tracks her vocals in all of her albums (sometimes to create a one-woman choir) and uses harmonic and rhythmic structures should be considered instances of her multi-layered feminine musical language, which finds its roots in the work of artists such as Nyro, Mitchell and Bush, as we have seen. Moreover, concept albums such as *Strange Little Girls* (2001), *Scarlett's Walk* (2002) and *American Doll Posse* (2007) could be regarded as three of the best examples of the feminist practice of creating different personae through masquerade in popular music.

In every chapter of this thesis, I have focussed on one particular feminist theory that can enlighten fruitfully key aspects of the selected songs of each artists discussed. However, as is apparent from my discussion, all the feminist theories outlined in this research are by no means exclusive to a single artist, and one can often find that several of them shed new light in interpreting the work of the same artist. So, although Amos's work

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<sup>6</sup> Tori Amos and Ann Powers, *Tori Amos Piece by Piece: A Portrait of the Artist: Her Thoughts. Her Conversations* (London: Plexus, 2005), p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> Tori Amos, the booklet of *A Piano: The Collection* (Rhino, 2006), p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.toriamos.com/go/music/> (last accessed 19/10/2011).

provides any researcher with fruitful ground to build upon with regard to multiplicity and masquerade, with its pluralistic characteristics (both musically and conceptually), in this chapter I shall focus on the workings of melancholia and related monotony in her songs which, I argue, may be seen as possible ways to create breaks in the order of the Symbolic. To do so, I will analyse three of Tori Amos's songs taken from her first three albums, namely 'Silent All These Years' (1992), 'Pretty Good Year' (1994) and 'Hey Jupiter' (1996), through the lens of psychoanalytical theories on melancholia and depression, in order to understand the ways in which she symbolizes melancholia in her music to narrate various forms of female subjectivities.

My theoretical articulation will begin with Freud, in order to define melancholia as a psychic condition, after which I shall discuss Julia Kristeva's reconsideration of Freud to determine music-specific implications of the melancholic compulsion to repeat. In discussing Kristeva's analysis of the additional difficulties faced by women in coming to terms with the effects of melancholia, I shall additionally take into account the theories of Luce Irigaray and briefly review the historical trajectory of melancholia along the lines of the approach proposed by Juliana Schiesari, from which an important distinction emerges as regards its representation along gender lines. Here, I should make it clear that I do not suggest that melancholia is an exclusively female phenomenon, merely that it calls into question the person's bodily being and gendered identity; in that respect, therefore, a female artist's articulation of melancholic signifiers forms part of a wider feminist project too. In other words, in the context of female artistic production, I consider melancholia as an alternative feminist practice of distortion, like Kristeva's theory of the semiotic explored in the earlier chapter on Laura Nyro, that has the power to challenge phallic/Symbolic language. To conclude my analysis, I shall discuss the

impact of female melancholia in both of Amos's later albums released between 1996 and 2011 and her life, by tracing back through her interviews and biographies in order to create a link between her work and her body.

The reason for focusing on Amos's early work is my contention that this period constitutes the core of her career in terms of music, lyrics and visual representation. Moreover, I suggest that Amos's explicit use of her own experiences as a source of inspiration for the songs written throughout this period makes her earlier work suitable for a feminist discussion, claiming a link between the female body, experience and language. This emphasis on the autobiographical started to wane from 2001 onwards, with Amos's album *Strange Little Girls*, and afterwards she mainly released concept albums based on fictitious characters. The reason for this, as she explained, was to avoid exposing her personal life, especially after giving birth to her only daughter. In a 2009 interview she said 'I have used made-up characters to keep the media at bay'.<sup>9</sup> In another interview, she stated that '[t]he main message of my new album [*American Doll Posse*] is: the political is personal. This as opposed to the feminist statement from years ago that the personal is political (...) [w]ith *Little Earthquakes* I took on more personal things'.<sup>10</sup> However, Amos returned to 'more personal' issues as a songwriter with the album *Abnormally Attracted to Sin* (2009).

Coming to song choices, even though her first LP was *Me and a Gun* (1991), it was the song 'Silent All These Years' that brought Amos her the first chart success. She

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<sup>9</sup> Amos quoted in Adrian Thrills, 'Tori Reform: Her kooky image has helped her sell 12m albums, but Tori Amos insists she isn't a "strange little girl" anymore', in *The Daily Mail* (21/05/2009). See also <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1186080/Tori-reform-Her-kooky-image-helped-sell-12m-albums-Tori-Amos-insists-isnt-strange-little-girl-more.html> (last accessed 18/10/2011).

<sup>10</sup> Amos quoted at <http://www.boesendorfer.com/music/index.php?ord=title&find=&pn=3> (last accessed 19/10/2011).

confirms its importance while talking about the writing process for the album *Little Earthquakes*:

(...) writing ‘Silent All These Years’ was foundational. I started writing it for Al Stewart – the melody, not the lyrics – because he’d asked me to write something. I allowed myself to find my own voice for somebody else, but not for myself. Then Eric Rosse made me ask *myself* the question: How could I give a song like that away? So as I started to claim it as my own, I was able to write the words around it. I think this song became my mantra. As a child with a dream to use her own musical vision, I had been silenced by my ambition to have a career beyond the bar rooms where people spilled cocktails all over the piano. While writing “Silent” I decided that even if I had to go back to a life of performing standards in piano bars, I would rather do that than live a musical life creating music I couldn’t wear well. “Silent” was a talisman.<sup>11</sup>

In her second and third albums, Amos continued to work on the musical ideas she had begun to explore with ‘Silent All These Years’. Taking into consideration the similarities between ‘Silent All These Years’, ‘Pretty Good Year’ and ‘Hey Jupiter’ in terms not only of content but also tempo, arrangement techniques and use of intervals, I would argue that these songs can also be regarded as the result and peak of her search for her own voice. Amos’s decision to complement them with video clips also confirms their significance for the artist.

Tori Amos’s first LP, *Me and a Gun*, can be regarded as a precursor to the approaches the artist presents in her first three albums as a singer-songwriter. As Whiteley puts it, Amos’s earlier albums are ‘largely about self-examination, reflecting on the tensions between her religious upbringing, her rebelliousness, her relationships and the struggle

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<sup>11</sup> Tori Amos, *A Piano*, p. 21.

to find her own voice'.<sup>12</sup> 'Me and a Gun' and its B-side, 'Silent All These Years', like many of her first songs, are autobiographical and as Joy and Press argue, they are 'based around the idea of *the talking cure*'.<sup>13</sup> For instance, in 'Me and a Gun', Amos narrates her personal experience of being raped, singing *a cappella* to underline the significance of her words. According to Bonnie Gordon, Amos, with her performance, 'explicitly writes it [the rape] into existence with terse but powerful language that confronts its unpleasant particularities'.<sup>14</sup> The song, centrally, is developed around the idea of a lost object/lost body. In other words, Amos textualizes a requiem narrating the loss of a feminine ideal of self which she will never *be* again. Since Freud argues that 'melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness',<sup>15</sup> I would relate the idea of a lost object, seen in Amos's earlier albums, to the concept of melancholia.

#### 4.2. Theorizing female melancholia

Freud considers mental features of melancholia as 'a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment'.<sup>16</sup> The same conditions might also occur in mourning, which for Freud 'is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person or to the loss of some abstraction

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<sup>12</sup> Sheila Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music*, p. 199.

<sup>13</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *The Sex Revolts*, p. 267.

<sup>14</sup> Bonnie Gordon, 'Tori Amos's Inner Voices', p. 194.

<sup>15</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XIV*, edited and translated by James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1957), p. 245.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on'.<sup>17</sup> But whereas Freud sees mourning as the reaction to a concrete loss, as something that will eventually be overcome with the passing of time and where 'the disturbance of self-regard is absent',<sup>18</sup> in melancholia 'there is a loss of a more ideal kind'<sup>19</sup> and the subject perceives such loss without being able to point clearly to what he or she has actually lost. The suggestion, for Freud, is that 'melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradiction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious'.<sup>20</sup>

In *Black Sun*,<sup>21</sup> her seminal work on depression and melancholia, Kristeva proposes a differentiation – one that will become very relevant to my discussion - between these two concepts:

I shall call *melancholia* the institutional symptomatology of inhibition and asymbolia what becomes established now and then or chronically in a person, alternating more often than not with the so-called manic phase or exaltation. When the two phenomena, despondency and exhilaration, are of lesser intensity and frequency, it is then possible to speak of neurotic depression.<sup>22</sup>

Here, a general point needs to be made from the outset. Despite Kristeva's above distinction, which assigns to melancholia the status of a more intense condition compared to depression, the meaning of these two terms often seems to overlap and merge in the various sources consulted. Kristeva herself acknowledged the fuzzy

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 243-44.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>21</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). Kristeva derives the image of a "black sun" from a sonnet of Gerard de Nerval, as it 'admirably evokes the blinding intensity of an affect eluding conscious elaboration'. See Julia Kristeva, 'On The Melancholic Imaginary', in *New Formations*, No. 3 (Winter 1987), p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 9.

demarcation between them<sup>23</sup> and some authors take them to be almost synonymous, as in the case of Joelle McAfee, for whom melancholia is an outmoded name for depression,<sup>24</sup> and who states that ‘Kristeva uses the now obsolete term *melancholia* to refer to narcissistic depression’.<sup>25</sup> In my discussion I will follow Juliana Schiesari’s argument, to be examined shortly, for a distinction to be made – based on the cultural and historical trajectory of these two concepts - between ‘melancholia’ as applicable to male artistic production, and ‘female melancholia’, more akin to depression, for female artists. For this reason, throughout this chapter where relevant I shall refer to ‘female melancholia’ to denote the specific nature of the melancholic state in women.<sup>26</sup>

For Kristeva, melancholia is primarily triggered by a failed separation, or differentiation, of the subject from the mother - with no emergence of primary narcissism.<sup>27</sup> Melancholia thus produces an all-pervasive sadness that is the ‘the most archaic expression of a non-symbolizable, unnameable narcissistic wound’.<sup>28</sup> Both for men and women, the ‘cutting of the umbilical cord’ from the mother signifies differentiation and entry into the Symbolic, and indeed the loss of the mother - in the

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<sup>23</sup> Kristeva argues that ‘[t]he terms melancholia and depression refer to a composite that may be called melancholy/depressive, whose borders are in fact blurred’. Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> See Noelle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 60.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>26</sup> See Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (London: Cornell University Press, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> A stage emerging from around six months up to around six years of age in the constituting of the individual self.

<sup>28</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 12. Within *Black Sun*, Kristeva points to the source of this generalized sadness as the “Thing” (*la chose*), ‘the real that does not lend itself to signification, the centre of attraction and repulsion, seat of the sexuality from which the object of desire will become separated’ (Ibid., p. 13), however it becomes increasingly clear in the book that what Kristeva refers to is a “maternal Thing”, and indeed – also given the importance of the maternal body throughout Kristeva’s work, as discussed previously in this thesis – this is how it has been understood within feminist literature. For example, Doane and Hodges comment that: ‘Asymbolia (...) results from a subject’s refusal to give up an archaic attachment to a maternal object. Kristeva vividly describes the deadly effects of a captivation with what she calls the “Thing”, [...] As her argument evolves, the relation to the mother is substituted for the relation to the “Thing”’. Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva:*

sense of separation from her - is a necessary precondition for the development of subjectivity. In *Black Sun*, Kristeva goes further and postulates the necessity of 'matricide (...) the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation'.<sup>29</sup> As she further explains, if this matricidal process is impeded, 'the maternal object having been introjected, the depressive or melancholic putting to death of the self is what follows'.<sup>30</sup>

In line with her theory, according to which the semiotic, or pre-Oedipal, is never left behind by the subject after passing into the Symbolic order, for Kristeva melancholia and the unconscious loss it represents are reflected in language. As John Lechte remarks, 'the melancholic can master signs, but not affect'.<sup>31</sup> Using words that are divorced from their drives (since meaning is produced by a 'synthesis of signifier and drive affect'),<sup>32</sup> the melancholic's language is characterised by flatness, stillness and emotional detachment. Unable to produce full symbolic signification, the melancholic inhabits language as an extraneous territory.

Whilst a child, regardless of his or her gender, becomes part of the Symbolic order - becomes a subject - necessarily in virtue of this loss, for Kristeva art and literature may have a sublimatory value, since they are able to represent semiologically, through poetic language and its semiotic devices already described previously in this thesis, the subject's loss - in an attempt to restore meaning. So, works of art may have therapeutic value in overcoming melancholia, both for the artist and for those who experience them since, and despite artists are themselves melancholic subjects, Kristeva maintains that

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*Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the "Good Enough" Mother* (University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 55.

<sup>29</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>31</sup> John Lechte, *Julia Kristeva* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 187.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.



‘[a] written melancholia surely has little in common with the institutionalized stupor that bears the same name (...) The artist consumed by melancholia is at the same time the most relentless in his struggle against the symbolic abdication that blankets him’.<sup>33</sup> For Kristeva, ‘what makes such a triumph over sadness possible is the ability of the self to identify no longer with the lost object but with a third party – father, form, schema’.<sup>34</sup>

In *Black Sun*, Kristeva sees the works of Dostoyevsky and Nerval as examples of the ‘therapeutic’ value of art in overcoming or, at least, verbalizing and coming to terms with melancholia. Except Marguerite Duras, the artists included in *Black Sun* are all male, and this is no coincidence. If the conquest of subjectivity requires a separation from the mother so violent to be only achievable through matricide, and if what is desirable is the capacity of identifying with the Symbolic order with the phallus as its ultimate signifier (‘father-form-schema’), it should come as no surprise that women, unlike men, will encounter further, indeed unsurpassable, difficulties, as Kristeva acknowledges when she writes that women’s ‘specular identification with the mother as well as introjection of the maternal body and self are more immediate (...) since I am She’.<sup>35</sup> These difficulties are also underlined by Luce Irigaray, who describes the relation between mother and daughter as ‘the *dark continent* of the *dark continent*’<sup>36</sup> and sees it as ‘an extremely explosive kernel in our societies’,<sup>37</sup> crucial in the efforts to undermine patriarchal society.

