

2018

**"When the Light that's Lost within Us Reaches the Sky" Jackson Browne's Romantic Vision (Chapter Seven of Rock and Romanticism: Blake, Wordsworth, and Rock from Dylan to U2)**

Gary L. Tandy

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/eng\\_fac](https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/eng_fac)



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Music Commons](#)

---

## Chapter Seven

# “When the Light that’s Lost within Us Reaches the Sky”

*Jackson Browne’s Romantic Vision*

Gary L. Tandy

In “Michael: A Pastoral Poem,” William Wordsworth imagines “youthful Poets, who among these Hills / Will be my second Self when I am gone.”<sup>1</sup> In his recent critical study, Andrew Bennett suggests that Wordsworth and the other British Romantic poets continue to have an impact on the poetry and poetic theory of our times: “Contemporary culture, indeed, is pervaded by developments in conceptions of poetry and art that are associated most fully with the Romantic period.”<sup>2</sup> As Sayre and Löwy state, “Far from being a purely nineteenth-century phenomenon, Romanticism is an essential component of modern culture.”<sup>3</sup> One contemporary musical artist who could justifiably be named a successor to Wordsworth (as well as other British Romantic poets) is the American singer-songwriter Jackson Browne. Beginning with his debut record in 1972, Browne has released twenty-three albums, consisting almost entirely of original music. He was honored with induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2004 and the Songwriter’s Hall of Fame in 2007. I first encountered Jackson Browne’s music as a university student, and his thoughtful, poetic, and honest lyrics captivated me and appealed to my English major critical sensibilities. The soothing tone of his voice and the folk-rock sound of his music were welcome antidotes to the turbulence in my teenage mind, and his images of yearning—for both romantic love and spiritual fulfillment—spoke to my confused and angst-ridden teenage heart. I was ushered into sleep many nights by the beautiful, melancholy melodies of the songs from his albums *Jackson Browne: Saturate Before Using* and *For Everyman*.

In graduate school as I delved deeply into the verse of the British Romantic poets—William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats—I began to recognize connections between Browne’s lyrics and their poetry. As I would discover later, it was not just the singer-songwriter’s words and images but also his worldview that led me to classify him as a Romantic lyricist. At the same time, I was impressed by Browne’s artistry and craftsmanship as I discovered that not only did many of his song lyrics stand on their own quite well as poems, but also that each album had a unity of theme and imagery that reminded me of a book of poems or sonnets. In both of these aspects, I would suggest, Browne stands out from many rock and roll musicians and deserves to be considered in the same artistic ranks as other musical contemporaries, including Bob Dylan, Neil Young, and Bruce Springsteen.

Unlike Bob Dylan, Browne and his music have not received much in-depth literary/critical analysis. Outside of one book-length study by Mark Bego,<sup>4</sup> most critical commentary has appeared in the pages of *The Rolling Stone* where Browne has been called “one of America’s most visionary and important songwriters”<sup>5</sup> and “rock’s greatest confessional singer-songwriter”<sup>6</sup> and where his music has been described as “searching” and “intensely introspective.”<sup>7</sup> While the music critics who write about Browne’s lyrics in publications like *The Rolling Stone* have not connected him to the literary tradition of Romanticism, they have identified key themes essential to that worldview. For example, in a review of Browne’s most recent album, *Standing in the Breach*, Anthony DeCurtis notes that the album’s songs “play like conversations between lovers trying to reassure each other of their commitment in a world that devalues human connection of any kind in favor of profit,”<sup>8</sup> a statement that recognizes Browne’s anti-capitalist stance. Earlier in the same review, the writer identifies the nostalgia for the past at the heart of Browne’s Romantic vision, noting that in his early songs like “For Everyman,” “Before the Deluge,” “Running on Empty,” and “The Pretender,” Browne “took a hard look at why the values of the Sixties seemed to die for so many people when that decade passed.”<sup>9</sup> DeCurtis goes on to acknowledge the essential unity of Browne’s work, stating that his recent music is marked by a commitment to the same values—freedom, compassion, generosity—that informed his early works.<sup>10</sup>

Jackson Browne’s lyrics demonstrate a worldview consistent with nineteenth-century British and European Romanticisms. While I will trace the Romantic themes and image patterns in Browne’s body of songs to show their pervasiveness, I will also argue that Browne creates and sustains his own Romantic vision. While it is consistent with the characteristics of European Romantic movements, it is also unique to his artistry as a singer/songwriter and, of course, to the wider culture in which he exists as an artist. Or, stated another way, Browne uses the themes and imagery of the Romantic

worldview but makes them his own, adapting them to fit his personal passions and his cultural milieu.

