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from *Inside A Prune*

Nearly 36 years ago, one of the most famous and dramatic audience/performer confrontations of all time happened in Manchester's Free Trade Hall. '*Judas!*' rang out from the body of the hall. '*I don't believe you,*' the performer drawled back. '*You're a liar.*' Turning to the band, not yet The Band, he hissed '*Play f***ing loud*', and the opening chords of 'Like a Rolling Stone' crashed out.

In the more than three decades since, Bob Dylan has lost none of his ability to incite, inspire, awe and occasionally infuriate his audience, whether it be on record, by constantly evolving and changing live performance or by interview. With such a massive body of art and incident to examine, we make no apology for launching a new publication, named after that famous protest, into the already crowded sphere of Dylan fanzines. Before we could justify doing so, however, we had to consider what we could offer that was different from the fine work being done by the established fanzines.

One of our key terms of reference is that, besides offering a new platform to some of the finest writers within what we might term 'the Dylan community', we are actively seeking writers with a viewpoint on Dylan from outside that community, in the worlds of media and journalism and from academia. We also hope to introduce as many new writers as possible; this was one of the things I found most satisfying about the previous magazine I edited, *Homer, the slut*.

Another way in which we seek to differ is by being less tied to current events. We hope that *Judas!* magazine will be viewed as something durable and authoritative, something to keep on your shelves and refer to, more like a book than a fanzine. This is not to criticise anyone else's publication, just an attempt to explain our own *raison d'être*. Obviously, we won't be totally divorced from Dylan's current activities. How could we be when a new album, film appearance, TV special or whatever happens? All publications on matters Dylan are bound to comment on the same thing on these occasions. Even now, sometime after the events (as we were not in existence at the time), we are delighted to present Nigel Hinton's views on '*Love And Theft*' and Glen Dundas's reflections on how the incorporation of songs from that release has altered the touring experience.

On the other hand, we will avoid duplication wherever possible and will not, for example, be offering a review page of recent audience recordings, since Ben Clayton and Kev Williamson already provide an excellent round-up of those in the pages of *ISIS*. Nor will we be covering every CD bootleg release, and we will review recent shows only when they are of particular import artistically and/or historically. Only glass mastered CD-boots of significant import in Dylan's 'parallel' and unauthorised recording career will be put under the expert microscope of Manuel Vardavas, starting in issue 2. This policy seems

particularly fitting as, of course, still among the most significant bootlegs of all time is the one from which, under many guises and titles, the cry of 'Judas!' first echoed in the ears of most of us; that 1966 Free Trade Hall recording, now finally available from (Sony) Columbia.

I mentioned *Homer* earlier; in many obvious ways, *Judas!* is a very different magazine. One way that is less obvious is that I am not doing all the work. In fact, Keith Wootton is doing the hard part. He's in charge of design and layout, publishing, distributing, managing the subscription base and so forth, leaving me to get on with the bit I like, the textual content. I thought I should point this out in case anyone thought my repeated use of the word 'we' signified that I had acquired Imperial pretensions!

Even though I am here to welcome you to issue 1, which we trust you will enjoy, issue 2 is already well underway with a number of enthralling articles and, we hope, another transcript from the interview tapes of Clinton Heylin. One thing we'd very much like to have is a letters page, but that depends on you writing to me, via post at the address on page 1 or by e-mail at editor@judasmagazine.com As important, whether you're a regularly-published writer on Dylan or someone whose voice hasn't been heard before but has something new and worthwhile to say, please send prospective articles to that same address. I must warn you though that the selection process is tough; I mean to say, I was told there was no room for me in this issue, and to work hard if I hoped to have a chance of appearing in issue two. A hard man to please, this editor – though a lovely chap as I'm sure you'll all agree.

Finally, please remember to keep an eye on our website at www.judasmagazine.com for all kinds of information; now that we have the first issue out we hope to create a special, interactive online *Judas!* readers' community too.

Andrew Muir

Thanks to all contributors and those who have offered encouragement, and to Derek and Tracey Barker, Michael Gray and Clinton Heylin for specific help.

Special Thanks to Peter Vincent not only for general help and encouragement but also for bringing his proof-reading expertise to bear. Any remaining grammatical infelicities have been re-inserted by us!