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<sup>33</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>36</sup> Luce Irigaray quoted in Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 77.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray argues that the melancholic symptoms outlined by Freud (sense of dejection, loss of interest in the external world)<sup>38</sup> manifest themselves when women enter the Symbolic, that is, when the female child comes to understand the little regard in which she, and also her mother, are held. This is a necessarily short statement of her highly articulated theory, but nevertheless it crucially points to a melancholia which is caused by the position of women in the Symbolic. For Irigaray, women – unlike men, who as boys enter into the Symbolic by identifying with the father and thus compensating for the loss of the mother with another object of the opposite sex - are unable to represent adequately their loss within the Father's language and have as their only recourse a return to the mother they abandoned, so as to make themselves an object of male desire; once again, therefore, the heavier yoke of melancholia and depression on women is crucially explained by the role of the Symbolic in limiting their ability to overcome their melancholia, which then becomes a further manifestation of gender inequalities within the Symbolic.<sup>39</sup>

These disparities are also to be found in the way expressing melancholia has come to be perceived throughout history in Western societies. It is, of course, undisputable that the maternal loss concerns universally both sexes yet, as Schiesari points out, in the Symbolic the male enjoys 'privileged access to the display of loss'.<sup>40</sup> She continues as follows:

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<sup>38</sup> See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, particularly pp. 66-73.

<sup>39</sup> A full discussion of female melancholia would go beyond the scope of this chapter, nevertheless another important feminist reading is that of Kaja Silverman who, starting from different theoretical assumptions, nevertheless also places the moment of loss, and hence the emergence of melancholia, at the entry into the Symbolic. See Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

<sup>40</sup> Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia*, p. 31.

In other words, once women and men have entered into the symbolic, a symbolic understood as dominated by a masculine cultural ideal, men and women find themselves in utterly different relations to the representation of loss.<sup>41</sup>

In her comprehensive historical overview, Schiesari follows the evolution of the concept of melancholia in Western culture, not just within the psychoanalytic domain, from its beginnings - when it was seen as a negative and the result of an excess of black bile - to its 'gendering', with its increasing association with 'great men' and male artistic creation to the detriment of female expressions of loss, such as depression. Its transformation from malady to a virtue and a sign of prestige and refinement, denoting the special status and insight of the (male) artist, has reduced female expressions of loss to 'inarticulateness' and silence.<sup>42</sup>

Schiesari locates the beginnings of this transformation in the Renaissance, specifically, in the work of a Florentine philosopher who lived in the fifteenth century, Marsilio Ficino. Schiesari explains this as follows:

[Ficino] was a self-described melancholic, who revised such negative (...) assessment of the melancholic temperament by insisting that those who fell under the unlucky planet of Saturn, as he himself had, were especially gifted. As the deity of planet traditionally associated with melancholia, and thus previously viewed negatively, Saturn took on a positive aspect with Ficino.<sup>43</sup>

Schiesari argues that for male artists, melancholia 'became an "elite" illness that afflicted *men* precisely as the *sign* of their exceptionality, as the inscription of genius

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>42</sup> For further discussion see Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia*, p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia*, p. 7.

within them'.<sup>44</sup> But whereas melancholia appears as a specific representational form for male creativity, the aestheticization and gendering of melancholia, Schiesari argues, has led to the appropriation of women's lack, with "'loss" [becoming] differently inscribed according to gender'.<sup>45</sup> So, whilst male artists have claimed melancholia for themselves, starting from the Renaissance and continuing through the Enlightenment, and later the Romantic age, women's expressions of loss have been devalued and relegated to depressed states and ritual mourning. As Schiesari polemically notes, 'looking over the list of those one could consider "great melancholics" (...) one is struck by the notable absence of women, an absence that surely points less to some lack of unhappy women than to the lack of significance traditionally given to women's grief in patriarchal culture'.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, women have suffered a double loss – I believe in both cases at the hands of patriarchal society – and as Schiesari maintains, 'to speak of female melancholia is to speak of something that is historically mute'.<sup>47</sup>

I would argue that, as Schiesari demonstrates, whereas melancholia can have symptoms common to both men and women, it is only when it is taken out of the purely psychic realm and by following its historical trajectory in Western societies, delving deeper into an analysis of this unconscious loss in the light of feminist theories, that its gendered status starts to emerge – as well as both its problematic nature and potential for a feminist challenge of the Symbolic. It is in this light that I propose to interpret the lyrics, music and videos of the songs of Tori Amos considered in this chapter – both as a 'symptom' and a 'cure' in their expression of female melancholia and their search for a language able to manipulate the Symbolic order and its silencing of women.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

Kristeva argues that

Aesthetic - and, in particular, literary - creation, as well as religious discourse in its imaginary fictional essence, proposes a configuration of which the prosodic economy, the dramaturgy of characters and the implicit symbolism are an extremely faithful semiological representation of the subject's battle with symbolic breakdown. This literary (and religious) representation (...) has a real and imaginary efficacy: belonging more to the order of catharsis than of elaboration, it is a therapeutic method used in all societies throughout the ages.<sup>48</sup>

Yet, she also points to the melancholic subject as being asymbolic, devoid of values, and a 'sullen atheist'.<sup>49</sup> In view of Freud's and Kristeva's theories, I propose that in most of her songs, Amos positions herself as a melancholic subject. For instance, in 'God' she can be regarded as one such Kristevan 'sullen atheists' who loses her faith in God, since she sings 'God sometimes you just don't come through / Do you need a woman to look after you'.<sup>50</sup> Her struggle between faith and its loss can be observed in 'Crucify' with reference to its lyrics, such as 'God needs one more victim', 'Got enough guilt to start my own religion' and 'I gotta have my suffering so that I can have my cross'. Religion has a special significance in Amos's own life experiences and artistic work, as the analysis of her songs in this chapter will further show, and will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion. Furthermore, traces of Amos's traumatic experiences, namely being raped by one of her fans, can be seen in songs such as 'Me and a Gun' ('I wore a slinky red thing / Does that mean I should spread / For you, your friends, your father'), 'Precious Things' ('He said you're really an ugly girl (...) and I died') and 'Baker Baker' ('Make me whole again').

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<sup>48</sup> Julia Kristeva, *On The Melancholic Imaginary*, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Tori Amos, 'God', *Under the Pink* (Atlantic/Wea, 1994). From this point on, unless otherwise stated, all lyrics quoted are taken from Amos's albums *Little Earthquakes* (Atlantic/Wea, 1992), *Under the Pink* (Atlantic/Wea, 1994) and *Boys for Pele* (Atlantic/Wea, 1996).

In her discussion of Amos's 'Cornflake Girl', Whiteley considers that 'self-victimisation and retribution'<sup>51</sup> are central themes to the song. It is clear, then, that there are many songs upon which one might draw in discussions of Amos and melancholia. I have selected 'Silent All These Years', 'Pretty Good Year' and 'Hey Jupiter' because they demonstrate most effectively the dynamics of this particular psychic condition, in terms not only of their literary qualities but also of their musical composition and visual representation, since my discussion will be performed by investigating the signifiers of female melancholia and depression embodied in lyrics, music and images. My purpose is not to perform a reductionist analysis claiming that Amos's entire *oeuvre* is one of depression, but to investigate the various ways in which her authorship is influenced by gender-conscious narrative strategies triggering a particular hermeneutic possibility in terms of melancholia.

### 4.3. Writing the silence

'Silent All These Years' appeared for the first time as the B side of the LP *Me and a Gun*, as noted, and later on the album *Little Earthquakes*. Considering that autobiographical, self-reflexive characteristics and the narrative of loss(es) run through *Little Earthquakes*, it can be argued that this song refers to the agenda of the whole album, that is, giving a voice to the silenced/repressed female. In this song, Amos creates a narrative to make this practice of giving voice come into being, depicting a relationship in which she is positioned, by the male, as a passive medium rather than an active agent.<sup>52</sup> Whiteley argues that the opening line of the song, 'Excuse me but can I be you for a while', characterizes Amos's desire 'for a new body, [and her demand] to

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<sup>51</sup> Sheila Whiteley, *Too Much Too Young*, p. 94.

<sup>52</sup> For the lyrics of 'Silent All These Years', see Appendix D1, pp. 293-4.

be someone else'.<sup>53</sup> However, another possible reading is that Amos merely seeks to assume the role of the speaking subject by asking to swap the positions of the male and female within the relationship (like Kate Bush in 'Running Up that Hill (A Deal with God)'). In this respect, what Amos implies at the beginning of the song is her yearning for the woman who was once able to express herself, the ideal of which has been lost when submitted to the phallic economy of male desire.

From the very first line, 'Silent All These Years' lends itself to an analysis in parallel with what Freud postulated to be melancholia towards 'loss of a more ideal kind'.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Amos clarifies her psychic condition by confessing her inability to speak: 'I got something to say you know but nothing comes'. Kristeva argues that '[melancholic] persons (...) riveted to their pain, no longer concatenate and, consequently, neither act nor speak'.<sup>55</sup> Thus, although melancholic individuals have a constant urge to speak, they cannot find the words to express themselves. Besides, according to Kristeva, 'melancholia ends up in asymbolia, in loss of meaning: if [a melancholic person] is no longer capable of translating or metaphorizing, [s/he] become[s] silent'.<sup>56</sup> Hence, the concept of silence which constitutes Amos's song may implicitly refer to the years dominated by melancholia/depression, as a never-ending process of waiting for the feeling of loss to end:

years go by will I still be waiting for  
somebody else to understand years  
go by if I'm stripped of my beauty and  
the orange clouds raining in my head  
years go by will I choke on my tears till

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<sup>53</sup> Sheila Whiteley, *Too Much Too Young*, p. 89.

<sup>54</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 253.

<sup>55</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 34.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

finally there is nothing left one more  
casualty

Further to my discussion in the introduction, one can therefore see the “symptom” of Amos’s melancholic state in the flatness of her delivery of the lyrics, as if language were ‘foreign’ to her. Nevertheless, this silence is not complete. Amos says that ‘sometimes’ she hears her voice, and this voice, when it surfaces, is angry and bitter, not totally resigned as someone who has been crushed by her loss and the ensuing depression. In ‘Silent All These Years’, despite the possible multifaceted meanings (what Kristeva called ‘polyvalence’<sup>57</sup>) of the lyrics, Amos seemingly describes a relationship in crisis, or perhaps the end of a relationship. She has been silent for a long time, but she is fully aware, and also resentful, at being judged and talked about by him – and I suggest that one could read this line as implying the male in general: ‘Yes I know what you think of me / You never shut up’. In contrast to men’s full ability to express themselves, her ‘scream got lost in a paper cup’, devalued and ignored. This resentment is also reflected in the line ‘What’s so amazing about really deep thoughts’: faced with a male discourse that tries to belittle her, she curtly replies ‘Boy you best pray that I bleed real soon’, thus underlying with her concreteness the real dynamics of their relationship and expose for what it really is his betrayal of her for another woman. Further on in the song, she sings sarcastically ‘Well I love the way we communicate / Your eyes focus on my funny lip shape’. The first line is clear enough in conveying that she thinks the exact opposite in their relationship, while the second line, albeit more opaquely, seems to point to the man’s relating to her above all sexually, and not as a thinking subject equal to him.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 97.



The analogy between her and a mermaid is also significant in ‘Silent All These Years’, where Amos sings: ‘But what if I’m a mermaid / In these jeans of his / With her name still on it’. Tori Amos’s interest in mermaid imagery is well documented. She herself said: ‘[m]aybe because I’d been living as a fish out of water for a long time (...) since I was 21, I think the mermaid mythology started to make sense to me. The idea of not fitting into the box of what a female contemporary artist should be’.<sup>58</sup> Mermaids as mythological figures have also a well-known association with music, with their singing which enthralled and led mariners to their death, that is, as outwardly creatures dangerous to men by their mere presence. Perhaps more pertinently for my discussion, they are not fully human and inhabit an in-between mythological world where they can never be said to fit in. I claim that the image of the mermaid in Amos’s song can serve as an apt analogy with the position of women both within the Symbolic in general, but also as melancholic subjects – inhabiting life and language as a ‘foreign’ territory, in a state of constant loss since they do not really belong anywhere, never fully understood and condemned to be outsiders.

But despite her melancholic state, Amos has not lost her empathy and compassion. When she sings ‘It’s your turn now to stand where I stand / Everybody lookin’ at you here’, she offers her hand to the man. It is not completely clear what Amos’s intended meaning in these lines is, however since we learn in the song the man’s mother has come, perhaps it is the man’s turn now to be judged and be exposed and scrutinized, becoming the object of someone else’s gaze and discourse (perhaps due to his conduct). As a woman, Amos knows only too well how that would feel.

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<sup>58</sup> Tori Amos, *A Piano*, p. 21. Furthermore, Amos endorsed the book *A Mermaid’s Tale: A Personal Search for Love and Lore* by Amanda Adams, calling it ‘a magic talisman’, in which Amos’s video for ‘Silent All These Years’ is actually quoted and praised. See Amanda Adams, *A Mermaid’s Tale: A Personal Search for Love and Lore* (Vancouver and British Columbia: Greystone Books, 2006), pp. 63 and 183.

The concept of melancholia can also be traced in Amos's second album, *Under the Pink* (1994). In this album, Amos chose to explore the complex relationships between women. Although most songs on the album are about 'emotional violence between women, rather than between sexes',<sup>59</sup> the opening track, 'Pretty Good Year', tells the story of a man, as Amos explains:

I got a letter from a guy named Greg. He's a fan, and this letter just happened to get to me, because a lot of times I don't get them. But he's from the north of England and he drew this picture, a self-portrait of himself. It was a pencil drawing and Greg had glasses and long hair and he was really, really skinny. He had this drooping flower in his hand. And he wrote to me this letter that touched me to the core about how at twenty-three, it was all over for him. In his mind, there was nothing. He just couldn't seem to catch the kite by the tail. You know, sometimes you see that kite flying and bloody hell, you just have to grab the tail, bring it down and see what's on the kite. Well, he just couldn't find a way around putting his desires and his visions into anything tangible, except this letter. Many people today, before they even reach thirty, feel this way-it's a functional exercise waking up, brushing your teeth, going through your day. People have just numbered themselves. I don't know the answer why. I think there are loads of answers. It's not my job to come up with an answer. Nobody wants to hear an answer from me. The point is, what I tried to come up with is the feeling we all feel. Shaking us out of this numbness. I was just telling Greg's story and Greg affected the singer so much that it brought my own stuff into it, and that was kind of a neat surprise.<sup>60</sup>

The song opens by describing Greg's dejected state - 'tears on the sleeve of a man' - with which Amos identifies, saying 'Don't wanna be a boy today'.<sup>61</sup> In other words, despite her oppressed position as a woman, for once Amos would not wish to swap places with him, and sees what they both share regardless of their gender: a sense of

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<sup>59</sup> Sheila Whiteley, *Too Much Too Young*, p. 92.