As both A. O. Lovejoy and M. H. Abrams note, the term "romanticism" has been defined in such varied ways by literary and cultural scholars that it is more accurate to talk about "romanticisms."<sup>11</sup> To be specific, then, for this analysis, I will follow the definition of Romanticism suggested by Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre in their article, "Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism," first published in 1984, and their book, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* (2001).<sup>12</sup> Sayre and Löwy describe Romanticism as a worldview that provides a specifically anti-capitalist critique of modernity. In what follows, I will present a description of Romantic characteristics from Löwy and Sayre, then identify theme and image patterns from Browne's lyrics corresponding to those characteristics. Since Löwy and Sayre identify multiple types, I will consider also how Browne's vision in his songs and albums aligns with a specific type of Romanticism.

## A REJECTION OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!<sup>13</sup>  
—William Wordsworth

Löwy and Sayre note that Romantics often express disillusionment with contemporary society and that the source of this disillusionment is closely connected to their critique of modernity. Modernity, they suggest, refers to "modern civilization, which was engendered by the Industrial Revolution and in which the market economy prevails."<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, then, the Romantic worldview involves a "revolt against the civilization created by capitalism."<sup>15</sup>

One does not have to look far in Jackson Browne's lyrics to find expressions of disillusionment with contemporary society. In "From Silver Lake," a song from his first album,<sup>16</sup> the speaker addresses someone he calls "our brother" who has rejected society and sailed across the sea. The speaker contrasts that experience with his own situation in the industrialized, capitalist city, where the "skyline is shaking" and the "mechanical city was waking." The disoriented speaker runs out, away from the city, "stumbling, mumbling." At the conclusion of the song, the speaker imagines himself running after his brother someday, but the song ends without resolving the speaker's conflict. "Rock Me on the Water," from the same album, begins with an apocalyptic, prophetic warning: "Oh people, look around you / The signs are everywhere." These signs include walls that are burning and towers

that are turning, and the speaker states his intention to leave the city and "get down to the sea somehow."

Browne's album, *For Everyman*,<sup>17</sup> continues the rejection of contemporary, capitalist society. At the beginning of the song "Our Lady of the Well," the speaker laments, "Across my home has grown the shadow of a cruel and senseless hand." His quest takes the speaker away from his home to a simpler, rural society where "the families work the land as they have always done," a decidedly non-capitalist vision. While in this simpler environment, the speaker continues to reflect negatively on his homeland: "It's so far the other way my country's gone," presumably referring to increasing mechanization, industrialization, and urbanization. In "Colors of the Sun," the speaker revels in his oneness with nature but contrasts his state with others from the urban, industrialized society as "dying men . . . Scuffle with the crowd to get their share / And fall behind their little bits of time." In a later line, Browne uses the term "disillusioned saviors" to describe divine or spiritual beings who want to show a better way to those consumed by capitalist society: "Disillusioned saviors search the sky / Wanting just to show someone the way." The speaker's overall motivation seems to be to find an idyllic setting far from the mechanized society of his home country. The title song of the album, "For Everyman," uses another apocalyptic setting and begins with a clear rejection of society: "They've seen the end coming down long enough to believe / That they've heard their last warning." Later the speaker expresses a longing to "give up the race / And maybe find something better," again rejecting capitalist pursuits.

Browne's 1974 album, *Late for the Sky*,<sup>18</sup> has been characterized as having as its "overriding theme the exploration of romantic possibility in the shadow of apocalypse,"<sup>19</sup> so it's no surprise the language of disillusionment and alienation continues. For example, in the song "Farther On," the speaker recognizes a disparity between his dreams and what he finds in the real world: "Now there's a world of illusion and fantasy / In the place where the real world belongs." The line recalls Georg Lukács's description of the Romanticism of disillusionment that is "characterized by an incommensurability between the soul and reality, in which 'the soul [is] larger and wider than the destinies which life has to offer it.'"<sup>20</sup> "Before the Deluge" once again turns to an apocalyptic setting. Its second verse mourns those who have traded the ideals of youth ("love's bright and fragile glow") for the material benefits of capitalism ("the glitter and the rouge"). The third verse, however, describes others who reject industrialized society because of its environmental damage: "Some of them were angry / At the way the earth was abused."

Perhaps Browne's *The Pretender* album<sup>21</sup> constitutes the singer/songwriter's most direct anti-capitalist statement, at least among his early works. The title song can be read as Browne's assessment of the state of the American Dream in the mid-1970s. The opening verse begins in an urban setting with