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Peter Doggett is the author of *Are You Ready For The Country*. Between 1982 and 1999 he was the editor of *Record Collector* magazine.

Glen Dundas is a renowned Dylan fan and author of the much consulted *Tangled Up In Tapes* tour and recording chronicles, follows Dylan's global touring activities from his home in Thunder Bay, Ontario, at the northern end of Highway 61 and far north of 'the North Country'.

Robert Forryan is well known for his contributions to Dylan fanzines in the past decade, having appeared in *Homer, the slut*, *Dignity* and *Freewheelin'*.

John Gibbens lives in London, where he has worked as a typist, receptionist, jazz doorman and typesetter. He was deputy editor of *The Oldie* for two years, and now makes his living as a subeditor on the Street of Shame. Touched Press published his *Collected Poems* in 2000, and two CDs of his music with The Children have also appeared. More details at www.touched.co.uk

Mick Gold studied English at Sussex University, and film-making at the Royal College of Art. In the 1970s he contributed to *Let It Rock*, *Creem*, *Melody Maker*, *Street Life*, and published *Rock On The Road*, a book of photos and essays. He threw it all away to produce and direct TV documentaries, including *The Midas Touch*, *Art of the Western World*, *Watergate*, *Death of Apartheid*, *The Crimean War*, *Hostage*, and *Endgame In Ireland*.

Clinton Heylin is a shy, retiring figure yet still well known due to his extensive writings on many musical figures, including a large number of books on Bob Dylan, among them *Behind The Shades*, *The Recording Sessions* and *Day By Day*.

Nigel Hinton is much respected by Dylan fans for his writings in *The Telegraph*; he's also a novelist, children's author and has adapted his work for TV.

Gavin Martin first heard Bob Dylan on Desolation Row, aka Bangor, Co Down Northern Ireland circa 1966. He never went to college to find the cost of knowledge but has written about Dylan, interviewed Marvin Gaye, Willie Nelson and Madonna and many more besides in *NME*, *Uncut* and *The Independent*. In 1996 he was officially confirmed a Bobcat, having released into the public domain a poignant little film of Dylan arriving at Belfast International Airport. If anyone has a copy of said film he'd dearly love to see it again.

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Proposing A Toast To The King

by Gavin Martin

'I feel like Bob Dylan slept in my mouth,'

Elvis Presley in a between song aside live in Las Vegas 24th August 1969.

'Only one thing I did wrong, stayed in Mississippi a day too long,'

Bob Dylan 'Mississippi', *'Love And Theft'*, released September 11th, 2001.

Earlier this year I asked Sir Paul McCartney what he thought when he considered the perpetual live performance schedule Bob Dylan has maintained for over a decade. What would drive an extremely wealthy musician, a gentleman of a certain age, to keep up such a work rate? As ever McCartney had a ready, though perhaps too hasty, response.

'Lack of a good woman, that's the only reason for staying on the road at our age,' he told me. There may be some truth in that; perhaps the failure of his marriages to Sara Lowndes and Carolyn Dennis and the lack of a stable single-partner relationship since have provided a spur for Dylan's travels. But, seeing Dylan perform at the incandescent, endlessly inventive heights he's scaled over the three decades I've been watching him, it's hard not to conclude that, whatever the reasons behind why he's doing it, Dylan has found a deep purpose in his nightly toil.

To see Dylan in full flow - from the raging torrents of electric fury, to the calm exultant moments when the musical interplay or three-part harmonies with Larry Campbell and Charlie Sexton recall backwoods settlers or clapboard gospel house meetings - is to see a fabulous carnival of Americana unfold, cross-cutting and enveloping time itself. He has subsumed and lived through so many epochs and influences - slave songs, blues truths, the white heat of 60s electric transformation, the fascination with Sinatra-style phrasing and 30s crooning. A 60-year-old man who has survived illness, hard living, the peculiar demands of being a cult icon in the culturally saturated Ground Zero 21st century, embodying all these elements and reinvigorating them, is both fascinating and inspirational. A Dylan performance is an encounter and a reckoning with many characters and personalities; in this respect a Bob show can summon up a similar feeling to watching old Elvis live footage.