<sup>60</sup> Bill DeMain, 'Tori Amos', in *In Their Own Words: Songwriters Talk About Their Creative Process* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), pp. 156-157.

<sup>61</sup> For the lyrics of 'Pretty Good Year', see Appendix D2, p. 295.

alienation and estrangement from life. Greg's mood is described as very low – spending his days alone writing letters and burning CDs that no longer have any meaning to him, waiting for death ('the eternal footman'<sup>62</sup>) to come, who will come even sooner now (death 'bought himself a bike to race', perhaps a suggestion that Greg may harbour suicidal thoughts). The lyrics are permeated by a sense of regret, of some kind of lost opportunity: 'They say you were something in those formative years', whereas now everything seems pointless: 'Hold on to nothing / As fast as you can'. Therefore, one can see that the opening of 'Pretty Good Year' reflects Freud's and Kristeva's classic manifestations of melancholia: asymbolia, detachment, flatness, timelessness (as Kristeva commented: '[t]he melancholic's past never passes'<sup>63</sup>).

In 'Pretty Good Year', we come across another of the typical signs of melancholia: repetition, in the line 'Is going to bring you back'. Amos sings this line repeating twice more the word 'back' at the very end. However, I argue that, in this instance, perhaps rather than monotonous repetition what we have is an instance of echo. This readily brings to mind the myth of the nymph Echo. Deprived of her own voice and condemned merely to repeat the last words of others, Echo embodies melancholia since not only has she lost any pleasure in language, but the words she utters have absolutely no meaning for her, they are, literally, 'foreign'. As such, Echo's dead language cannot express what she feels or desires. Therefore, as a woman herself, Echo can be said to be a metaphor of female melancholia and women's excluded position within the Symbolic (that is, language).

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<sup>62</sup> Amos takes this reference from T.S. Eliot's 1915 poem 'The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock': 'I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker, / And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, / And in short, I was afraid'. See T. S. Eliot, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 14. Incidentally, in the same poem we also find references to another theme dear to Amos: 'I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each (...) We have lingered in the chambers of the sea / By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown / Till human voices wake us, and we drown'. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>63</sup> Julia Kristeva, *On The Melancholic Imaginary*, p. 11.

Throughout 'Pretty Good Year', listeners do not hear the object of the song, Greg, speaking. He seems to be silenced, as Amos was in 'Silence All These Years'. As Amos herself states, in her music she 'use[s] texts –history, mythologies, [her] own stories- to construct other texts'.<sup>64</sup> Of 'Me and a Gun', for instance, she writes that:

I am the girl who's raped. That is the ground that I covered. I did not cover the rapist's point of view. Now, if I were a guy, I'd cover that song from the rapist's point of view or from that of the victim's husband. If I were somebody who hated women, I'd cover it in one way, and if I were somebody who loved women, I'd cover it in another way.<sup>65</sup>

At first glance, this argument would appear to contradict her approach in 'Pretty Good Year', a song with a central male character. However, her use of personal pronouns throughout the song makes it clear that although it seems that the song's main character is a man who suffers from melancholia, it is Amos herself (the narrator) who constructs the story, by defining the male as a melancholic object. Hence, listeners again are faced with Amos's melancholic state (as in the song 'Silent All These Years'), but this time with a different narrative strategy.

At the beginning of 'Pretty Good Year', we hear Amos as the narrator who refers to the object of the song in the third person. The use of the third-person pronoun makes listeners realize that what she does is tell a man's story from a feminine perspective, rather than the man's point of view. At the beginning of the second verse we start to hear Amos switching her point of view to the second person. This dramatic change in the use of personal pronouns provides her with the possibility to create an intimate relationship with the main character and, as argued above, shows their shared

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<sup>64</sup> Tori Amos and Ann Powers, *Tori Amos Piece by Piece*, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

melancholic state and alienation. In this section, Amos also attempts to turn the male character's melancholic mood into a mourning process. She offers two images that might create a hopeful atmosphere: a bright sandy beach and America. She says 'maybe a bright sandy beach is going to bring you back', to make Greg overcome his melancholia. She insistently repeats that this is still a 'pretty good year'. When that does not appear to work ('Maybe not', sings Amos), we hear that he is now going to see America. However, Amos then sings 'Well let me tell you something about America', seeming to imply that America is no 'promised land' and won't bring about a miracle. Moreover, being American herself and having spent there the first part of her life, her 'formative years', and also in light of what we know about her biography, it comes as little surprise that she should be so pessimistic. For this reason, I argue that Amos's endeavour identifies the mourning as incomplete and melancholia as persistent.

As the above analysis suggests, Amos's narration of the melancholic male character may also be understood as the artistic transference of her own melancholic state. Kristeva's observations of its effect on speech will help to clarify my arguments. According to Kristeva, melancholic people 'utter sentences that are interrupted, exhausted, come to a standstill. Even phrases they cannot formulate'.<sup>66</sup> Just before the musical climax of the song, we hear Amos murmuring. While singing that Greg will see America, she utters meaningless phonemes, such as 'ne-na-ne-na-ne-na-ne-na-ne-na'. These non-verbal signifiers of the semiotic have already been considered in the chapter on Laura Nyro, and as discussed in the introductory section above, 'afford the subject a chance to imagine the nonmeaning'.<sup>67</sup> Just after this passage, Amos comes back to the main idea: that of the 'pretty good year'. Although she repeats this phrase, the second

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<sup>66</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 33.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

repetition is left suspended: pretty good year / pretty good...' And whilst offering perhaps some hope ('Some things are melting now'), she suddenly and angrily sings 'What's it gonna take / Till my baby's alright', going on to reflect that sometimes Greg, with regard to the letters he writes, is 'aware that they're drawing him in' (another instance of semantic polyvalence: does she mean that they are somehow shortening his life, since he's not actually living, but merely existing, or that melancholia will suck him in and destroy him?).

Then, at the end of the song listeners unexpectedly hear Amos talking about two new characters, Lucy and Greg's best friend ('Lucy was pretty / Your best friend agreed'). I suggest that the sudden emergence of these characters could be regarded on the one hand as further interruptions to a possible narrative closure in the lyrics, reinforcing her enactment of melancholia through 'broken logical sequences',<sup>68</sup> and on the other as Amos's more open-ended and optimistic message about the future.

Amos released her third studio album *Boys for Pele* in 1996, just after breaking up with her long-time partner and co-producer of her first two albums, Eric Rosse. The title of the album refers to the Hawaiian fire/volcano goddess Pele. Amos learned about this goddess in Hawaii, while visiting 'a female shaman renowned for uncovering hidden parts of the soul'.<sup>69</sup> According to the myth, Pele was driven from her heavenly home after seducing the husband of her sister, the sea goddess. As she wanted to protect herself from her sister's floods and waves, she landed on the Big Island and assumed the form of a volcano. Although after a while her spirit had to return to her sleeping body on the Big Island, she was able to take on many different forms, such as that of a

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>69</sup> Tori Amos, *A Piano*, p. 18.

desirable woman, in order to seduce and sacrifice men. In various interviews, Amos explained the inspiration behind the album title:

Pele is a volcano goddess in Hawaii, and I fled to Hawaii in the middle of the "Under the Pink" tour for five days when I was at my lowest, and I couldn't feel any fire within myself. I couldn't feel anything (...) I came to the north shore in Hawaii, and a friend of mine - we'll call her a medicine woman, a very wise woman - was there. And I felt after the San Francisco, or around those dates, I couldn't feel a sense of when I wasn't behind that piano or with a man in my life. I couldn't find out who the woman was. Some of you may ask me, 'Why did you go to the men in your life?' and the truth is I felt they had an energy force, to a flame, that I couldn't find. When I went to the north shore and I just spent time walking up and down that beach with this medicine woman, I just began to feel the presence of Pele all over the island, even though I know she's not on that island. I just felt this deep little flame start to happen. (...) The journey from "Little Earthquakes" through "Pink" to "Pele" has been really a claiming of womanhood. And I kind of see these records as a trilogy. They work together. And this final record was about me embracing my womanhood. I call it the boy record, which means it's the womanhood record because it was really through the men in my life, what they didn't give me in some cases, which forced me to give it to myself. And they couldn't give it to me, just like I couldn't give it to them. I couldn't give them their fire, and they couldn't give me mine...I was dying. I don't care how many sold-out concerts I had. I was dying.<sup>70</sup>

The album title can therefore be interpreted as a symbolic representation of Amos's search for the fire she needs in order to help her discover the power she has.

'Hey Jupiter' was released as the fourth single from the album *Boys for Pele*. It was Amos's first EP since 'Crucify' (1992). It was also released as a Double A-side single together with the song 'Professional Widow' in the UK. The version that appeared both

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<sup>70</sup> Tori Amos interviewed in *Everybody's News* (Cincinnati), May 31, 1996. Available at <http://thedent.com/cinart.html> (last accessed 07/04/2012).

on the EP and the Double A-side single (the so-called ‘Dakota version’) is completely different from the original LP version. While Amos sings the original version predominantly with the accompaniment of an acoustic piano, the Dakota version has some other instrumental layers such as a rhythm track and bass guitar. I believe that the album version of the song reflects more clearly *Boys for Pele*’s artistic agenda, since it is arranged and produced only by Amos. Moreover, some of the lines of the song that Amos sings in the original version are cut in the Dakota version. For that reason, in my music and lyric analyses I have chosen to study not the Dakota version, but the original album version.

As Whiteley comments, it is not possible to talk about ‘a single correct interpretation’<sup>71</sup> in most of Amos’s songs. According to her research, ‘Hey Jupiter’ is ‘about the discovery of a female friend’s romantic attachment for her [or] as an autobiographical song [it is] about the break-up of her long-time relationship with Eric Rosse’.<sup>72</sup> Taking into consideration Amos’s conversations with Ann Powers,<sup>73</sup> I argue that, like most of the songs on *Boys for Pele*, ‘Hey Jupiter’<sup>74</sup> is based on the idea of mourning stemming from a newly-ended relationship, as well as pre-existing melancholia exhibiting a ‘disturbance of self-regard’ as argued by Freud.<sup>75</sup>

The very title of the song, with its reference to ‘Jupiter’ – at the same time the supreme God for the ancient Romans (analogous to the Greeks’ Zeus) and the largest planet in the solar system – is consistent with the reading of the end of a relationship as the underlying theme. Jupiter, therefore, can be understood as Amos’s former lover in this

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<sup>71</sup> Sheila Whiteley, *Too Much Too Young*, p. 99.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>73</sup> See Tori Amos and Ann Powers, *Tori Amos Piece by Piece*, pp. 36 and 48.

<sup>74</sup> For the lyrics of ‘Hey Jupiter’, see Appendix D3, pp. 296-7.

<sup>75</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, p. 243.



song, who was (and perhaps still is, even after their break-up) the most important person in her life, as well as the fulcrum around which she revolves, the key reference point in her ‘universe’. A line further on in the song, ‘Your apocalypse was fab’, confirms both the huge impact their split has had upon her, and continues with a biblical/religious theme consistent with my discussion above. Such impact is further confirmed by the third verse in the song:

Sometimes I breathe you in  
  
and I know you know  
and sometimes you take a swim  
found your writing on my wall  
if my heart’s soaking wet  
Boy your boots can make a mess

We encounter yet another religious reference here: ‘writing on the wall’ is an expression that denotes impending danger or doom. Its origins are biblical - because of profanation, God caused the fall of Babylon and announced its collapse with the appearance of a mysterious hand that wrote on the wall of the King’s palace an equally mysterious warning. I think it is also significant that the fall of Babylon was caused by blasphemy on the part of the licentious and debauched King: since Amos’s sings ‘your writing on my wall’ and, above all, in light of my discussion that follows, this verse attests to the workings of melancholia by pointing to Amos’s self-reviling.

As Kristeva states, we cannot deny that ‘melancholia, like mourning, conceals aggressiveness toward the lost object, thus revealing the ambivalence of the depressed person with respect to the object of mourning’.<sup>76</sup> She continues as follows:

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<sup>76</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 11.

“I love that object,” is what that person seems to say about the lost object, “but even more so I hate it; because I love it, and in order not to lose it, I imbed it in myself; but because I hate it, that other within myself is a bad self, I am bad, I am non-existent, I shall kill myself.” The complaint against oneself would therefore be a complaint against another, and putting oneself to death but a tragic disguise for massacring another. Such logic presupposes, as one can imagine, a stern super ego and a whole complex dialectic of idealization and devalorization of self and other, the aggregate of these activities being based on the mechanism of identification.<sup>77</sup>

Departing from this argument and bearing in mind the opening line of second verse, ‘sometimes I breathe you in’, I suggest that Amos has introjected her lost object, her lover, with whom she now has a love-hate relationship. In this process, however, her own self-regard has been compromised.

The opening lines of the song, ‘No one’s picking up the phone / Guess it’s me and me’, depict Amos’s psychological state after the end of the relationship. What deserves particular attention here is the meaning of ‘me and me’, which can both be read as the acknowledgment by Amos that she is utterly alone now, or as some kind of split personality on her part. What has led some scholars to conclude that the song is about a female friend is Amos’s use of third-person pronouns starting from the third line: ‘and this little masochist / she’s ready to confess / all the things that I never thought’. Whiteley explains this as a ‘confusion of pronouns’.<sup>78</sup> However, I suggest that, here, there is no confusion of pronouns; ‘this little masochist’ is Amos herself and manifests the self-reproach and self-reviling outlined by Freud in his discussion of melancholia analysed at the beginning of this chapter. ‘This little masochist’ is not only ‘ready to confess’, perhaps in an attempt to capitulate to the man in order to regain him, but she is also ‘lifting up her dress’. This crudely sexual image pinpoints to the low self-esteem

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>78</sup> Sheila Whiteley, *Too Much Too Young*, p. 98.

felt by Amos and her readiness, perhaps, to look for other men simply in order to anesthetize herself and feel less sharply the impact of her loss and lack. Be that as it may, I argue that it is the reason why Amos sings ‘Guess it’s me and me’ – she and her little masochist are one and the same.