the speaker declaring his intention to buy "a house in the shade of the freeway," to "pack his lunch in the morning and go to work each day." But by verse three the listener understands the speaker's words as deeply ironic, as he describes himself being "caught between the longing for love / And the struggle for the legal tender." It is not far from these lines to Wordsworth's "Getting and spending we lay waste our powers" and not impossible to imagine the songwriter might have had Wordsworth's sonnet in mind while composing "The Pretender." The tone of the song is markedly sad, and it becomes clear that the pretender symbolizes the failure of the Romantic imagination as it succumbs to a capitalist society. Thus, it is appropriate when the speaker asks us to "Say a prayer for the pretender / Who started out so young and strong / Only to surrender." And just in case the listener misses the point or the irony, the speaker refers to himself as one who struggles for the legal tender, a "happy idiot" who believes "in whatever may lie in those things that money can buy." Browne continues the ironic and the satiric tone in the song "Lawyers in Love," where the images of capitalist society include lawyers, designer jeans, TV trays, and political turmoil. The speaker in "Tender is the Night" expresses another disconnect, "Between a life that we expected / And the way it's always been." In a 2007 interview, Jackson Browne acknowledged the anti-capitalist bent of his artistic goals: "What I'm hoping to get to in my music is the quality of life, the quality of our existence, and whether it's getting better or not. That's very personal terrain, but our dreams seem relegated to the area of mass consumption."<sup>22</sup>

The above examples have been drawn from Browne's musical creations from the 1970s. His albums from the following three decades continue to employ the language of disillusionment with and alienation from late twentieth- and early twenty-first century U.S. culture. For example, the title song of the 1996 album *Looking East* opens with the speaker standing alone in the ocean looking east, a symbolic rejection of his own western society. The second verse describes the speaker's attitude toward the current state of his country: "These times are famine for the soul while for the senses it's a feast / From the edge of my country, as far as you can see, looking east." Characteristic of Browne's songs in the 1980s, 1990s, and beyond is the shift from naming what is wrong with contemporary capitalist society to considering what can be done to change the world through social activism. Beginning with his *Lives in the Balance* album (1986), the capitalism that Browne rejects is most often tied to other concerns like poverty, war, racial injustice, and the environment. Here Browne again follows the lead of the British Romantic poets—especially Blake, Wordsworth, and Shelley—who used their poetry to draw attention to areas of social injustice in England and Europe in the early nineteenth century.

## NOSTALGIA FOR PARADISE LOST

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,  
 The earth, and every common sight  
 To me did seem  
 Apparell'd in celestial light,  
 The glory and the freshness of a dream.<sup>23</sup>  
 —William Wordsworth

When Bruce Springsteen inducted Jackson Browne into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2004, he contrasted two California musical sensations. The Beach Boys, Springsteen said, gave us paradise on the beach while Jackson Browne gave us paradise lost.<sup>24</sup> Springsteen's comment is perceptive, and with its allusion to Milton's epic poem about the Biblical myth of the garden captures some key aspects of Browne's musical universe. For example, the tone of Browne's musical creations is often melancholic and in that sense recalls a favorite attitude of the British Romantic poets including Wordsworth and, perhaps most notably, John Keats.<sup>25</sup> The speaker in Browne's songs often looks back nostalgically at some paradisaical time in the past—a time when life was simpler, easier, more free—more joyful even.

Löwy and Sayre note that for European Romantics, "Nostalgia for a lost paradise is generally accompanied by a quest for what has been lost. An active principle at the heart of Romanticism has often been noted in various forms: anxiety, a state of perpetual becoming, interrogation, quest, struggle."<sup>26</sup> The fact that Romantics look to the past does not mean they ignore present reality. In fact, another typical Romantic move is the attempt to rediscover paradise in the midst of bourgeois society. As Löwy and Sayre note, this attempt to find paradise in the present may take many forms, including a utopian experiment (for example, Coleridge's and Southey's youthful plans to establish an ideal community in Pennsylvania), the "creation of a community of like-minded individuals, or simply falling in love."<sup>27</sup> Finally, the ideal can also be sought in the "sphere of childhood, in the belief that the values that governed all adult society in a more primitive state of humanity—its 'childhood,' as it were—can still be found among children."<sup>28</sup>

While Browne's lyrics occasionally explore a desire for the "creation of a community of like-minded individuals," his efforts to locate a present paradise in the midst of the bourgeois society most often center around two other elements: falling in love and rediscovering the ideal in the state of childhood. Also, as we have seen in some of Browne's early songs like "Colors of the Sun" and "From Silver Lake," the speaker in the song considers the option of fleeing bourgeois society altogether. However, while this desire for flight is strong in some songs, it is far from being the predominant response to alienation in his music. The song "For Everyman," in fact, can be read as an

indictment of the impulse to flee. As *Rolling Stone* writer Anthony DeCurtis notes:

The title track of Jackson Browne's second album, *For Everyman*, was a response to the escapist vision of Crosby, Stills and Nash's *Wooden Ships*. As violence, fear and paranoia overtook Sixties utopianism, *Wooden Ships* imagined a kind of hipster exodus by sea from a straight world teetering on the edge of apocalypse. Browne wasn't giving up so easily.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, Browne's characteristic tendency (or to be exact, that of the persona in his songs) is not to flee, but to stay and search for utopia in the present world or, if not in the present, to hope for the eventual dawning of a utopia in the future, an impulse I will explore in the final section of this analysis. Browne's own description of "For Everyman" notes that the song arose from his nostalgia for the 1960s: "It's about the expectations we had, all the changes in the Sixties that had burned out by 1972, '73. It's meant to be an expression of the search for connection with others, for common purpose."<sup>30</sup>