The feeling can come at any point during the show. When he carouses gleefully into something as frivolous as 'Country Pie', slams into the rangy almighty bleakness of 'Watchtower', or beseeches and implores the muse or a higher power to come forth on the sacred bluegrass stormer 'Wait For The Light To Shine', Dylan is unabashedly celebrating a tradition, the tradition of individuality, wedded to a fond regard for and acute insight into the community from which such individuality springs. It is the same tradition that Elvis embraced with magisterial sweep. It was undoubtedly restrictions imposed by Colonel Tom Parker that prevented Elvis from ever leaving America to perform

around the world, but Dylan traverses the globe with almost evangelical fervour. Eventually suffocated by a lifestyle which left him artistically impotent, Presley became a prisoner of his fame. He left the world as an icon, but his premature death deprived us of a fuller understanding of the world, and the humanity that nourished and influenced him.

Freed from outside control, the 'Dear Landlord' who would put a price on his soul, Dylan's command of his music and artistic destiny and his ability to recreate and add to his legacy by being so 'on form' in his 6th decade ensures he expands on the legacy of the onetime rock 'n' roll king. Sure, an early Dylan death, or even an end-of-the-century expiration might have suited the requirements of those sad fuckers who think over 40s/50s/60s something performers shouldn't make rock 'n' roll. Or, even worse, the empty-headed romantics who find glamour in early deaths. Those who think there's a sacred link that ensures the good - Hank, Gram, Jimi, Buddy - die young, and that in a corrupting, energy-sapping business a shock early farewell is the only way to preserve dignity. What a sadly narrow-minded and reductive view of a culture which has always celebrated life, freedom and omnipresent beauty.

Like any child of the 50s drawn to the myriad possibilities thrown up by America's musical melting pot, the young Robert Zimmerman was set free and transformed by the Memphis flash. It's such a truism now that it's easy to be blasé about the miraculous way music makes connections that would otherwise be impossible to imagine. Where else could the souls and fates of a dirt-poor son of the south and a

middle-class product of the Midwest Jewish Diaspora become so entwined? Presley accelerated the culture by introducing the cool, glamour and daring which were a life-changing rebuke to McCarthy era racist America. The qualities that came through in Elvis TV appearances and in the records beamed into distant outposts by the magic of the airwaves became a potent catalyst in Dylan's voracious intake of art, movies, literature and music.

The Elvis quote that begins this piece is delivered in an offhand, jocular fashion but it contains an almost Dadaesque truth; in the nine years that Elvis had been away from the American stage, Dylan had been the prime figure to utilise and explore the cultural space Elvis had created. Dylan's genius took many forms, but his natural grasp of alchemy - adding surrealism, folk protest, the intensified barbed verse/prose of Ginsberg and Burroughs to the arena Presley declared open for business - must rank among his greatest attributes. As a performer and writer Dylan interconnected with a whole other school of learning, enabling him to adopt a chameleon approach to his public image that Elvis must have envied.

A captive of a dispiriting formula movie production line for most of the 60s, Presley remained socially and politically remote from Dylan and the era's counterculture. The Vietnam War and The Beatles' impact on America's youth seemed to make Elvis a conservative God-fearing relic from a bygone era. But the counterculture hegemony had its own in built parsimony, shortsightedness and prejudices. As Elvis's rampant afterlife has shown, his stature as a conservative relic was sorely over-hyped.

Sure, he was a hopelessly confused drug-addled right-winger, but that shouldn't be confused with artistic death. Indeed, the idea that Las Vegas became a kind of living tomb for him is loudly and triumphantly refuted by the astonishing performances on the 4CD *Elvis Live In Las Vegas* box set released in 2001.

In the earlier performances on the box set, recorded in 1970 and 1972, Elvis connects not just with his own past (and by extension the country, blues, gospel shouters and smooth-voiced crooners that influenced him) but also bonds deeply with recent pop. The funny, irreverent and illuminating between-song raps have the charm and candour of a storytelling showman raised on travelling fairs and tent shows. In his version of 'Release Me' he tackles the song as if it was a composition that deserved to hold The Beatles 'Strawberry Fields'/'Penny Lane' single off the top of the British charts, which certainly wasn't the case when Englebert Humperdinck's sickly original did just that in the UK in March 1967. His versions of Ray Charles's 'I Got A Woman' and Del Shannon's 'Runaway' show an affiliation with his 50s peers that encompassed both love and competitiveness. And there can be no doubt that when Elvis disciple John Fogerty heard his hero sing 'Proud Mary' his heart must have nearly burst with pride.