Elsewhere in ‘Hey Jupiter’, she realizes that maybe she does not know herself as well as she thought, revisiting ‘all the dolls I had’, which I take, (recalling the title of her 2007 album *American Doll Posse* in which she developed five different female characters to represent different aspects of her personality), to mean the various masks she assumed in order to be accepted by her lover(s). The line ‘Took my leather off the shelf’ can perhaps be interpreted as her sexual (perhaps promiscuous) past, which she had left behind for him but that, now their love is over, she may ‘wear’ once more in her self-destructive hatred.

The intensity of female melancholia reaches its peak in the chorus of the song. Here, Amos makes it clear that she feels that everything has changed. She says ‘nothing’s been the same’, making it clear that the break-up changed her life - a life, as depicted by Kristeva to explain the effects of melancholia, that ‘is unliveable, heavy with daily sorrows, tears held back or shed, a total despair, scorching at times, then wan and empty’.<sup>79</sup> And the end of ‘Hey Jupiter’ dashes all hope, as Amos sings ‘no one’s picking up the phone / guess it’s clear he’s gone’.

As the lyric analysis in this section shows, the workings of female melancholia make their presence clearly felt in Amos’s songs, which can, therefore, be regarded as an

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<sup>79</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 4.

instance of what Kristeva referred to as ‘writing cure’, that is, an attempt to articulate, verbalize and dissect melancholia by an artist in order to stare at one’s loss and lack. This articulation crucially challenges the attempt to silence women and marginalise their loss within the blanket category of clinical depression. When discussing women’s artistic creation through the works of Marguerite Duras, Kristeva remarked that in Duras’s novels ‘written on the brink of illness [we find] no improvement, no promise of a beyond, not even the enchanting beauty of style or irony that might provide a bonus of pleasure in addition to the revealed evil’.<sup>80</sup> In Amos’s lyrics, too, we find no catharsis: she verbalizes and writes the symptoms of female melancholia, and so according to Kristeva she has gone some way in facing it, yet in the last analysis her texts narrate the experience of women who are still gripped in its vice.

I argue that the persistence of melancholia in Amos’s lyrics (and indeed her music and visual representation) is to be understood as a manifestation of the double yoke imposed on women by the primeval loss and the Symbolic repression. Amos’s lyrics cannot provide any catharsis because, unlike men, as a woman and a female artist Amos cannot fully identify with the Symbolic as a ‘third party’, since the phallic order it represents has always actively attempted to marginalize and silence the female. Accepting the place the Symbolic dictates for women, therefore, would mean both resigning to a perpetually melancholic status and a perpetually repressed and secondary status in the Symbolic order.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 228.

#### 4.4. Composing the silence

Owing to Amos's distinctive piano writing, most of her songs seem to be suitable for discussion in terms of melancholia. For instance, Paul Atinello argues with reference to 'Not the Red Baron' (*Boys for Pele*, 1996) that the song 'presents an obscurely connected set of referents held together by a sensual resonant piano texture that suggests reflection, melancholy, even grieving'.<sup>81</sup> However, what this argument misses is that melancholia is not only a dark mood of inexpressible feelings and 'isolated reflections',<sup>82</sup> but also a psychic condition ready to be textualized in music.

Kristeva, following the theories of Freud and Melanie Klein, among others, defines melancholia as a pathological condition. However, she argues that this debilitating condition can also trigger artistic creativity, especially in terms of literature:

For if it is true that those who are slaves to their moods, beings drowned in their sorrows, reveal a number of psychic or cognitive frailties, it is equally true that a diversification of moods, variety in sadness, refinement in sorrow or mourning are the imprint of a humankind that is surely not triumphant but subtle, ready to fight, and creative (...) creation is that adventure of the body and signs that bears witness to the affect-to sadness as imprint of separation and beginning of the symbol's sway; to joy as imprint of the triumph that settles me in the universe of artifice and symbol, which I try to harmonize in the best possible way with my experience of reality.<sup>83</sup>

According to Kristeva, as discussed above, Dostoyevski, Duras and Nerval can be viewed as writers whose works are dominated by sadness, suffering, grief and melancholia. Her discussions are not limited to literature: she also analyzed Holbein's

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<sup>81</sup> Paul Atinello, 'Closeness and Distance: Songs About Aids', in *Queering the Popular Pitch*, edited by Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 226.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>83</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 22.

famous painting *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* by taking melancholia as a reference point. Although she does not perform any such analysis on any musical score, her arguments that '[during the melancholic period] a repetitive rhythm, a monotonous melody emerge and dominate the broken logical sequences' have obvious application to music.<sup>84</sup>

'Silent All These Years' opens with a melodic line presented by the piano. The distinctive characteristic of this line is its incessant use of a figuration built on successive semitones within a simple, repetitive rhythmic structure (Figure 4.1). The use of semitones persists throughout the verse in the piano accompaniment. This interval disappears, however, once Amos starts to sing in a more positive mood by dreaming 'if [she is] a mermaid' in the chorus. She supports her artificially optimistic mood not only by changing intervals in the piano accompaniment from minor to major, but also by adding strings to the arrangement. However, after recalling the traumatic silence of all these years she, as expected, brings back the monotonous opening tune with its repetitive rhythmic structure (Figure 4.2).

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

Flowingly  
No chord

*mp*

Verse  
1. Ex-

**Figure 4.1.** The opening line of ‘Silent All These Years’ presented by the piano (Sword and Stone Publishing Inc.)

A5

E5

No chord

Si - lent all these years

**Figure 4.2.** The return to the opening line (after the chorus) in ‘Silent All These Years’ (Sword and Stone Publishing Inc.)

Amos's vocal timbre and the song's melodic line likewise reveal the psychodynamics of 'Silent All These Years' that can be related to female melancholia. As Whiteley puts it, 'the simple and unadorned vocal line of the verse is (...) evocative of introspection in its repetitive phrases and narrow range, and the childlike opening line is quietly subdued'.<sup>85</sup> Amos, throughout the song, prefers to use a monotonous vocal timbre parallel to the song's first melodic phrase.<sup>86</sup> The verse is based on only one melodic figure that is created using four descending notes (Figure 4.3). Although Amos makes some minor rhythmic changes in this melodic line, she obsessively uses the same vocal timbre every time she sings the line.

The image displays musical notation for the verse of 'Silent All These Years'. The top staff shows a vocal line with a descending melodic line and a '1. Ex-' marking. The bottom staff shows a guitar accompaniment with a descending melodic line and three chord diagrams: E (4 fr.), Emaj7 (4 fr.), and A/E (5 fr.). The lyrics 'cuse me but can I be you for a while' are written below the notes.

**Figure 4.3.** The use of four descending notes in the main melodic line of the verse ('Silent All These Years') (Sword and Stone Publishing Inc.)

On first hearing, the point at which the song gains momentum appears to be located at the beginning of the chorus. However, the melodic line that forms the chorus is based on only two notes (G# and B, Figure 4.4), and Amos, during this section, continues to use the same timbral technique as before. Instead, 'Silent All These Years' reaches its musical climax at the middle eight of the song. The essential characteristic of this

<sup>85</sup> Sheila Whiteley, *Too Much Too Young*, p. 89.

<sup>86</sup> See the tenth track on the CD accompanying this thesis.



section comes from its richness of vocal counterpoint. As Mazullo puts it, Amos frequently uses ‘multiple vocal lines’<sup>87</sup> in her songs. Even though the middle eight of the song is dominated by Amos’s polyphonic backing vocals, she sings the melodic line using little more than a single note, B (Figure 4.5). Recalling Kristeva’s argument, I contend that the obsessive melodic figure that is heard in the piano accompaniment throughout ‘Silent All These Years’, Amos’s unvarying vocal timbre, and her use of single notes to compose the melodic lines directly refer to the concept of female melancholia and dominate the song from the first note on.

**Figure 4.4.** The melodic line of the chorus in ‘Silent All These Years’ (Sword and Stone Publishing Inc.)

<sup>87</sup> Mark Mazullo, ‘Revisiting the Wreck: P. J. Harvey’s Dry and the Drowned Virgin-Whore’, in *Popular Music*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Oct., 2001), p. 441.

The image displays three staves of musical notation for the song 'Silent All These Years'. Each staff includes a treble clef, a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and a common time signature. The lyrics are written below the notes, and guitar chords are indicated above the staff lines.

Staff 1: Chords E, B/E, A/E, B/F#, G#m7. Lyrics: Years go by will I still be wait - ing for

Staff 2: Chords Aadd9, Bsus4, B. Lyrics: some - bod - y else to un - der - stand

Staff 3: Chords E, B/E, Aadd9/C#, B. Lyrics: Years go by if I'm stripped of my beau - ty And the

**Figure 4.5.** The single B of the middle eight in ‘Silent All These Years’ (Sword and Stone publishing Inc.)

As in the case of *Little Earthquakes*, Amos’s second studio album, *Under the Pink*, largely draws on an acoustic piano-based sound. Although some of the songs, namely ‘God’, ‘Past the Mission’, ‘The Waitress’, and ‘Cornflake Girl’, include instruments such as drums, bass and guitar, in her second album Amos’s primary aim was to explore the possibilities of her own instrument. As a result, she even used a prepared piano to record one of the songs, ‘Bells for Her’. The most significant difference between her previous album and *Under the Pink* is her avoidance of strings or synthesizers to create a more dramatic atmosphere, as well as her exploration of multi-sectional song structures.

Like ‘Silent All These Years’, the song ‘Pretty Good Year’ also opens with a flowing melodic line presented by the piano. Rhythmically, this line consists predominantly of quavers. Harmonically, it is based on four chords, namely, G $\flat$ , D $\flat$ , E $\flat$  minor and C $\flat$  (Figure 4.6). Amos uses the first two bars of this melodic line to construct the accompanying part of the first verse (Figure 4.7). Consequently, during the verse (16

bars) Amos employs only two chords:  $G\flat$  and  $D\flat$ . In contrast to the fluency of the accompanying melody, she uses the bass (root) notes of these chords ( $G\flat$  and  $D\flat$ ) in dotted minims ( $G\flat$ ) and tied notes (Figure 4.7). Thus, the incessant use of quavers in the right hand and of dotted minims and tied notes creates a repetitive rhythmic structure that supports the melancholic atmosphere of Amos's lyrics.

**Flowing**  
Capo on 1st fret:

*p*  
*with pedal*

**Figure 4.6.** The opening line of ‘Pretty Good Year’ (Sword and Stone Publishing Inc.)

Tears on the sleeve of a man don't want to be a  
boy today

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**Figure 4.7.** The accompaniment of the first verse (Sword and Stone Publishing Inc.)

Besides the piano accompaniment, the vocal line of the verse is also dominated by the insistent use of D $\flat$  and G $\flat$  (Figure 4.7). Amos starts to sing the first words of the verse ‘tears on the sleeve of a man’ on middle D $\flat$  by repeating the crotchet four times. Listeners hear her employing two different notes, G $\flat$  and F, just before ending the main melodic idea of the song on middle D $\flat$ . She continues to sing the words ‘don’t wanna be a boy today’, again on middle D $\flat$ , by making a significant change in the rhythmic structure of the melody: at this point she reverts to quaver notes instead of crotchets (Figure 4.7). Amos employs a monotonous, child-like vocal timbre similar to that of ‘Silent All These Years’, while repeating the same note (D $\flat$ ) with little deviation.<sup>88</sup> This vocal delivery, I would maintain, reveals the song’s melancholic character by emphasising the melodic line of the verse as based around a single note.

The chorus begins with an anacrusis (a quaver D $\flat$ ). The rest of this section is mainly based on the successive use of two notes, G $\flat$  and A $\flat$ . In other words, during the chorus Amos draws on the possibilities of a major second interval to compose a whole section of the song (Figure 4.8). This choice also enables her to continue to employ the above-mentioned monotonous vocal timbre. This vocal timbre reaches its peak in this section while singing, ‘hold on to nothing as fast as you can’. In terms of musical repetitions, the use of the interval of a perfect fourth (D $\flat$  to G $\flat$ ) in the piano accompaniment is also significant. This interval is heard for the first time at the beginning of the section in the vocal line. Amos uses this interval not only as a part of the chord C $\flat$  sus2 but also as a part of the following broken chord-like melodic figure (Figure 4.8). Furthermore, although we hear two different notes, E $\flat$  and F, used as

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<sup>88</sup> See the eleventh track on the CD accompanying this thesis.

appoggiaturas, Amos ends the section singing ‘Well still pretty good year / Ah pretty good’ overlapping every syllable with a G $\flat$  or a D $\flat$ .

The image shows a musical score for the chorus of 'Pretty Good Year'. It consists of three systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The first system has lyrics 'bike to race and' and chord diagrams for F (G $\flat$ ), C (D $\flat$ ), F (G $\flat$ ), and C (D $\flat$ ). The second system has lyrics 'Greg he writes let-ters and burns his C Ds they' and chord diagrams for B $\flat$ sus2 (C $\flat$ sus2), C $\flat$ sus4 (D $\flat$ sus4), and C (D $\flat$ ). The third system has lyrics 'say you were some-thing in those form-a-tive years' and chord diagrams for D $\flat$ m7 and E $\flat$ m7. A 'cresc.' marking is present in the piano accompaniment of the third system.

**Figure 4.8.** The successive use of a major second in the vocal line and a perfect fourth in the accompaniment of the chorus of ‘Pretty Good Year’ (Sword and Stone Publishing Inc.)

Like ‘Silent All These Years’, this song also reaches its peak at the middle eight. What distinguishes this section from the verse and the chorus is Amos’s use of a new (unprepared) key (E minor), and the addition of an electric guitar and drums to the arrangement. She opens this section with a figuration built on a semitone both in the vocal line and in the piano accompaniment (Figure 4.9), just as she does in the opening line of ‘Silent All These Years’. Another similarity between the two songs’ middle

eights is that they are both dominated by the use of a single note, B, throughout the vocal line. Taking into consideration what I treat as common denominators, I suggest that Amos employs repetition in terms of rhythm, melody and harmony as a way to construct female melancholia in her music.