The persona in Browne's lyrics frequently looks back to an idealized past, removed from the present. For example, in "From Silver Lake," the speaker tells of the quest of his "brother" who has left for some "ruin far away." In "For Everyman," everybody is looking for the one who can "lead them back to that place in the warmth of the sun / Where a sweet child still dances." Often the first-person narrator of the lyric looks back to his youth with nostalgia, a backward look typically occurring at the opening of the song. In "Looking into You," the speaker recounts returning to a house he once lived in "Around the time I first went on my own." Similarly, the opening of "The Barricades of Heaven" finds the speaker reflecting on his life at sixteen and his carefree days playing music with his friends in a van. Often these nostalgic looks at the past emphasize the simplicity and easiness of these youthful days. As another nostalgic speaker notes in "About My Imagination," "And it was so easy then to say what love could do / It's so easy when your world is new." The opening lines of "Off of Wonderland" strike a similar tone: "It was easy for me / Living off of Wonderland." While not all of Browne's songs should be interpreted autobiographically, we can safely assume that many of these nostalgic references come from Browne's experience, especially those that recall his life as a musician. It's also fairly common for Browne in his later songs to allude to his earlier ones, as he does in this song ("Living with an unknown band / Waiting there for Everyman"), further justifying an autobiographical reading in this case.

Related closely to Browne's mood of melancholic nostalgia is the expression of the experience of loss in his songs. One of Browne's earliest songs reflects on the state of being physically lost. The speaker of "A Child in these Hills" asks, "Who will show me the river and ask me my name?" and though



he earlier states that it was his choice to leave the house of his father, he still mourns his lost condition: "I am alone." In "A Song for Adam," from the same debut album, the speaker reflects poignantly on the loss of a friend who committed suicide. In this song, it is the friend who represents the Romantic figure, who is a deep-thinking, melancholy loner: "He was alone into his distance / He was deep into his well," the speaker says of him.

As would be expected from a songwriter who often addresses romantic love, Browne's songs have their share of lost loves recalled with regretful tones. In the classic "These Days," written when Browne was sixteen, the speaker states, "I had a lover / It's so hard to risk another these days." And later, in a line that sounds like it was written by a sixty-year-old, not a teenager, the speaker makes a poignant request: "Don't confront me with my failures / I have not forgotten them." "Fountain of Sorrow" opens with a clever pun: "Looking through some photographs I found inside a drawer / I was taken by a photograph of you." But the tone quickly turns somber as the speaker notices the photo captures not just the subject's "childish laughter" but also the "trace of sorrow" in her eyes. Like Keats, whose poems often reflect the paradox of melancholy in the midst of happiness, the subject of Browne's song is loneliness that "seems to spring from your life / Like a fountain from a pool." The song also captures the Romantic theme of the impermanent and transitory nature of joy: "Now for you and me it may not be that hard to reach our dreams / But that magic feeling never seems to last." It would be easy to compare Browne's use of photographs in this song as a way of capturing and preserving an emotion to Keats's use of the Grecian urn in his famous ode.<sup>31</sup> Another song that mourns lost love as well as its impermanence is "Linda Paloma," which uses the image of wind favored by the British Romantics to capture a sense of loss: "Love will fill your eyes with the sight / Of a world you can't hope to keep."

Löwy and Sayre suggest that when Romantics seek paradise in the present, they often turn to childhood.<sup>32</sup> The British Romantics, especially Blake and Wordsworth, frequently featured children in their poetry. To mention one example among many, Wordsworth's "We Are Seven" contrasts the innocent faith of a child with the pragmatism of a worldly wise narrator, who comes off as cold and scientific in contrast to the loving and innocent girl.<sup>33</sup> Blake's poems about the chimney sweeps similarly contrast childlike faith with the greed and cruelty of the adults who exploit these children by employing them to perform difficult and health-damaging labor.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, a frequent notion for the Romantics, especially Wordsworth, is that children are closer to divine power and spiritual realities than are adults.

Browne, like the British Romantics, uses childhood to represent divinity and spirituality. In "Too Many Angels," Browne makes a connection between angels and children, a comparison that was natural for Wordsworth and Blake. Browne uses the motif of photographs of children "All in their

silver frames / On the window sills and tabletops / Lit by candle flames." It is a scene that recalls a religious ceremony, a feeling that is reinforced when the speaker mentions the "angel faces" of the children. After noting that the photographs have preserved the children from the "ravages of time," the speaker contrasts the innocence and purity of the children/angels with the sorrow and sin of the adult world: "Too many angels / Have heard you lying." Wordsworth's poetry often makes a similar move, seeing children as more godlike or divine than adults. As he notes in his poem "Ode: Intimations of Immortality":

Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home.<sup>35</sup>

Often in Browne's lyrics children are more than symbols of innocence; they serve as representatives of the divine or spiritual, elements Romantics believe to be missing from a materialistic and industrialized society. In "Too Many Angels," Browne also returns to the Keatsian theme of art (represented by the photographs) giving permanence to impermanence.