Prior to his 1968 TV Comeback and his return to the live stage in Las Vegas Elvis had happened upon a Dylan song, 'Tomorrow Is a Long Time', on the *Odetta Sings Dylan* album. The song had not been released as a Dylan performance when Elvis recorded it in May 1966, but he completely understood its simple timeless poetry and elegant

melodic flow. The performance was one of the most meaningful and beautiful by Elvis in a period when quickly knocked-out tat was the norm. You can hear the warmth and relief in Elvis's voice as he sinks into a song that is spun from the same mastery of American folk culture, the seamless blend that exists only in music that inspired him.

Though neither the rumoured May session of 1971 or the 1972 duet on 'If Not For You' discussed in John Bauldie and Michael Gray's *All Across The Telegraph* compilation probably ever took place, the connection between Elvis and Dylan has always remained strong. In 1977 Dylan reacted badly when a man he never met but whose art had provided the basis for much of his life died. He later said that when he heard the news of Elvis's death he *'had a breakdown. If it weren't for Elvis and Hank Williams I couldn't do what I be doing what I do today.'* You can't know what it's like to be a frontier artist unless you actually are one yourself. Eric Clapton and Pete Townshend have spoken about the sense of devastation and emptiness they felt when Jimi Hendrix died. I wonder if Dylan felt something similar when Elvis went, if he heard the king singing that song *'Its your baby, you rock it'*. A cursory look at Dylan's career after Elvis died suggests someone trying to do justice to the memory and legacy of his forbear.

Elvis's death coincided with the final chapter in the very public fracture of Dylan's marriage to Sara Lowndes. Explicitly in the song 'Sara', allusively in many songs on *Blood On The Tracks* and *Desire*. With the sprawling much-derided movie *Renaldo and Clara* the relationship was laid bare with unnerving candour and, at least publicly, put to rest. It's possible to

view subsequent developments, the At Budokan album and the greatest hits tour, as Dylan's equivalent to Elvis's Las Vegas stint. Jerry Scheff from Elvis's band joined on bass, while the girl backing singers recalled Elvis's gospel muses The Sweet Inspirations. Presley had struggled to attain spiritual contentment while he was alive, a joy that can be heard most clearly in his gospel sides. Perhaps this fact was totally unconnected with Dylan's conversion to Christianity, perhaps not. Perhaps it's a measure of how completely absorbed Dylan has to be in a music and the culture that bred it (in this case sacred gospel music) to do it justice.

I first saw Dylan play live at Wembley Stadium in 1984, a sluggish muggy Saturday afternoon, the Real Live Mick Taylor band in a stadium setting. I found it so weird, unbelievable in a way, that up there was my teenage hero onstage. When I was a kid hearing Bob's 60s music in the 70s he seemed, like Elvis, Little Richard, Buddy Holly and countless others must have to him when he was growing up, like a creature from another planet. I never thought I'd get to see him, and subsequently I've come to feel blessed that I've had the chance to see Bob frequently, but, as is often the way with stadium gigs, on my first encounter Dylan seemed remote, going through the motions.

Now I rationalise the memory - like any marathon runner in it for the long haul Dylan needed to pace himself, so perhaps he was already thinking of what lay ahead. If, as Mikal Gilmore recently suggested, Dylan lacked direction for most of the 80s, then for me the equivalent of the Elvis 68 Comeback TV special took place away from the

cameras with the G.E. Smith band's appearances in London and Dublin at the end of the 80s. The 80s had been a terrible stagnant period in rock history, the only living evolving embodiment of music from the source that I had apprehended was Van Morrison's wondrous spiritual odysseys.

Van and Bob – buddies, touring partners, that's another story altogether but when I saw Bob at Dublin and Wembley something cracked open, something Van hadn't touched when I'd been seeing him. It came out of the cold metallic edge of the sound, the music's frenzied rush with Dylan sneering and cackling into the whirlwind, unleashing one apocalyptic blast after another. It was the zeal and vibrancy I'd sought but only initially found in punk, filtered through mesmeric multi-levelled songs. Songs that were on this evidence inexhaustible, always ready to offer up new treasures and rewards if treated with vigilance and respect.