The image displays a musical score for the opening of the middle eight section of a song. It consists of three systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. Above each system are guitar chord diagrams for E5, Gbass, and Abass. The vocal line features a prominent, repetitive note of B natural. The lyrics are: 'hey what's it gon-na', 'take till my ba-by's al-right what's it gon-na', and 'take till my ba-by's al-right'.

**Figure 4.9.** The opening of the middle eight with a figuration built on a minor second, and the incessant use of a single note (B natural) in the vocal line (Sword and Stone Publishing Inc.)

*Boys for Pele* signifies an obvious departure from Amos's previous two albums, since she appears for the first time as the producer of her album, claiming total artistic control over a work that focuses on a particular construction of women within mythology and religion. In this album, Amos avails herself of the possibilities of piano, but also those of other keyboard instruments including harpsichord, clavichord, and harmonium. Since

bloodlines are, according to her, an important part of women's history, she follows the bloodline of the piano back to the harpsichord in order to create a musical 'subtext to that context'.<sup>89</sup> Thus, *Boys for Pele* can be regarded as a result of Amos's urge to create a link between womanliness and her music. Bearing this in mind, I suggest that her choice of opening the album with 'Beauty Queen', in which the voice is accompanied by only a single note, appears to resonate with my primary argument that her music's monotonous and repetitive character can be related to her melancholic state.

In a similar manner to 'Silent All These Years' and 'Pretty Good Year', the piano provides the instrumental basis of 'Hey Jupiter'. Instead of a flowing melodic line, Amos opens the song with a chord, B  $\flat$  5, presented by the piano (Figure 4.10). Her use of a single chord from which to derive the song's introduction creates a distinctively minimalist musical atmosphere from the outset. Rhythmically, each bar possesses a repetitive character based on the continual use of a dotted crotchet-quaver figuration. This persists not only at the beginning of the song, but also through the first few lines of the verse, 'No one's picking up the phone / Guess it's me and me / And this little masochist'. Although she reverts to a different chord, namely C minor, Amos employs the same rhythmic structure during the rest of the verse in the left hand as well.

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<sup>89</sup> Amos, *A Piano*, p. 28.

Slowly

Bb5

No one's pick-ing up the

L.H. *p*

phone guess it's me and me and this lit-tle mas-o-chist she's read-y to con-

**Figure 4.10.** The opening chords of 'Hey Jupiter' (Sword and Stone Publishing Inc.)

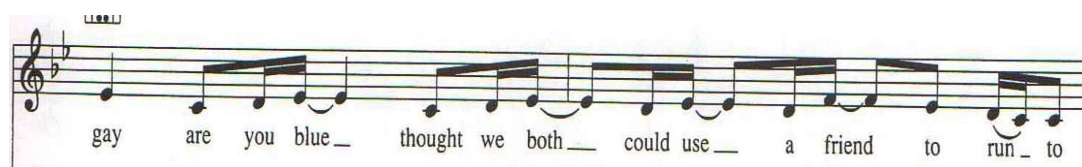
The vocal line is less repetitive than those of the first two songs, yet melodically the first part of the verse develops around a small melodic cell that is based on a semitone. Another melodic cell that consists of a major second and minor second appears in the second part of this section (Figure 4.11). To compose the vocal line here, Amos utilizes a specific rhythmic structure (a quaver note leading to two semiquavers that are tied to a crotchet or a quaver), that is heard throughout the song.

fess all the things that I nev-er thought that she could feel and

**Figure 4.11.** The melodic cell that consists of a major second and a minor second heard in the second part of 'Hey Jupiter's first verse (Sword and Stone Publishing Inc.)



The chorus of the song starts with a similar rhythmic structure. Moreover, unlike ‘Silent All These Years’ and ‘Pretty Good Year’, here Amos makes use in the chorus of the melodic line previously heard in the second part of the verse, without making any changes to it (Figure 4.12). Thus Amos draws, both rhythmically and melodically, on the material she employed at the beginning of the song to compose a new section. Also, she continues to accompany herself with piano alone, adding no new instruments to the arrangement in this section. As a result, the fact that there are no considerable differences between the song’s two main sections (the verse and the chorus) in terms of melodic and rhythmic structures and arrangement techniques makes its melancholic/repetitive atmosphere its predominant characteristic.



**Figure 4.12.** The use of a melodic line heard in the verse and also in the chorus (Sword and Stone Publishing Inc.)

Not only the musical elements mentioned above, but also Amos’s vocal delivery, signifies female melancholia as described by Kristeva. Throughout the song Amos, once again, employs a monotonous vocal timbre. However, in ‘Hey Jupiter’, the song’s narrow-ranged melodic lines are not sung with a child-like vocal timbre. Instead, listeners hear the voice of a mature woman who seems to have been suffering for a long time.<sup>90</sup> Amos, while singing the song’s melodic lines, that largely consist of only six notes between middle B $\flat$  and middle F, expresses the pain of loss through a vocal timbre that can be categorized as muttering. Throughout these sections, Amos’s deep

<sup>90</sup> See the twelfth track on the CD accompanying this thesis.

breathing is also quite audible. Thus, my argument that the song ‘Hey Jupiter’, like ‘Silent All These Years’ and ‘Pretty Good Year’, reflects Amos’s depressed state not only through its lyrics, but also through its musical elements, is strengthened by her use of a monotonous and quasi-muttering vocal timbre throughout the song. Her foray into falsetto just after the chorus can be regarded as the peak of this melancholic effect.

Amos’s vocal range and virtuosity have been widely remarked upon. Bonnie Gordon, discussing Amos’s use of voice in ‘Me and a Gun’, argues that

[The] song uses the materials of the body – the mouth, the breath, the tongue, and the teeth – to project internal experiences outwards (...) Thus it can link internal experiences and external world. It, like pain, thus breaks down boundaries between inside and outside (...) Amos projects outward cries and groans – the moment where pain destroys language – within a sung gesture (...) Her solo singing voice acts as an interpreter for pain most obviously when moments of pure sonic force emanate from her body, when we hear her body.<sup>91</sup>

But whilst ‘the voice [performs] experiences that otherwise lie beyond the limits of sensibility – whether it is a silenced internal voice or the visceral experience of physical and emotional pain’,<sup>92</sup> Gordon also emphasizes that ‘the act of turning a painful experience into a shareable one empowers the survivor.’<sup>93</sup> Amos’s use of falsetto, the ‘grain’ in her voice, is thus at the same time a signifier of melancholia and an attempt to communicate innermost feelings in an attempt to overcome one’s grief.

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<sup>91</sup> Bonnie Gordon, ‘Tori Amos’s Inner Voices’, p. 199.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

#### 4.5. Visualizing the Loss

Throughout her career, Tori Amos has made full use of the possibilities of visual representation, in terms both of cover art and music video, to explore and re-conceptualise the ways in which female sexuality is represented. In order to demonstrate the relationship between patriarchy and female sexuality, in most of her cover art and videos she questions the roles imposed by Western civilisation on women by replicating them in an exaggerated manner. The overemphasized opposition between the picture of Tori Amos in a little box on the front cover of *Little Earthquakes* and the picture of some visually magnified phallic mushrooms on the back cover of the album can be regarded as being one of the best examples of Amos's critical gesture to the ways in which the unbalanced male/female dialectics come to be visually embodied. In addition, the cover art of the album *Boys for Pele*, showing a barefoot Amos sitting on a wooden chair with a gun in her hand, and a picture from the booklet presenting Amos breastfeeding a pig are, I would suggest, among the best representations of the artist's hyperbolic articulations of the roles imposed on women by society.

I have briefly mentioned Amos's emphasis on 'bloodlines' in the concept for *Boys for Pele*. Another such bloodline for the artist is that of Christianity, which helps us interpret the image on the album cover. Amos commented that 'Following my own bloodline, Christianity, that moved from the hills of Virginia back to Ireland and Scotland, I made the decision to record *Pele* in Ireland.'<sup>94</sup> Elsewhere she said: 'I went (...) back to the South and the old-world church, to the place that deemed wrong Mary Magdalene and the shadow-sorcerer side in the Bible. I went to reclaim that hidden

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<sup>94</sup> Tori Amos, *A Piano*, p. 28.

womanhood. Because you can't have grace without the whores.'<sup>95</sup> I would argue that Amos's confrontational pose on the album cover, holding a gun, with her even gaze directed at the viewer, signifies her defiance in laying claim to the full spectrum of her womanhood. Part of the imagery of the cover art is described by Amos in another interview, where she explains:

Well, it's a reference to "Me and a Gun," a song I wrote that was on Little Earthquakes. And the idea that there's a dead cock on my right and a live snake on my left. And the idea is that death and life (...) creation (...) what it's taken me to get here with men, and I don't want to be angry anymore. And you turn it over and you put the gun down, but I'm not pretending what it's taken to get me here. But no more resentment.<sup>96</sup>

In her earlier song 'Me and a Gun', Amos had narrated her harrowing experience of being raped at gunpoint. Therefore, I would suggest that her posing with a gun on the album cover of *Boys for Pele* subverts the traditional imagery of guns as a symbol of male power, domination and violence. As regards the booklet picture depicting Amos breastfeeding a piglet, once again its religious undertones are hard to ignore, with its clear reference to traditional compositions of Madonna and child. However, Amos subverts all such imagery by presenting a totally unexpected one. Her manipulation of convention therefore also extends to depictions of femininity and motherhood, and produces unsettling visual results. Asked to comment on her chosen representation, the artist explained: 'I think more than anything the picture represents what I wanted to show (...) The record is very much about exposing that which is hidden in the

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with Tori Amos published in *The Chicago Tribune*, January 18, 1996. Available at [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1996-01-18/features/9601180427\\_1\\_blood-roses-songs-teen-spirit/2](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1996-01-18/features/9601180427_1_blood-roses-songs-teen-spirit/2) (last accessed 07/04/2012).

<sup>96</sup> Radio interview with Tori Amos on February 7, 1996, on Live 105 San Francisco. Available at: <http://www.yessaid.com/interviews/96-2-7Live105.html> (last accessed 07/04/2012).

unconscious. That's why a lot of the record is kind of (...) metaphorical work (...) nurturing that which has been hidden, non-kosher if you will.'<sup>97</sup>

Turning now to video clips, since all the songs I have analysed in this chapter were also released as EPs or singles to promote the albums they are taken from, they were also accompanied by music videos. Amos's choice of 'Silent All These Years', 'Pretty Good Year' and 'Hey Jupiter' as promo singles, for the albums *Little Earthquakes*, *Under the Pink* and *Boys for Pele*, respectively, also shows that they are among the most significant embodiments of the artistic mood and agenda of the albums they were in. This can also be seen in the similarities between the visual content of the music video of 'Silent All These Years' and the cover design for the album *Little Earthquakes* (Figure 4.13). Taking into consideration the themes repeated in most of Amos's video clips, such as isolation and being boxed in, starting with 'Silent All These Years', I argue that her videos signify a coherent artistic statement to support the resonance of the critical messages of Amos's *oeuvre* with issues of sex, gender and sexuality, as well as expressions of the presence and workings of female melancholia.

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<sup>97</sup> Radio interview with Tori Amos on February 23, 2006, JJJ FM (Sydney, Australia). Available at: <http://www.yessaid.com/interviews/96-02-23JJJ.html> (last accessed 07/04/2012).



**Figure 4.13.**The cover art of *Little Earthquakes* and screenshots from the video of ‘Silent All These Years’ (Warner Music)

Parallel to the repetitive characteristic of its music, the video of ‘Silent All These Years’ is based on only three images presented repeatedly: a child, a box and the narrator (Amos) herself. The video opens presenting Amos playing the piano. While Amos moves away from her instrument, the image of a child-girl appears behind it (Figure 4.13, upper right). The co-existence of an old piano and the image of a child-girl can be regarded as a metaphorical bridge to Amos’s past. The latter can also arguably refer to Amos’s loss of an ideal self, and Amos seems to contrast the child’s freedom of movement throughout the video, her carefree skipping, with the constraints and limitations suffered by her older, womanly self brought about by the position of her

gender within the phallic order. It should also be remembered, however, that as discussed previously in this chapter, Amos refers to her tracks as ‘Song-Girls’ and therefore the fact that the little girl emerges from behind the piano Amos is seen playing at the beginning of the video may also signify her creativity and freedom as an artist, which she claims for herself despite her loss. Interpreted in this way, the image of the little girl can be seen as becoming a *locus* of resistance against the yoke of melancholia interpreted by patriarchal discourse as a result of the oppression that women experience.

The video is dominated by only one colour: white. This overbearing presence gives the spectator no way to make out any visual boundaries with which to identify a spatiality within the video. The completely white background, moreover, serves to emphasize women’s isolation in their melancholic state and their struggle for their voice to be heard. The image of the little girl also implies that the narrator lives in an undefined period of time between the past and the present. Thus, both space and time are indeterminable in ‘Silent All These Years’. Evoking Kristeva’s argument that the melancholic person feels as though she is far from ‘the normal category of normal people’,<sup>98</sup> I propose that this ambiguity in terms of temporal and spatial coordination symbolizes Amos’s melancholic unfamiliarity with the real world.

At the beginning of the chorus, reflecting the melodic line’s narrow range, we see Amos struggling and tumbling to free herself from the confines of her box, seemingly in vain (Figure 4.13, lower left): when she finally succeeds, it is only to become positioned between the ends of two white walls which are visualized as a narrow, void-like passage (Figure 4.13, lower right), which I would argue denote her having become a sexed

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<sup>98</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 4.

being. It is, therefore, no surprise that the passage into womanhood should coincide with a further narrowing of Amos's freedom of movement. The lyrics punctuate this moment with the line 'My scream got lost in a paper cup', which is also significant, as are Amos's swaying movements, which are reminiscent of those of a stripper in a peep show. According to Kristeva, depression gives the melancholic subject another life:

All this suddenly gives me another life. A life that is unliveable (...) a devitalized existence that (...) is ready at any moment for a plunge into death. An avenging death or a liberating death, it is henceforth the inner threshold of my despondency, the impossible meaning of a life whose burden constantly seems unbearable, save those moments when I pull myself together and face up to the disaster. I live a living death...<sup>99</sup>

Considering Kristeva's argument I propose that Amos, in the video, presents herself as a person who lives a living death in a coffin-like box or between grave-like walls.