Another song that features childhood is "Barricades of Heaven." The song opens with the speaker (presumably Browne himself) looking back on his childhood days when he was sixteen, carefree, and making music with his friends. The song's bridge then focuses on images of childhood: "Your face bathing me in light / Hope that never ends." While the images in this song are not as distinct as they were in "Too Many Angels," childhood seems to represent a spiritual experience that comes to the speaker in the night and is associated with other positive images ("voices of my friends" and "Hope that never ends"). Finally, "Your face bathing me in light," while an enigmatic image, carries with it some associations of religious, beatific visions. These examples show that Browne turns often to the imagery of childhood in his songs and that his symbolic use of childhood is consistent with that of the British Romantics, especially Blake and Wordsworth.

While many other examples could be cited, these should be sufficient to show a clear pattern of tone and imagery in Browne's music that expresses Romantic melancholic nostalgia for a lost paradise.

## THE VISION OF PARADISE REGAINED

I will not cease from Mental Fight,  
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand,  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green & pleasant Land.<sup>36</sup>

—William Blake, *Milton*

Löwy and Sayre suggest that another strain of Romanticism does not find recovering paradise in present reality ultimately fulfilling or, in some cases, even possible. They note, "A third tendency holds the preceding solutions to be illusory, or in any event merely partial; it embarks on the path of authentic future realization."<sup>37</sup> As Löwy and Sayre point out, this orientation toward the future can also be found in other Romantic authors including Percy Bysshe Shelley, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, William Morris, and Walter Benjamin, writers for whom the "recollection of the past serves as a weapon in the struggle for the future."<sup>38</sup>

Jackson Browne's lyrics provide numerous instances of this Romantic vision of the future. In fact, it is in his imaginative construction of this future vision connected with and empowered by social activism in the present that Browne makes his most original contribution to rock and roll music and the Romantic poetry of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries. This orientation toward a future vision also means that Browne's specific type of Romanticism aligns most closely with what Löwy and Sayre name Revolutionary and/or Utopian Romanticism, defined as

the nostalgia for a pre-capitalist past . . . projected into the hope for a post-capitalist future. It aspires . . . to see the abolition of capitalism and the creation of a utopian future possessing some traits or values of pre-capitalist societies.<sup>39</sup>

Browne's lyrical vision of a future paradise begins early in his songwriting career. Several songs from his first albums, including "Rock Me on the Water" and "For Everyman," use apocalyptic imagery and look forward prophetically to future events. Though some of the songs describe perilous and even destructive events, they also imply hope for a better future, a future at times portrayed with images of spiritual renewal and even salvation.

"Farther On" from *Late for the Sky* contains an explicit future vision, but it begins with the typical Romantic move toward the past. Looking back, the speaker recalls times of community and connection with the "gentle ones." Shifting his point of reference to the present, the speaker longs for paradise but admits, "Heaven's no closer than it was yesterday." Near the end of the song, the angels are introduced, and they are wiser than the speaker: "They know not to wait up for the sun." The angels also possess comprehensive vision. They look over the speaker's shoulder at "the vision of paradise contained in the light of the past." Thus the angels possess the Romantic ability to look toward the past but also envision the future. Presumably as a result of the guidance of the angels, the speaker is pictured at the end of the song with his "maps and my faith in the distance / Moving farther on." Here, as in "Rock Me on the Water," the exact nature of the paradisaical vision is not revealed, but it is clearly a vision of paradise located in the future.

"Before the Deluge," also from the *Late for the Sky* album, is another song with an apocalyptic setting. As the title indicates, the song looks toward some future time when a catastrophic event ("the deluge") will occur.<sup>40</sup> While the tone of most of the song seems to match the theme of desolation and destruction, the ending allows for optimism because a remnant survives the deluge, and the chorus strikes a positive note that the "music will keep our spirits high" and that creation will "reveal its secrets by and by / When the light that's lost within us reaches the sky."

A song from *The Pretender* album that follows a pattern similar to "Before the Deluge" is "The Fuse." It begins with an image reminiscent of a Coleridge conversation poem: "It's hard to say for sure / Whether what I hear is music or wind / Through an open door." The song continues on a largely pessimistic note climaxed by this exclamation regarding social injustice: "Oh Lord / Are there really people starving still?" The conclusion of the song presents another image of apocalypse but also envisions a better world to follow, where the singer will hear the sound "Of the waters lapping on a higher ground / Of the children laughing." Here Browne combines two of his favorite images—water and children—to present a vision of peace, joy, and salvation.