From that point on Dylan live shows became an all-bets-are-off, transforming experience.

Some have complained about the ragged quality of the early 90s shows, the supposedly drunken meander of Hammersmith 1991 and his much criticised 6 night run at the same venue in 1993. I was there that is not what I heard or experienced. There was Dylan in loose limbed good natured mood, a curious and irascible old cove, somehow maintaining a mystique, an unknowability that seems to be an essential part of his armour outliving his own myth. Wherever he wandered off the beaten track he was still able at every single performance to pull something extraordinary out of the hat, cast a new and

unexpected light on one of the jewels on his own 'highway of diamonds' or do something unique and loving to a song by one of his early friends and influences, Tomorrow Night sticks out.

I've heard certain critics give forth at the bar, surrounded by a coterie of friends and maybe even (God knows do critics have such things) admirers as they joylessly pick the show apart. These scholars of Dylan have a sneering know it all attitude and a way of reading the numerous blips and diversions that are intrinsic to Bobart . These would, if adhered to, suffocate his music. Dylan is all about making new discoveries even in songs that aren't his own, songs as old and worn as Tomorrow Night where the very titles etch and explore the distance and relationship between the eternal road warrior/wandering minstrel and his audience.

Dylan, the kid who claimed to have hopped out of Hibbing all those years ago to join a carnival, has engaged in a life-long study of the mechanics of performing, and the beautiful symmetry of his art means that there are moments when the songs speak of nothing so much as his undying fidelity to the song itself. What has kept Dylan going out there, spending endless nights on the Lost Highway, if not the song? The song is the sacred ground where Dylan the performer and Dylan the fan - dig the frame of references, the unending glee that courses through his performance and it's clear Bob's as big a fan as anyone in the house at any Dylan show - comes face-to-face with his fans and influences. And of course, Dylan has not only been able to learn from the dangers of Elvis's life lived as an icon but has also been able to master his

own fate by having the song-writing talent, perhaps the greatest song-writing talent in American history, that Elvis never had.

What has kept Dylan going? The wind, the rain, gravity, many things, but partly a raging ego. It's good fortune for the world at large that Dylan remains hungry, fascinated, bowled over by his own songs, the way they can comment on and shape the world, the way they defy time and space to find new meaning and pointed relevance in each successive era. The events of history may change but these songs he's written are like mercury, always finding a new level, a way of fitting into current events and settings.

I have had some of the most remarkable and unexpected experiences of song-meaning transference at Dylan shows. To hear him play 'Maggie's Farm' in the Brighton Conference Centre, beside the hotel where ex-Premier Margaret Thatcher almost met her end in an IRA bomb blast, was a cauterising and incantatory moment. Why should this be so? I mean 'Maggie's Farm' certainly wasn't written about Thatcher, but the song is its own magical little world. Played with the zeal and urgency Dylan brought to it that night, it could mean whatever you want it to mean.

Of course with his own Russo-Judaic background and his keen awareness of the Scots, Irish and African songs and communities that feed the great river of American music, Dylan is an international performer in a way that Presley never was. He's taking his art out into all manner of places that The King never knew existed, setting up his stall of magical potions anywhere and everywhere he can. I love that image of Dylan in the Howard Sounes book where he's at a

party and Maria Muldaur asks him to dance, and he says 'I'd dance with you, Maria, but my hands are on fire.' The young Dylan as a giddy can't-keep-still manic ball of energy, the current of musical creativity running through him.

Look at a few of the places Dylan has played during the so-called Never Ending Tour. With an orchestra in Japan, on the banks of the river Mersey in Liverpool, at a sport hall in Belfast, a boxing arena in New York and a cultural centre in Prague. Take a look at the itineraries of his tours and you realise that getting out there and doing it every night, playing music and investigating the songs is for him a cleansing exercise good for mental, spiritual and physical health. But in these new contexts its also a means of exploration and discovery; who knows what possibilities or secrets the songs will offer up in the next town or at tonight's show.