Subsequently Amos again becomes confined in a boxed-up space; this time we see her face appearing through an opening in a white wall. As a woman, and in her melancholic state, Amos looks in from the outside – of life, of reality, of the Symbolic – and this also reflects her detachment and estrangement. Through this same opening, we then glimpse a succession of various images – among which are two dangling earrings arranged to resemble a bra, when Amos sings 'If I'm stripped of my beauty', and a brief glimpse of the little girl again. Significantly, when Amos reappears, after singing 'I love the way we communicate', she remains silent for the next two lines in the lyrics, as if to signify her denial that any real communication has taken place. Returning once again in her 'allotted' space between two walls, Amos sings 'It's your turn to stand where I stand',

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.4.



and her voice raises to express her anger at her situation. And even once she starts spinning outside of her box, we quickly understand that it is an illusion: the white space closes around her and it becomes clear that it, too, is yet another prison from which Amos tries to escape, only to find herself again where she started.

As with the video of ‘Silent All These Years’, the video of ‘Pretty Good Year’ also presents Amos as a body isolated from the real world. At the beginning, the camera closes in on Amos’s face and on her look, which gives the viewer the impression that she is alone, distant, inaccessible in her world. In her analysis of Hans Holbein the Younger’s ‘The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb’, Kristeva discusses the painter’s choice of leaving Christ’s corpse alone and argues that ‘[i]t is perhaps that isolation that endows the painting with its major melancholy burden’.<sup>100</sup> Bearing this in mind, I maintain that in ‘Pretty Good Year’ it is primarily the feeling of stillness and detachment we perceive in Amos when she is sitting in her armchair that creates the melancholic atmosphere (Figure 4.14, upper left). This sense of remoteness, however, is offset by Amos’s suggestive looks, generally relaxed and free posture and by the occasional flick of her tongue. These all seem to be in contradiction to the idea of a woman in a depressed state, yet I argue that they may also be seen as instances of her resistance against being written off and silenced, by emphasizing her sexual persona and eroticism. We know of her own biographical experience of rape and abuse, yet Amos herself declared that, with *Under the Pink*, ‘this record is working through not being a victim’ and ‘all my songs, whether it’s “Pretty Good Year” or “Yes, Anastasia”, are about the healing process’.<sup>101</sup> In other words, I argue that Amos here consciously tries to claim her right to full expression as a woman despite what happened to her, and in so

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp. 112-3.

<sup>101</sup> Bill DeMain, ‘Tori Amos’, pp. 155 and 157, respectively.

doing gives voice to her loss but also seeks to go beyond it and not to become totally defined by it.



**Figure 4.14.** Screenshots from the video of ‘Pretty Good Year’  
(Warner Music)

In the second shot, viewers suddenly see Amos entering the room by breaking through a window (Figure 4.14, upper middle). It is not clear if by breaking through she is attempting to stop being an outsider and enter her life, or perhaps Greg’s life, but while she is about to touch the floor the camera changes angle and viewers realize that Amos is still sitting in the chair where we first saw her. Thus, coinciding with the two chords heard at the beginning of the song’s introduction, two different images of Amos appear just before she starts to sing the first phrases in the video. The Amos sitting in a chair can be considered the real Amos, while the other can be considered Amos’s depiction of herself that implies her entrance into her or another’s life. Thus, like in ‘Silent All These Years’, Amos is, once again, outside the very boundaries of ‘the normal’.

What visually distinguishes the chorus from the first verse is the appearance of the male character, Greg. Like Amos, he is also inaccessible, motionless, and alone in his world.

It is Amos who touches him, but he does not react. He is pinned down to his bed and looks as if he is compelled to silence (Figure 4.14, upper right). Just before the end of the chorus, viewers see Amos once again sitting in her chair and repeating the words, 'pretty good year'. While repeating these words, she closes her eyes as if dreaming and waiting for a miracle that can pull them out of this leaden melancholic atmosphere, characterised by the impossibility of meaningful interpersonal communication which Amos depicts in this video by his obliviousness and the fact he never touches her.

At the beginning of the following section of music, the camera focuses on Amos's body rolling on the floor. Here, the backward motion of Amos's body creates the impression that she is struggling to stand against a force that magnetizes her to a particular place. In the following shot we realize that this place is a narrow box, to which she is irresistibly drawn back: she is put 'back in her place' as a melancholic woman. She sings her song by sitting and kneeling in this box (Figure 4.14, lower left) as she does in 'Silent All These Years'. In the following shot, she is shown in bed next to her lover, who continues to sleep as if he were dead. Just after this scene, Amos appears levitating in mid-air (Figure 4.14, lower middle). This scene can also be regarded as representative of Amos's phantasmatic universe that is the result, and at the same time, the signifier of her separation from the real world.

Amos slowly lets herself fall to the floor before the beginning of the middle eight. Before she hits the floor, the hands of a group of men appear suddenly to carry her. During these shots, time runs more slowly than real time. The following scene pictures Amos reclining in her chair. However, while she is dancing with a group of men other images of her from earlier scenes of the video start to be successively introduced,

creating an ambiguity in the temporality of the video. Furthermore, we see male dancers laying the unconscious Amos on her chair at the end of the dance scene, which, in real life, should have occurred just before the image of Amos in her chair (Figure 4.14, lower right). Since this scene appears just after viewers see Amos sitting in that chair, I suggest that the idea of a linear, progressive time is deconstructed and rendered indeterminable and ambiguous.

Almost at the end of the video, however, the earlier scene when Amos broke in through the window is reversed, and she returns to the outside. It is not possible for women totally to overcome female melancholia whilst still subjected to the Symbolic order, so expecting a quick solution would be facile. Nevertheless, Amos continues to push through boundaries – here exemplified by the window and the narrow box – in order to show her resilience and the strength of her spirit which refuses to be crushed and reduced to silence.

Moving on to ‘Hey Jupiter’, the video of this song is also dominated by references that can be regarded as melancholic signifiers in terms of visual representation. The sequence opens with a slow motion scene: a young girl, running, is seen entering and walking inside a burning house. In the first two shots, we see only the little girl’s feet surrounded by smoke, going through a maze of corridors, and covering her mouth and nose with a handkerchief (Figure 4.15, upper left). Both the slow motion pace that dominates these scenes, and her old-fashioned handkerchief, shoes, socks and dress, lead viewers to the conclusion that she is from the past. For the time being, we cannot guess her identity or indeed her purpose. The camera then turns to Amos’s face. We see her sitting in a room about to be surrounded by the engulfing fire. Yet she appears

totally oblivious to the impending danger and her own safety. We see that she is crying, and she is almost motionless and expressionless, as if devoid of hope and totally dejected. Her hands hold on to the chair as she does not want to be moved away. During this scene, she does not even blink. As discussed in the analysis of ‘Pretty Good Year’, she seems to be frozen and distant from the real world (Figure 4.15, upper middle). It is that isolation, again created by her look, that could be read as an indication of the melancholia she suffers from.



**Figure 4.15.** Screenshots from the video of ‘Hey Jupiter’ (Warner Music)

We also see that Amos is heavily made up. This appears in stark contrast to the little girl, who finally finds Amos, and I maintain that it serves also to symbolize the fate of woman after her entry into the Symbolic order. However, Amos is unable to feel the girl’s presence, in spite of her proximity. We are, once again, face to face with a person, to use Kristeva’s words, who lost ‘all interest in words, actions, and even in life itself’.<sup>102</sup> The only time her face becomes animated is when Amos sings the lines ‘Sometimes I breathe you in / And I know you know’. Her mouth contorts into an

<sup>102</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 3.

expression of (self-)hatred, which I argue can be read as the result of her introjection of the lost object in order not to lose him, only to start hating him and herself too. This is slowly killing her, and in the video she appears to be ‘ready at any moment for a plunge into death’.<sup>103</sup> We now see a shot of the little girl’s shoes and ankle socks against Amos’s bare feet with painted nails. The girl takes Amos’s hand and starts to lead her to safety, yet Amos’s facial expression demonstrates that she is unaware of what is happening, totally wrapped up in her world and inner torment (Figure 4.15, lower left). She is running without understanding what she is escaping or where she is going, being passively led away by the little girl (Figure 4.15, lower middle), who consistently appears more animated and lively than Amos.

I would argue that the building on fire represents Amos’s life, now lying in tatters after the end of her relationship. It is unclear whether it was she who started the fire in order to kill herself, or whether the flames represent the mess she is finding herself in and the collapse of her own world. It is also clear, I think, that the little girl is none other than a younger Amos, from a time prior to Amos’s loss and still characterised by hope and an undamaged ego (before the girl’s entry into the Symbolic). We then see Amos stumbling whilst emerging from the building. Outside, a small crowd of onlookers has gathered, along with some firemen trying to bring the flames under control. Yet Amos seems unaware of the drama, and quite apathetic. Her lack of communication with others is striking. Similar to one of Kristeva’s case studies of a female patient suffering from depression, Amos acts as if she is experiencing ‘an irremediable dissociation between herself and everything else’.<sup>104</sup> At the end of this scene, she is led to a car by the little girl, who tries to smile at her and spur her into some kind of reaction. But

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

inside the car Amos is once again in a narrow, box-like place, with steamed up windows hiding her from the outside world and out of the reach of other people (Figure 4.15, lower right). Throughout the video, her facial features remain almost frozen, to reflect her utterly catatonic psychic state. The little girl could be interpreted as Amos's belief that loss and depression can be fought by drawing on one's own resources and strength – whilst outside people remain mere onlookers. Amos closes her eyes and her mind goes back to her sitting in the room surrounded by fire. In the video, the lyrics confirm her inability, at least for the time being, to leave her past and loss behind: 'I go from day to day / I know where the cupboards are / I know where the car is parked / I know he isn't you', desperately trying to hold on to a semblance of routine whilst facing total collapse. She seems to be, to use Kristeva's words once more, 'nailed down to her past'.<sup>105</sup>

Recalling my concluding remarks in the section on lyric analysis, I claim that Amos's selected videos can similarly be read as an attempt to represent the presence and *onus* of female melancholia, both in her work and for her personally, as a woman. As with her lyrics, here, too, we find no catharsis and her characters depicted in the videos are ultimately defeated in their struggle to free themselves of their depressed state. Yet, as well as symptoms of female melancholia, Amos's videos can be seen as the beginnings of a cure, in their attempts to show women not merely as objects, but also as subjects of their own stories. It is reasonable to argue that these women are all damaged in some way, and as such are as yet unable to rise above their melancholic status and attain happiness and self-fulfilment. However, Amos's visualization of female melancholia acquires a polemic value and, together with her lyrics, contains criticisms of the

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

representation and belittlement of the female self within patriarchal societies. Amos's videos show the effects of female melancholia - to be understood in my discussion as being due to a double devaluing of the mother and of women as females within the Symbolic. In this way, they serve a dual purpose, both encouraging a critical discussion and as insistent reminders of women's unwillingness to be silenced. By critiquing the treatment of women within the Father's order, Amos, therefore, ensures that their struggle is kept in the public eye and is not forgotten.

#### 4.6. Conclusion

Amongst female popular musicians, Amos is remarkable in her awareness and identification with feminist themes and her conscious elaborations of such issues in her songs, as we have seen in the above discussions and as her various interviews and comments also confirm. Moreover, she demonstrates a keen awareness of her own role in this respect. In an interview, she stated: '[s]ongwriters are the mirrors, just like the poets were in another time. The poets of the late nineteenth century especially, the French poets, they were the voice of their time. So what are we?'<sup>106</sup> She has always insisted on the importance of being true to oneself, arguing in the same interview that 'you got to be your own song'.<sup>107</sup> Her willingness to put herself autobiographically under scrutiny in her songs is both inspiring and extremely fruitful when tracing the influence of female melancholia on women's artistic production.

To summarize my arguments so far, the three sections above demonstrate that each of the songs selected conveys a narrative coherence which performs female melancholia in

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<sup>106</sup> Bill DeMain, 'Tori Amos', p. 157.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.



terms of lyrics, music and visual representation. The analysis of the lyrics leads to the conclusion that Amos consistently positions herself as a female melancholic and depressed subject, by textualizing her imaginings of loss, silence and fragmentation. The musical analysis demonstrates that all of these songs can be read in parallel with Kristeva's theories on melancholia, since a repetitive rhythm and a monotonous melody dominate her music. Finally, the reading of the music videos addresses the ways in which the melancholic signifiers in the literary text and musical composition of these songs are transferred to the realm of the image too.

Melancholic signifiers can also be explored in Amos's subsequent albums released between 1998 and 2011. For instance, as Amos explains, her 1998 album *From the Choirgirl Hotel* is completely 'about loss and emptiness'.<sup>108</sup> Throughout the opening song of the album, 'Spark', Amos concentrates on her recent miscarriage: 'she is convinced she could hold back a glacier, but she couldn't keep Baby alive'. Similarly, the song 'Playboy Mommy' is dominated by the shadow of this baby to whom the mother was unable to give birth. Concerning her album *To Venus and Back* (1999), her inspiration for the track '1000 Oceans' was the death of her father-in-law.<sup>109</sup> The opening line of the song, 'These tears I've cried, I've cried a thousand oceans',<sup>110</sup> can be interpreted as either Amos's or her husband's reaction to the loss of a parent. Another example of her consciously or subconsciously driven exploration of melancholia in her work appears in the album *Strange Little Girls* (2001). In this concept album, Amos selects certain songs written by male singer-songwriters such as Eminem, John Lennon,

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<sup>108</sup> See Amos, *A Piano*, p. 42.

<sup>109</sup> See 'Tori Talks about 1000 Oceans', available at <http://www.yessaid.com/talk/111000oceans.html> (last accessed 10/09/2009).