The title song of Browne's *World in Motion*<sup>41</sup> begins with a negative image, "Sun going down on the USA," and goes on to refer to social concerns including homelessness and income inequality. However, after a typical Romantic look backwards to an earlier, less troubled time, the speaker seems to be inspired with an optimistic vision for the future: "Things like hunger, greed and hatred / One way or another, gonna be eradicated." In a typical Romantic move, the speaker switches from a vision of the past to a positive vision of the future. Specifically, he transitions from the current world passing away ("Sun going down on the USA") to a vision of a new world order ("Sun coming up a hundred years away"), a world where hunger, greed, and hatred will be no more.

In "Don't You Want to Be There," from the same album, Browne invokes the future vision in the opening lines: "Don't you want to be there, don't you want to go? / Where the light is breaking and the cold clear winds blow." Wherever this "there" is, Browne's lyrics picture it as a place where forgiveness abounds. It is a time and place of reconciliation, where "those you have wronged, you know / You need to let them know some way." It is also, appropriately, a place of childlike innocence, "where the grace and simple truth of childhood go / Don't you want to be there when the trumpets blow?" The trumpets blowing suggest a celebration or perhaps even a second coming, and the trumpet metaphor continues through the anaphora of "Blow" in the next four lines. The people mentioned in these lines are those who have suffered poverty and injustice, but Browne's vision is of a time where all will be healed and the world will be as it was meant to be. The final stanza

reinforces the paradisaical vision and returns to Browne's preferred angel imagery while emphasizing strength and love as contrasted with fear: "Don't you want to be where there's strength and love / In the place of fear."

"Far From the Arms of Hunger"<sup>42</sup> is another song that spins Browne's Romantic vision of a future utopia. In the first stanza he paints a picture of a world without hunger and without war, and the final line hints at the reason: it is "A world no longer ours alone." The next stanza expands on this theme describing a global attitude that recognizes as a brother the "face across the border / Across a sea of differences." The song's chorus envisions a future "Far from the world disorder / Beyond the reach of war." While the song acknowledges that change will have to occur for this new world to emerge (especially on the part of the United States), it expresses confidence that at some point in the future a global consciousness will emerge and along with it a world of unity and peace.

Browne's album *Standing in the Breach*<sup>43</sup> continues to explore a future vision. In the title song, the speaker sounds the call for social action on the part of the hearer. The "we" of the opening stanza sounds the Romantic call for community, for people to recognize their connectedness and common humanity. That recognition is one that leads to action, to "standing in the breach." He goes on, "And though the earth may tremble and our foundations crack / We will all assemble and we will build them back." Browne's choice of the verb form "will" is telling. It places the action in the future but it is not conditional (e.g., "should" or "could"). It speaks of confidence and hope, not uncertainty and despair.

This hope, however, is not achieved by ignoring difficult realities, as the second stanza makes clear with its focus on income inequality: "I will never understand however they've prepared / How one life may be struck down and another life be spared." The third stanza highlights the gap between this present reality and what the speaker (and the audience) knows this world could be. Though some doubt is expressed ("You don't know how it will happen now"), the speaker maintains hope because he knows the change the world needs already exists inside everyone. As with the choice of verb tense in the opening stanza, Browne's use of the second person ("You don't know"; "You know") is intentional and shows a progression in the songwriter's vision. Earlier songs casting the future vision like "Farther On" used the first person, focusing on the individual consciousness. "Standing in the Breach," by using the second person, seems to invite the listener to share the vision while stressing the common humanity that unites everyone. At the very least, it seems to invite anyone of good will who shares Browne's Romantic vision to stand with him. In a 2007 interview, Browne suggests the importance of having a future vision and how that future vision could influence present realities: "To imagine the world that you want to have is the most fundamental tonic we have, the thing that will actually produce the best

food and the best art and the best solutions to the problems we're faced with."<sup>44</sup> In a 2014 review of *Standing in the Breach*, Anthony DeCurtis asserts that Browne has remained true to his vision: "But, like John Lennon, he's enough of an artist to understand that imagining the world as it should be is the first step in bringing that world about. However, the next step—doing something—is even more important."<sup>45</sup>

Typically, though, the songwriter must recognize the realistic obstacles that stand in the way of humanity's achieving the vision of paradise: "The unpaid debts of history / The open wounds of time / The laws of human nature always tugging from behind." Yet in spite of these obstacles, the speaker expresses hope, albeit conditional: he wants to think that the earth might heal and that people might still learn. Once again, Browne's grammatical choices are significant: "I want to think," "might still learn." In spite of experience and history, Browne simply must believe in a positive future vision. Browne's Romanticism is seen in his recognition, on the one hand, of the deeply flawed nature of the world and, on the other hand, his ability to maintain faith in the basic goodness of humanity embodied in his future vision of a better world. "Standing in the Breach," of all of Browne's future vision songs, seems to exemplify best the original nature of the singer/songwriter's contribution: his imaginative construction of a future vision connected with and empowered by social activism in the present. Browne himself underscored the importance of both vision and activism in a 2007 *Rolling Stone* interview:

"You must be the change that you wish to see in the world" is another good one. If you're here, you're going to be part of what the world becomes. I don't have any confidence in surveillance systems or guards and the ways of preserving the disparity of wealth that I believe is at the heart of the policies of the right and the super-rich in this country. But the cataclysmic changes that we're staring at as a result of climate changes or famine or huge population migrations are going to lay them low too. They're in denial. They're asleep on the tracks and there's this train coming. It's in everybody's interest that we wake up and address these things.<sup>46</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This analysis has focused not on proving influence but on identifying those elements of Browne's lyrics that demonstrate the continuity of his worldview with that of the European Romantic movement, specifically of the Revolutionary and Utopian type. Further, I suggest that Browne uses that shared worldview to construct a unique imaginative vision that stands as an original contribution to rock and roll music and to the Romantic poetry of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Finally, while this chapter has

explored three major Romantic elements in Browne's lyrics, other themes and image patterns deserve attention. For example, like the British Romantics, Browne often uses his music to bring attention to a variety of social concerns like poverty, war, racial injustice, and the environment. Jackson Browne has been a keen observer of U.S. culture and has embodied his critique in poetry and music that yield pleasure and insight for his audience. His lyrics are worthy of close attention, an attention that will lead the critic to recognize Browne's poetic depth and artistic excellence as well as his Revolutionary and Utopian Romanticism.

## NOTES

1. William Wordsworth, "Michael: A Pastoral Poem," lines 38–39, *The Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Mark Van Doren (Roslyn, NY: Black's Readers Service Company, 1951), 430.
2. Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 264.
3. Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy, "Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism," *New German Critique* 32 (1984): 42.
4. Mark Bego, *Jackson Browne: His Life and Music* (New York: Citadel Press, 2005).
5. Anthony DeCurtis, "Jackson Browne: New World, Timeless Values," *Rolling Stone* 1220 (October 23, 2014): 58.
6. Bud Scoppa, "Jackson Browne: The Very Best of Jackson Browne," *Rolling Stone* 947 (April 29, 2004): 80.
7. John McAlley and Ted Drozdowski, "Performance," *Rolling Stone* 679 (April 7, 1994): 34.
8. Anthony DeCurtis, "Jackson Browne: New World, Timeless Values," 58.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. M. H. Abrams, ed. *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 8.
12. Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy, "Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism," *New German Critique* 32 (1984): 42–92; Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).
13. William Wordsworth, "The World is too Much with Us; Late and Soon" lines 1–4, *The Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Mark Van Doren (Roslyn, NY: Black's Readers Service Company, 1951), 536.
14. Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism*, 18.
15. *Ibid.*, 19–20.
16. Jackson Browne, *Jackson Browne: Saturate Before Using*, Asylum Records SD-5051, 1972, 33-1/3 r.p.m.
17. Jackson Browne, *For Everyman*, Asylum Records SD-5067, 1973, 33-1/3 r.p.m.
18. Jackson Browne, *Late for the Sky*, Asylum Records 7E-1017, 1974, 33-1/3 r.p.m.
19. Stephen Holden, review of *Late for the Sky*, *Rolling Stone*, November 7, 1974, accessed January 13, 2016, [www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/late-for-the-sky-19741107](http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/late-for-the-sky-19741107).
20. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 112.
21. Jackson Browne, *The Pretender*, Asylum Records 7E-1079, 1976, 33-1/3 r.p.m.
22. Jackson Browne, quoted in Anthony DeCurtis, "Jackson Browne," *Rolling Stone* 1025–1026 (May 3, 2007): 134.
23. William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," lines 1–5, *The Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Mark Van Doren (Roslyn, NY: Black's Readers Service Company, 1951), 541.