There's no need for him to worry about what warped meanings, individual dramas or peculiar memories and meaning his audience take from the show. When it's over he's back on the road, *'heading for another joint'*, a new audience waiting. The latter will no doubt be peopled by ever-younger faces. (This is the unwritten demographic increasingly obvious at Dylan shows. Last time he came here and toured in 2000 'his people' regularly took younger less familiar faces from the back of the queue. A ploy rewarded with young faces suffused with joy at the end of the show, charging the venue with a mood of awe, optimism and renewal. And no wonder, name me another 60-plus-year-old performer who is so accessible in a live and in person situation, able to radiate cool and

charisma without being an embarrassment, and I'll show you Willie Nelson.)

Still, the setting and local history can do strange things to a song, or at least my interpretation of a song. Like when I saw Dylan perform over three nights at the Palace of Culture in Prague in 1995. It was said that a back problem had prevented strapping on a guitar, so every night he took the stage holding the mic with one hand, finger pointing towards the roof, singing 'Down In The Flood'. Now that song, written during the Basement sessions, relates to a non-specific scene plucked from American settler history. But in Prague it seemed to be about something else entirely.

It was a strange few days. Between shows I'd wander the city, which had only recently been tagged as 'the Seattle of Europe' on account of the ever-increasing US student population who came to stay after the fall of Communism. I happened upon a photo exhibition by Dennis Hopper, shot during the early 60s. The juxtaposition of the ancient whitewashed cellar and the monochrome images of the 60s, James Brown beaming, surrounded by bikini-clad Californian girls, was striking. But not as striking or as haunting as the old Jewish town. During the war the Jewish population of Prague was almost completely wiped out. Terrazin concentration camp is located a short drive from the city, and the sense of loss and desolation hung heavy in the air on a walk through the old graveyard or the synagogue closed by the Nazis, attacked again in 1967. And a common sight there in the antique and book shops in the collections of religious relics was the Torah. The sacred Jewish symbol, a finger pointed heavenwards? Am I reading too much into

it? Possibly, but that's how songs work for me and Dylan is the master of the song.

Why has Dylan been able to go on long past the point where Elvis gave up the ghost? It's the difference between being the director rather than the actor in the movie of your life; being a songwriter Dylan writes his own script. When he sings he can grapple with fate, destiny, politics and the price of love, sometimes all of them at once. He has dug deep into his and America's past to define the present and ponder the future, an ongoing process highlighted by the *World Gone Wrong* and *Good As I Been To You* albums, the sleeve notes he wrote for the former illustrating the righteousness of his quest perfectly. Dylan is the song scientist attuned to the levels of prophesy, intrigue and resonances that exist there.

Is there an ending? So many of his friends and collaborators (Doug Sahm, George Harrison, Jerry Garcia) have gone in recent years, but Dylan keeps on mapping out euphorias and nightmares. He can't help himself, he's a cultural avatar, a living giant who will not be held to ransom by his past, who must keep driving forward.

When I consider the phenomenal depth, velocity and sheer fecundity of Dylan's art it's easy to see rock 'n' roll as a finite culture. I mean after Elvis, after Bob, who're you gonna put up as a contender? Sure 'enjoyable acts', 'useful performers' have come along since Bob first rocked the world, but comparing many (any) of them to Dylan is like comparing the recently discovered new planet 2001 KX76 – actually little more than a boring lump of frozen rock – to the sun or the moon. Thankfully Bob's steadfast promise to stay true to his art is repeated again and again in song.

From the vow to keep on keeping on in 'Tangled Up in Blue' (a song held for so long at the same position, 5th song into the set, that it became a rallying point or staging post for whatever was to follow) to the warm wry resignation of 'Mississippi', birth state of Elvis, fount of so much American music.

And his songs, whether old like 'It's Alright Ma' or new like 'Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum' cross time to stay true to the world and remain actively engaged with it. As the comic tragedy of the Clinton presidency was played out 'Its Alright Ma' sounded like a prescient up-to-the-minute commentary, riven with horror, haunted with paranoia, coursing with new life. And to see Dylan now in his pomp, his enthusiasm is infectious, I get renewed excitement for all types of music, music he doesn't even touch – hip hop, techno, African, Latin, anything. Because the all-consuming energy and curiosity with which he approaches a performance rub off, you want to find out what more music can do to explain this world, or introduce you to new ones.