<sup>110</sup> Tori Amos, '1000 Oceans', in *To Venus and Back* (Atlantic, 1999). Lyrics quoted in this section are from the albums *American Doll Posse* (Epic, 2007) and *Abnormally Attracted to the Sin* (Universal, 2009).

Neil Young and Tom Waits in order to reinterpret them from a female point of view, by creating different personae. According to Lori Burns and Alyssa Woods, ‘the different personas that Amos adopts for each song allow her to provide a variety of perspectives on social issues, and permit her a degree of artistic detachment’.<sup>111</sup> In the album, Amos chooses to reinterpret the rap artist Eminem’s song ‘’97 Bonnie & Clyde’ from his 1999 album entitled *Slim Shady LP*. In the original version of the song, Eminem, by giving voice to his fictitious character Slim Shady, explains how he has killed his wife and kidnapped his daughter while disposing of his wife’s dead body in the river. In her cover version, Amos adopts the voice of the woman who has just been killed by Slim Shady; in other words, she gives a voice to the woman who has lost her life and her child. As Burns and Woods put it, rather than making some major changes in the lyrical content, Amos prefers to use her voice as ‘an important *Vehicle for the Communication* of the mother's feelings’.<sup>112</sup> These feelings can be explained as loss and longing.

Amos wrote and composed the most of the songs of her seventh solo studio album, *Scarlet’s Walk* (2002), during the aftermath and trauma of the terrorist attacks on America at the World Trade Centre Towers in New York City. The main idea of the album is triggered by the visit of a medical woman from the Lakota Nation.<sup>113</sup> In her

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<sup>111</sup> Lori Burns and Alyssa Woods, ‘Authenticity, Appropriation, Signification: Tori Amos on Gender, Race, and Violence in Covers of Billie Holiday and Eminem’, in *Music Theory Online: The Online Journal of the Society for Music Theory*, Vol. 10. No. 2, June 2004 available at [http://mto.societymusictheory.org/issues/mto.04.10.2/mto.04.10.2.burns\\_woods.html#FN30](http://mto.societymusictheory.org/issues/mto.04.10.2/mto.04.10.2.burns_woods.html#FN30) (last accessed 19/10/2011).

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. (emphasis in original). Burns and Woods continue as follows: ‘To portray the victim's voice, she explores a spoken vocal quality, reciting the text of the verses in a cold, quiet, and detached tone. She actually recorded her vocals from inside a box that did not allow her to move, which was created for the purpose of allowing her to relate psychologically to the dead mother’.

<sup>113</sup> Lakota is the name given to a Native American tribe. Lakota people are also known as Teton Sioux. They are one of the seven Sioux tribes. As Larissa Petrillo, Melda Trejo and Lupe Trejo explain, ‘Lakotas (...) are part of a larger group that includes Dakotas (Santee), Nakotas (Yankton), and other Lakota bands, collectively known as Sioux Indians. The Lakotas have been referred to as “the archetypal Indian in the American imagination” and have been popularized in many of the Indian stereotypes associated with the “Wild West”’. See Larissa Petrillo, Melda Trejo and Lupe Trejo, *Being Lakota: Identity and Tradition on Pine Ridge Reservation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), p. 3.

visit, she said to Amos that ‘those who are they, that call themselves the Fathers of this Being we call America, are molesting her [our Great Mother] and pimping her out. We expect you to tell her real story. You have an opportunity to try and light a fire in those who call themselves Americans but do not see America as their Great Mother’.<sup>114</sup> In order to personify the Great Mother and question what it means to be an American, Amos has her character walk across the entire country. The whole album can be viewed as a requiem for the people who were killed on 11 September 2001. Amos explains this as follows:

Scarlet walks to the nation’s capital as a different woman that has listened to the Great Mother and seen the Great Mother’s love for all their children, shedding tears of love, for settler and Native American, in her state of compassionate equanimity. I, myself, was even surprised at the denouement of *Scarlet’s Walk*. The Great Mother chose to confront the patriarchy that has pimped her out and left American Mothers weeping for the loss of their children, a loss that cannot make sense of or justify this current river of blood.<sup>115</sup>

For her eighth solo studio album, *The Beekeeper* (2005), Tori Amos drew inspiration from the idea of a woman who visits the garden of life and eats from the tree of knowledge, and in so doing invokes the image of the prototypical woman, Eve. As she puts it, the songs signify the different stages of her journey and aim to explore her feelings about different emotions such as love, betrayal, temptation, seduction, disappointment and bereavement.<sup>116</sup> As Amos emphasises in her *Rolling Stone* interview with Jessica Robertson, the impact of a relative’s loss is also significant in *The Beekeeper*:

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<sup>114</sup> Tori Amos, *A Piano*, p. 37.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>116</sup> See ‘Interview: Tori Amos’ by Sarah Jane, in *Uncut* (February 2005), available at [http://www.uncut.co.uk/music/tori\\_amos/interviews/8545](http://www.uncut.co.uk/music/tori_amos/interviews/8545) (last accessed 19/10/2011).

I think on [the title track] *The Beekeeper* [my brother's death] was addressed, because the song itself speaks about loss. I was drawn to the idea that in the bee colony, the drones are the ones that go first. I thought that it was nature's parallel for the loss of this man before his time. It was originally written about my mother – she was critical, and she flat-lined and came back. That's the last time I saw my brother. But after his accident, I finished [the album] with an ode to him. 'Toast', the final song on the record, I wrote on the plane coming back from the funeral.<sup>117</sup>

Melancholia-related themes appeared also in the albums *American Doll Posse* (2007) and *Abnormally Attracted to Sin* (2009). For *American Doll Posse*, Amos created five different personae influenced by Greek mythology – yet another instance of the concomitant possible relevance and applicability to Amos's works of one or more of the other feminist theories considered in this thesis, such as multiplicity and masquerade. The songs sung by one of Amos's personae created for this album, Clyde (clitorides), are mainly based on experiences of loss and longing, as she is depicted as being covered by emotional wounds: 'is there a love Lost and Found / (...) / Well you can stare all day at the sky / But that won't bring her back / that won't bring her back'. In *Abnormally Attracted to Sin*, Amos, in the song 'Maybe California', gave voice to a suicidal mother who felt like she lost the meaning of life: 'nothing is making sense anymore to me / I don't know when I stopped making him smile / Now the kids see me cry all the time'. This mother's words are similar to utterances of melancholic or depressed people observed by Kristeva, as discussed throughout this section. Similarly, in the song 'Lady in Blue', Amos told the story of a woman who 'left the right man' and suffered from melancholia remembering old days on her 'cold pillow'. Finally, for her latest studio album, *Night of the Hunter* (2011), Amos creates a character who is left alone in an old house dealing with a relationship that is about to come to an end.

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<sup>117</sup> Jessica Robertson, 'Tori Amos Talks in Tongues', in *Rolling Stone* (March 2006), available at <http://www.toriamos.com/go/galleries/view/729/1/728/press/index.html> (last accessed 19/10/2011).

I have argued that Amos's accounts of death and/or loss and her autobiographical urge to express her experience from a female perspective in her songs guarantee a strong gender-specificity in her performance of melancholia. My discussion in this chapter points to a very close relationship between melancholia and gender identity in Amos's *oeuvre*, which reflects a more general argument about the different representations of melancholia in men and women. We have seen that, within the historical and cultural realm, melancholia has assumed a positive and creative connotation in relation to male artists, further disempowering women by devaluing their own expressions of loss to the pathological realm of depression and sadness. To counter this reading, I have argued that, in women, melancholia cannot be fully understood unless it is seen both as the expression of a primeval loss and lack common to men and women, and as the expression of woman's further loss brought about by her oppression and inability to represent herself in the Symbolic order, under the phallus as its ultimate signifier. Throughout this chapter, therefore, I have attempted to read Amos's melancholia also as an embodiment of this female-specific loss. To further substantiate my argument, I shall now finally turn to the question of the importance of the biographical experience of religion in Amos's upbringing to her own personal development as a woman and an artist.

In *Piece by Piece*, Amos explains the role of her paternal grandmother, Addie Allen Amos, who made her father switch his focus and study theology in order to become a minister. She argues that if this had not happened, she would now be a different person, writing songs on different subjects.<sup>118</sup> It is clear that her grandmother had a distinctive impact on Amos's character. To Amos, the relative she referred to as *the Puritanical* or

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<sup>118</sup> Tori Amos and Ann Powers, *Tori Amos: Piece by Piece*, p. 41.

the *Shame Inducer* was and always has been her *greatest adversary* and challenger.<sup>119</sup> Her grandmother was a well-educated Irish-Scottish woman. Since she had a college education in the early 1920s, she even declared herself a feminist. At the same time, as Amos emphasized, ‘Grandma was an ordained minister/missionary as well as a teacher’.<sup>120</sup> One of these missions was, according to Amos, to guide Amos’s father to handle his daughter and to raise a respectful Christian woman.<sup>121</sup>

Some memories about punishments related to Christianity are significant in Amos’s written biography. At the age of five, she was punished by her grandmother since she said she ‘found Jesus cute’.<sup>122</sup> The grandmother wrote her a letter to stress that ‘there will be no Christmas under the tree’<sup>123</sup> until she learnt to love Jesus. Although according to Amos, her reaction (‘finding a boy cute’) was completely natural, ‘[her grandmother] and the church knocked all the health out of it’.<sup>124</sup> Amos claimed that it was not her, but Mary Magdalene whom the grandmother punished. According to Amos, in Christianity, Mary Magdalene symbolises the whore, whereas the Mother Mary stands for virginity and divinity. Amos continues that ‘if there was anything in her granddaughters that smelled of that [Mary Magdalene]’,<sup>125</sup> a punishment was necessary. It is clear that, for Amos, her grandmother was identified with the Church and therefore symbolized Christianity for her.

Amos learned the key lesson from the hardship she endured at the hands of her grandmother and the Christian Church. At an early age, she decided that ‘she wasn’t

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

going to let anybody have power over [her] like that'.<sup>126</sup> She revolted against her grandmother and the Church. As she puts it, 'if a woman wanting to choose her own path, sexually and spiritually, went against Grandmother's puritanical belief system, then she would be treated (...) as a pariah'.<sup>127</sup> In the beginning, as a woman who had sex, Amos identified with Mary Magdalene. As she argues, 'the Virgin Mary has been stripped of her sexuality but has retained her spirituality; the Magdalene has been stripped of her spirituality but has retained her sexuality'.<sup>128</sup> For Amos these two Marys must be joined to create a whole woman. She started to explore the split between the two Marys in her first solo studio album, *Little Earthquakes*. This idea reached its peak after Amos discovered Dr. Marvin Meyer's book *The Secret Teachings of Jesus: Four Gnostic Gospels*<sup>129</sup> while recording *The Beekeeper* in 2005. She explains this as follows:

As a preacher's daughter, I can see the obvious wounding which has been passed down from mother to daughter is sexual shame. Because the church in its dogma created a Mother Mary that was circumcised of her sexuality by the church fathers in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and because the Mary Magdalene was stripped from her sexuality by the same patriarch, we have had no integrated Christian female icon, where the sexual and the spiritual are joined together within one woman. (...) With the discovery of the Gnostic Gospels another truth is beginning to emerge, another truth that sheds light on the place of honor that women had in Jesus' Christianity. It seemed to me the way to heal this sexual shaming, even if it's an unconscious shame that you carry inside you, was to marry the two Marys within the self. This creates a new paradigm within the psyche where Christian women do not have to deny either their spiritual or their sexual self.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>129</sup> Dr. Marvin Meyer, *The Secret Teachings of Jesus: Four Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986).

<sup>130</sup> Tori Amos, *A Piano*, p. 45.

As the examples taken from Amos's biography show, being a minister's daughter and a strict Christian's granddaughter significantly affected not only her work but also her character, and can be considered the ultimate root of Amos's never-ending battle with the Christian Church. This battle, however, is also gender-specific, since it concerns a shame imposed on women by virtue of their sex and which is perpetuated in the mother-daughter relationship. One should also not forget that this particular puritanical reading of Christianity is that encoded in institutionalized religion within the Symbolic order and, as such, is yet another source of repression and marginalization of women. If one considers religion in this light, that is, in terms of its historical and cultural representation within patriarchal society, along the lines proposed by Schiesari for melancholia, then I believe two additional points become clear. On the one hand, it can be argued that, for the reasons explained above, religion, in its institutionalised encoding with its discrimination along gender lines, contributes to female melancholia by excluding women from its discourse – or at any rate by being complicit in the fragmentation of their selves by equating female sexual expression with sin and shame – and positing as an example for woman a 'virtue' which crucially deprives her of any hope of self-expression as a full subject. This process, in turns, engenders feelings of guilt and reproach that will become introjected and will contribute to women's melancholic 'disturbance of self-regard'.<sup>131</sup> However, just as the masculine economy does not allow women equal status and the ability to fully express themselves as subjects, I argue that the reason women feel excluded from institutionalised religion is similar: within it, they find themselves repressed and silenced. On the other hand, the artistic works of women, when seeking to articulate these issues, cannot achieve catharsis over melancholia, since what they are trying to go beyond is not only a

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<sup>131</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 243.



primeval loss, but also a Symbolic order in which this loss is devalued and exacerbated as it can find no language to be expressed in, and where melancholia has been appropriated by masculine discourse and has thus become gendered.

I therefore claim that Amos's identification with Mary Magdalene, a figure considered as a woman who lost her dignity and honour, should also be regarded as a melancholic one. If we accept this argument, we can also interpret Amos's search for a different Christian female archetype by integrating the two Marys (Mother Mary and Mary Magdalene) as another attempt to verbalize female melancholia. The joining of the two opposing poles of female identity that Mother Mary and Mary Magdalene epitomize (the virgin and the whore) would signify restoring the full female subjectivity in the Symbolic order. Therefore, by refusing to fall back into silence, in her artistic production Tori Amos articulated women's melancholic status within patriarchal society and the institutional church and claimed for women the status of fully-fledged subjects.