24. Bruce Springsteen, "Induction Speech for Jackson Browne, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, 2004," October 22, 2010, accessed November 11, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yfyC6piz-k>.
25. For Wordsworth, see "Sweet Was the Walk" and the "Lucy" poems; for Keats, see "Ode on Melancholy" and "Ode to a Nightingale."
26. Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism*, 23
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. Anthony DeCurtis, *Rolling Stone*, quoted in Mark Bego, *Jackson Browne: His Life and Music* (New York: Citadel Press, 2005), 235.
30. Jackson Browne, quoted in David Fricke, "My Life in 15 Songs," *Rolling Stone* 1220 (October 23, 2014), 54.
31. John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," *John Keats: Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1978).
32. Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism*, 23.
33. William Wordsworth, "We Are Seven," *The Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Mark Van Doren (Roslyn, NY: Black's Readers Service Company, 1951).
34. William Blake, "The Chimney Sweeper," from *Songs of Innocence* and "The Chimney Sweeper," from *Songs of Experience, The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 10, 22.
35. William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," lines 63–66, *The Works of William Wordsworth* ed. Mark Van Doren (Roslyn, NY: Black's Readers Service Company, 1951), 543.
36. William Blake, "Preface to *Milton*," lines 13–16, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 95–96.
37. Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism*, 24.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*, 61.
40. Browne has stated that "Before the Deluge could be 'about the nuclear-power issue,'" see Anthony DeCurtis, "Jackson Browne," *Rolling Stone* 641 (October 15, 1992): 138.
41. Jackson Browne, *World in Motion*, 1984.
42. From Jackson Browne, *Time the Conqueror*, Inside Recordings (2) INR9231–8, 2008, compact disc.
43. Jackson Browne, *Standing in the Breach*, Inside Recordings (2) INR-14107–1, 2014, compact disc.
44. Jackson Browne, quoted in Anthony DeCurtis, "Jackson Browne," 134.
45. Jackson Browne, quoted in Anthony DeCurtis, "Jackson Browne: New World, Timeless Values," 58.
46. Jackson Browne, quoted in Anthony DeCurtis, "Jackson Browne," 134.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrams, M. H., ed. *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1960.
- Bego, Mark. *Jackson Browne: His Life and Music*. New York: Citadel Press, 2005.
- Bennett, Andrew. *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Blake, William. "The Chimney Sweeper." In *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by David V. Erdman, 10. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982.
- . "The Chimney Sweeper." In *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by David V. Erdman, 22. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982.
- . "Preface to *Milton a Poem*." In *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by David V. Erdman, 95–96. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982.
- Browne, Jackson. *For Everyman*. Asylum Records SD-5067, 1973, 33-1/3 r.p.m.



- . *Jackson Browne: Saturate Before Using*. Asylum Records SD-5051, 1972, 33-1/3 r.p.m.
- . *Late for the Sky*. Asylum Records 7E-1017, 1974, 33-1/3 r.p.m.
- . *Lives in the Balance*. Asylum Records 60457-1-E, 1986, 33-1/3 r.p.m.
- . *Looking East*. Elektra 7559-61867-2, 1996, compact disc.
- . *Pretender, The*. Asylum Records 7E-1079, 1976, 33-1/3 r.p.m.
- . *Standing in the Breach*. Inside Recordings (2) INR-14107-1, 2014, compact disc.
- . *Time the Conqueror*. Inside Recordings (2) INR9231-8, 2008, compact disc.
- . *World in Motion*. Elektra 9-60830-1, 1989, 33-1/3 r.p.m.
- DeCurtis, Anthony. "Jackson Browne." *Rolling Stone* 641 (October 15, 1992): 138.
- . "Jackson Browne: New World, Timeless Values." *Rolling Stone* 1220 (October 23, 2014): 58.
- Fricke, David. "My Life in 15 Songs." *Rolling Stone* 1220 (October 23, 2014): 54.
- Holden, Stephen. Review of *Late for the Sky*. *Rolling Stone*, November 7, 1974, accessed January 13, 2016, [www.rollingstone.com/music/album-reviews/late-for-the-sky-19741107](http://www.rollingstone.com/music/album-reviews/late-for-the-sky-19741107).
- Keats, John. "Ode on a Grecian Urn." *John Keats: Complete Poems*, edited by Jack Stillinger, 282-283. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1978.
- Löwy, Michael, and Robert Sayre. *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Lukács, Georg. *The Theory of the Novel*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971.
- McAlley, John, and Ted Drozdowski. "Performance." *Rolling Stone* 679 (April 7, 1994): 34.
- Sayre, Robert, and Michael Löwy. "Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism." *New German Critique* 32 (1984): 42-92.
- Scoppa, Bud. "Jackson Browne: The Very Best of Jackson Browne." *Rolling Stone* 947 (April 29, 2004): 80.
- Springsteen, Bruce. "Induction Speech for Jackson Browne, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, 2004," posted October 22, 2010, accessed November 11, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yfCópiz-k>.
- Wordsworth, William. "Michael: A Pastoral Poem." *The Works of William Wordsworth*, edited by Mark Van Doren, 429-442. Roslyn, New York: Black's Readers Service Company, 1951.
- . "Ode: Intimations of Immortality." *The Works of William Wordsworth*, edited by Mark Van Doren, 541-547. Roslyn, NY: Black's Readers Service Company, 1951.
- . "We Are Seven." *The Works of William Wordsworth*, edited by Mark Van Doren, 56-8. Roslyn, NY: Black's Readers Service Company, 1951.
- . "The world is too much with us. . ." *The Works of William Wordsworth*, edited by Mark Van Doren, 536. Roslyn, NY: Black's Readers Service Company, 1951.