I'm the sort of dimwit who uses songs to understand the world. A song is a dead text, it only comes alive when it's inhabited by a performer. Ray Charles singing the beautiful 'I Can't Stop Loving You' is one of the most meaningful songs I know, an actualisation of long cherished truth which lies at the centre of everything from Joyce's *Ulysses to the Song of Solomon*. It is easy to hear the song as a way of addressing the nature of the uncertainty, abandonment and heartbreak that Dylan felt when Elvis died. *'I can't stop loving you/I've made up my mind/To live in memory of the lonesome times...'* Certainly,

the way Colin Escott describes Elvis keeping on his toes in Las Vegas could easily have been written about present-day Dylan. *'He recognised that he must mix it up. The show must be constantly reinvented, partly because there were returnees and partly because he needed to challenge himself and his band. He ran the gamut of American popular music; he had been listening intently to music since the mid 40s and knew 1000s of songs.'*

When he got ill just after recording *Time Out Of Mind* Dylan told reporters when he left hospital that he had thought he was going to meet Elvis. He has said that during the recording of *Time Out Of Mind* he felt the presence of Buddy Holly, one of the first performers he ever saw, looming over the album, 'guiding it in some way.' Bob Dylan the giddy skinny guy who couldn't dance with Maria Muldaur because his hands were on fire is still alive inside him. As he recently explained to Mikal Gilmore in a *Rolling Stone* interview, *'I can't really retire now because I haven't done anything yet. I want to see where this will lead me because now I can control it all.'* What keeps Dylan going? A sense of duty and honour, a patriotism to the only America worth a damn – the America of Coltrane and Burroughs, Guthrie and Charley Patton, the need to keep the past alive, to keep the past in the present. Dylan's mission, whether he sings sacred or secular, is profoundly spiritual. He knows that, as his friend and Sun Records founder Sam Phillips said when he heard Howlin' Wolf, this is *'where the soul of man never dies'*.

And in his songs what sport there is to be had, what a feeling of immortality matched to the ever-present sense of mortality. The ever-unwinding narratives full of cul de sacs,

wrong turns and offhand revelations. Songs full of snares, jarring reflections, dark alleys that stretch into the night, brilliantly illuminated clearings where you do no more and no less than confront your own soul. And always coming back to something sweet, something simple, pledging his time to you and the song. So much Bob to listen to, so little time.

Recently, I've been listening to the bootleg of his Seattle 6th October 2001 show, the second show to feature songs from *'Love And Theft'*. *'It is time for Bob to park "Masters of War" away,'* says the sleeve note. *'The notion it is the presence of weapons that cause war is obviously naive and misguided. Would Bob say the Boeing guys who designed the 757 or 767 are "Masters of War" since those planes were used in attacks?'* argues the writer. Sure 'Masters of War' was written long before the terrible events of September 11th but the song's central truths and the burning accusation contained in lines like *'You that build the death planes/You that build all the bombs'* still hold true. Wars in our time rage before and after the Twin Towers collapse; the petrochemical and military-industrial complex are still the beneficiaries, humanity still the loser. Never mind the fact that, prior to the Twin Towers going down, Bush was widely seen as one of the weakest presidents in American history, elected and financed by less than scrupulous means. Bob's inability to let the past rest is a rebuke to what Gore Vidal calls the United States of Amnesia.

There are treasures aplenty on the bootleg live album, but the song I'm playing now is *'Tonight I'll Be Staying Here With You'*. I love what he does with his voice here;

apart from reinventing himself as an electric guitar player in recent years Bob has also proved to be the most imaginative vocalist alive. His phrasing rivals Sinatra as he uses a whole bag of tricks – lacerating spite, nonchalant indifference, gruff declamations, searing firepower – to put his mood across. He delivers the lyric here in a gasping, breathless fashion, as if he were off to meet Elvis or Woody but came back, ailing but determined to reassert himself. As the band takes the melody at a slow waltz pace the line about the *'poor boy on the street'* sounds more than ever like a *'there but for the grace of God go I'* acknowledgement. But the whole tenor of the performance sounds like he's restating the promise - making explicit the obvious connection to the audience.

The song fades out with guitar solo taking the place of the words. Bob plays a cyclical riff parlayed and buffeted by the band but the riff extends, ever renewing, coming back again and again. The waltz tempo hots up but the dance continues. He can dance now, Maria, he can really move. To paraphrase another great Jewish poet, Leonard Cohen, dance on maestro. Dance us to the end of love.