Undoubtedly, it is possible to determine melancholic signifiers not only in the works of female singer-songwriters but also in those of several male singer-songwriters throughout the history of popular music. However, in this chapter I have argued for a female-specific melancholia identified in Amos's work and as a primary constitutive element in the formation of the female ego, the self, and gender identity, and I suggest that what Amos *performs* as melancholia can directly be characterized as a sexualized artistic performance of her individual truth of femininity. Finally, I would argue that any catharsis of the female melancholic status, common to all women and which female artists, Amos included, have attempted to verbalize, can only take the form of a challenge to the Symbolic order and a fundamental re-theorizing of the relationship

between mother and daughter that refutes the necessity of matricide but attempts to renew the value of both as complete subjects in their own right.

## Conclusion

The primary aim of this thesis has been to characterise and attempt to interpret different modes of female representation in Anglo-American popular music. This project has embarked on a critical analysis of the question of whether authorial gender-consciousness can be reflected within popular music pieces to be considered not only as ideologically signifying cultural commodities, but also as textually signifying entities of words, music and images complementing one another. In other words, I have argued that the cultural and ideological embodiments of popular music texts may be musicologically interpreted in tandem, and that the word-music-image entities they represent are located simultaneously at a representational and textual/musical level.

Although this study was primarily informed by modes of feminine manipulation of male-centred discourses and representations of women, it was also motivated by an intellectual urge to question the possibility of claiming a link between the female body and text. In this respect, in each of my case studies, I have followed a path shaped by theories concerning the *female* and the *feminine* to read gender-specific signifiers in selected songs by Laura Nyro, Joni Mitchell, Kate Bush and Tori Amos.

Throughout the various chapters, I have analyzed the question of whether a kind of ‘female mode of writing’ in popular music exists and, if so, how it functions. More specifically, I have investigated the extent to which female musicians as composers contribute to popular music. According to Reynolds and Press, women's innovations in popular music are limited to the level of content only. They argue that ‘even the most striking and powerful of the new female artists are musical traditionalists, bringing new kinds of subject matter and subjectivity to masculine formats. Women have seized

rock'n'roll and usurped it for their own expressive purposes, but we have yet to see a radical feminisation of rock form in itself'.<sup>1</sup> Such a statement, I argue, seems to be the product of reading popular music from within conventional male-dominated discourses.

As scholars such as Susan McClary, Jane Bowers and Judith Tick have suggested, the reasons for women's absence from creative roles in the history of Western music have almost always been socio-cultural and political.<sup>2</sup> The same can also be said for the history of popular music. At this point, we need to be mindful of what Reynolds and Press described as 'what rock music has made of women'.<sup>3</sup> Throughout its history, rock has had almost invariably positioned women as minor, passive figures to be excluded from artistic creativity. Until the late 1960s, women on stage were regarded, to a great extent, as secondary figures. They were also considered mostly as sexual objects serving to fulfil male fantasies. Neither in the studio nor on stage had they ultimate control over the songs they interpreted. To succeed in the industry, they had to be dependent on managers, producers and songwriters, the vast majority of whom were men. It can therefore be argued that, in popular music, women were hindered from participating in creative processes, through the imposition of historical, socio-cultural and political barriers that have been governing Western culture for centuries.

Although the dominance of males both in the corporate sphere and the media can be shown as the primary reason for women's subordination, I suggest that the difficulties inherent in an in-depth music analysis (especially for music critics and popular music consumers) constitute another reason. This point can be said to apply to the works of

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *The Sex Revolts*, p. 387.

<sup>2</sup> See Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings*, pp. 3-34, and Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, 'Introduction', in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950*, edited by Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 3-14.

<sup>3</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *Sex Revolts*, p. 230.

male and female artists alike, since a musicology-based analysis would not be appropriate in the literature on popular music, which is both predominantly journalistic in its slant and conceived for a non-specialist readership. Moreover, since lyrics can be considered as semiotically more accessible than music, it would be easier for the lay person to interpret them in terms of perceived innovative qualities. In just one such representative example of books on popular music, *The Sex Revolts* by Reynolds and Press, it is stated that ‘it seems that female artists are more interested in communicating and telling stories than in taking on that rather masculine scientific obsession with breaking the barriers of sound’.<sup>4</sup> Since, for the reasons mentioned above, that particular volume does not include any music analysis, one could enquire as to the authors’ evidence for their claim and their question ‘Where are the great female sonic wizards?’.<sup>5</sup> However, I believe that another point needs to be made. Whereas, outside the domain of musicology, an emphasis on the lyric content alone may be justifiable as evidence of the innovations introduced by female musicians, here this innovative aspect becomes a source of criticism and a limitation.

In an attempt to address these gaps, and also to argue for the original character that some works by female musicians, among whom the four artists considered in this thesis, display, and show ‘what women made of rock’,<sup>6</sup> I have therefore based my arguments partly also on the study of musical structures. The conclusions of my musical analyses reveal that the songs by Laura Nyro and Joni Mitchell reviewed in this study signify the transgression of the rhythmic, harmonic and formal conventions of popular music. Hence, I claim that both these artists distort the Symbolic signifiers of popular music by breaking with the conventions of music. In this respect, Nyro’s practice of structuring a

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<sup>4</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *Sex Revolts*, p. 388.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

chord without its third, her use of conventionally “wrong” bass notes, and her frequent tempo changes, and Mitchell’s various alternative guitar tunings, can be considered as subversive within the context of the late 1960s and early 1970s Anglo-American popular music scene. Likewise, Bush’s use of vocals, studio techniques and chords in parallel with her feminine masquerade, observed in the chapter devoted to her, giving rise to a kind of feminine writing, manipulates the patriarchal language of popular music from within. I also maintain that the ways in which Tori Amos uses a repetitive rhythm, monotonous melody and unvaried chord structures in the songs under discussion, by putting the female body into popular music text, suggest a sexualized artistic practice enacting the possibility of distorting dominant musical discourses.

All the songs analyzed in this study mirror and are informed by these four figures’ artistic performances appropriating gender-consciousness, in terms not only of lyrics and visual representation, but also of musical structure. I therefore argue that they may be considered examples of different artistic attempts to search for an alternative non-phallogentric language, that is to say, a feminine writing, an *écriture féminine*, celebrating different aspects of the female body. The reasons the works of these artists were selected for discussion in this research are based on both the similarities and differences between them, with regard to artistic production and gender representation. Among the common themes running through their songs are a manipulation of normative lyrical and musical structures, as well as a navigation of socio-cultural issues imposed by patriarchy, an urge to reconfigure power relationships, and an emphasis on the female body/sexuality/gender.

But although these artists were analyzed in terms of the common denominator of a

textual gender-consciousness, the dynamics of gender representation with regard to ‘womanliness’ and their inscription within the text, uncover certain differences: the strategically over-emphasized feminine self-consciousness in Laura Nyro’s and Tori Amos’s works is embedded within their textual narrative and demonstrates an ideological coherence with respect to gender. However, the very gender-conscious dynamics of Joni Mitchell’s and Kate Bush’s works are primarily informed either by an attempt to trace back women’s experiences in literature, mythology, history and visual arts, or by the inscription of the experiences they went through as women.

Most importantly, whereas Nyro and Amos overtly claim and celebrate the significance of the practice of writing sexual difference, in their comments and interviews both Mitchell and Bush refute any conscious role played by gender in their works. However, as I have argued in the chapters of this thesis, I believe that this stance may be partly explained by the historical position and treatment of women within popular music, and that their *oeuvre* can at the very least be legitimately said to give voice to female issues and concerns. Furthermore, their unease at being categorised as “female musicians” reflects the potential pitfalls in positing yet another binary opposition between “male” and “female” music, to which I will now turn.

As Kelly Oliver commented, when describing women’s position in Western cultural discourses, Kristeva talked about them being in a ‘double bind. Either women can enter the Symbolic – language, politics, time, culture – only by identifying as men, or they can withdraw into their silent bodies as hysterics’.<sup>7</sup> To evade this double-bind, as well as needing to speak [male] language in order to have a voice within the Symbolic and

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<sup>7</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, p. 108.

not fall silent, women must however also avoid to be ruled by male discourse and ‘becoming “virile women” or supermen’.<sup>8</sup> Any efforts to counter this, according to the theories examined in this thesis, involve acting at the level of language – in the case of Kristeva by ‘putting symbolic logic within the body, and putting semiotic bodily drives within the Symbolic’,<sup>9</sup> as explained by Oliver, or in the case of Irigaray and Cixous by employing a sexed language, *écriture féminine*.

A mode of speaking or writing exclusive to women cannot be claimed, since it must necessarily be dependent on language itself, which is a product of the Symbolic order. To expect women’s musical writing to be completely different from that of men’s, therefore, would be unrealistic. In this regard, I suggest that the claim by Reynolds and Press that ‘we’ve yet to see a radical feminisation of rock form in itself’<sup>10</sup> misses an important point: this *radically feminized version* of the form would not signify, *de facto*, an entirely new and different music, a kind of music unheard until today. Otherwise, it would constitute a completely new musical genre which has nothing to do with rock. Bearing this in mind, I claim that the artists included in this study achieve a feminization of rock and popular music in general, by disrupting it from within, utilizing different artistic strategies to manipulate both the lyrical and musical structures dictated by dominant discourses, and in so doing go beyond ‘traditional masculine formats’.

Returning now to the earlier discussion on the risks of perpetuating gender-based binary oppositions and double-standards within popular music literature, I also believe that one can locate generally problematic aspects in the discussion by Reynolds and Press –

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *Sex Revolts*, p. 387.



whose book is quoted merely an example of a much wider approach and constitutes an otherwise important and progressive work on the subject of gender in popular music. On the one hand, women are asked to acquire, become proficient in and internalize the Symbolic, that is, the traditionally male-dominated, language of music – the very same music which for centuries has been accessible to them only marginally and within specific domains. On the other hand, their very innovations start, so to speak, to work against them.

When Reynolds and Press contrast female artists as seemingly more concerned with ‘communicating and telling stories’, as opposed to the ‘rather masculine scientific obsession with breaking the barriers of sound’, a two-fold risk could ensue. The first danger is that of perpetuating a discourse within music that in the past has imposed limiting labels on female artists, for example that of “confessional singer-songwriters”. Rather than seeing in the subject matters verbalized by women musicians an attempt to critique male ideologies and/or comment on the repressed and marginalized status of women in society, or instances of an alternative language expressing gendered concerns, their lyrics are understood as something characteristic of their gender. On the other hand, musical innovation and excellence are ascribed to male musicians, thanks to their more ‘scientific’ approach, which again is taken as a characteristic of their gender. I believe that, in the light of these points, the reluctance expressed by female musicians such as Joni Mitchell and Kate Bush at being identified with explicit feminist or gendered positions may become better understood.

Reynolds and Press, however, pose an important question when they ask whether the focus on the feminine they were witnessing at the end of the 1990s would ‘become

normalised at some point'.<sup>11</sup> Although the Anglo-American popular music industry, historically speaking, has tended to neglect the artistic achievements of female musicians, Joni Mitchell and Kate Bush are today recognized as two of the most influential figures of the late twentieth century. As Whiteley states, 'it would be difficult to trace a contemporary female singer-songwriter who does not owe and acknowledge a debt to Joni Mitchell'.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, artists such as Prince, Elvis Costello, Herbie Hancock and Sufjan Stevens are among the male figures who refer to Mitchell as a model for their art. Likewise, Bush is today considered a highly influential figure by artists such as Bat for Lashes, John Lydon, Joanna Newsom, Tricky and Florence Welch. However, despite the fact that female musicians from Rickie Lee Jones to Suzanne Vega and male musicians from Elton John to Steely Dan recognize Nyro as one of the foremost singer-songwriters of the twentieth century, she still remains, to use Reynolds and Press's words, 'strangely isolated'.<sup>13</sup> One could argue that, in the case of Nyro, the fact that her most successful songs were made famous by being sung by other artists, giving her less visibility as a performer, may have contributed to the higher regard in which she is held today as a songwriter than a singer. However, a similar 'isolation', in a way, could also describe the case of Amos.

At the beginning of the early 1990s, Amos appeared on the popular music scene as a follower of Joni Mitchell and Kate Bush. However, as Whiteley puts it, 'time has shown Amos to be an influential and important singer-songwriter in her own right, demonstrating her prowess both as a composer and producer'.<sup>14</sup> Partially, as a result of the artistic and commercial success of Amos's piano-based songs, from the mid-1990s

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 386.

<sup>12</sup> Sheila Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music*, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Reynolds and Press, *Sex Revolts*, p. 378.

<sup>14</sup> Sheila Whiteley, *Too Much Too Young*, p. 84.

onwards, popular music has seen the emergence of a plethora of female artists, such as Fiona Apple and Regina Spektor, who have combined elements of alternative rock with the singer-songwriter traditions rooted in the late 1960s. Nevertheless, today it is still rare for a musician to refer to Amos as a model for his or her art. In short, while Mitchell and Bush are both known for their declared identification with male artists, and are acknowledged as two of the most significant artists of the late twentieth century, Nyro and Amos, who placed such a strong emphasis on female figures as models for their art, have been less acknowledged by the popular music industry.

This, I contend, cannot be a coincidence. Race and class factors should be regarded as primary cultural determinants within the history of Anglo-American rock music. Yet the importance of the role that gender and sexuality play in the formation and transformation of this style has become increasingly clear. To make an impact at all, female artists may still either need to ignore, repress and even reject femininity and female sexual identity, or represent them in the ways that patriarchal society expects or even forces them to. Thus, it is my contention that whereas sexual identity provides women with the possibility of transgressing the structural barriers of the rock idiom, it can also prove to be a trap, in which women are deprived of a number of opportunities that are granted to men unconditionally.

The feminist theories reviewed in this research contributed to put issues of gender firmly of the agenda at the time and stimulate a productive debate. At the same time, it should be stressed once more, I do not propose the existence of a new and exclusively female form of music writing. Rather, aside from the role and relevance of gendered approaches for the artistic production of the musicians examined, I have attempted to

show the importance of gender issues for a wider discussion of the role of popular music both as reflecting, and in contributing to shape notions of self, sexuality, gender identity and body.

There are also aspects not considered in this thesis that could be explored in future research in the field. Firstly, the evolution and development of gender issues could be traced in the body of work of subsequent women musicians, such as Fiona Apple and Regina Spektor. Secondly, modes of feminine writings could be explored also in the work of male musicians. Gender issues have not lost any relevance since the theories and the songs analyzed here appeared, and this thesis intends to be a modest contribution to the further development and widening of research in this area.

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