This article is dedicated to John Bauldie for the warm companionship and helpful introductions to so many lovely people in Prague, 1995.

The Heylin Interview

Clinton Heylin talks to Arthur Rosato and Joel Bernstein

This is the second transcript from the additional interviews I conducted for *Behind the Shades: Take Two*, the first appearing in *ISIS* some time back. Like that interview with Larry Johnson, the following interview with Arthur Rosato (and the odd snappy aside from our mutual host and coffee-maker, Joel Bernstein) was transcribed by Derek Barker (gratias, DB). However what with all those Sounes transcripts to run in *ISIS* and the emergence of a Dylzine with a moniker I can really relate to, I decided to take the transfer fee (two pints of shandy and a packet of mignons morceaux) and give it to *Judas!* the slut. When I conducted this interview, in the sunny climes of Oakland, at chez de Joel, I had already interviewed Arthur for *The Recording Sessions* and so I dispensed with the usual tip-toeing round tut subject and got down to le nitty gritty. Needless to say, my own comments were made to goad responses and should not be considered questions intended to require direct answers per se.

Clinton Heylin: I'd like to talk about Bob on the road. Joel's contribution here is to prompt.

Arthur Rosato: To prompt, right. Will I ever work in the business again? (Laughs). There's no evil bad stuff [here], because Bob wasn't like that. It's just that the guy, the human being, is one thing, his music is another.

Joel Bernstein: Or as I would say, '*never confuse the artist with the art.*'

Clinton Heylin: Let's start at the beginning.

Arthur Rosato: The first time I saw Bob was when I was working with The Rolling Stones in '72. We were in New York at the end of the tour. We had an after show party... and Bob was there. He came in his red plaid shirt and Chip [Monck], who was a good friend of his, introduced us. I think the Stones tour had a big influence on him. That was the biggest thing going at the time. Bob's a major rock & roll fan; he loves the Stones thing, and he takes in everything. It was right after that we started working on *Planet Waves*. He came out of retirement.

Clinton Heylin: There were tour rehearsals in L.A.

Arthur Rosato: Yeah. The funniest thing was when we did pre-tour rehearsals at the Coliseum (sic) in LA. The basketball court was still down and he's trying to look like a basketball player, and he's not that tall and he's not that good. He's in his socks and he's trying to look like he knows what he's doing, but he doesn't, he's so self-conscious. I mean his whole thing is he's very self-conscious. So, he's shooting baskets, and he's wearing that sweat-shirt. I think he's had that sweat-shirt for thirty years.

Joel Bernstein: The grey one with the hood?

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, he had it on then. So he's he trying to shoot and he realises that it's a different sport. It has nothing to do with anything he's ever done. So he ends up sitting in the bleachers and watching the other guys shooting. That's when I realised Bob is human. He's a very human being. He's really no better than us. I can shoot better than him though. (laughs).

Clinton Heylin: Was Sara with him at the rehearsals?

Arthur Rosato: I can't remember. At that time it was more like an event, so we were kind of caught up in that. We were bringing in the newest technology.

Clinton Heylin: And of course Dylan hadn't played a gig in the modern rock era.

Arthur Rosato: No. Well, he did Bangladesh, but he hadn't done a tour in eight years. That was the first time he came out on tour... It was a pretty magical tour. I talked to Bob about it a few years later and ... you know being Bob, he just thought it was okay.

But on tour he was great, Bob was a real sweetheart, he always wanted to make sure everybody was taken care of... Levon was funny because he would talk in terms of, '*I can't hear it.*' So I cranked it up more and this roar surrounded him and he still couldn't hear it. Finally it dawned on me that he couldn't understand what he was hearing. So we put the volume down gave him one single speaker and he was happy. They would do 'Stage Fright,' which was a little poke at Bob.

Clinton Heylin: A poke at Bob? Robertson suffered with terrible stage fright didn't he?

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, but that was a dig at Bob. I introduced Bob to Carlos Santana

and Carlos showed Bob how to do some things and Bob said all those years he played with Robbie, he never showed [Dylan] anything. [Robbie] always turned his back [on stage], so you could never see what Robbie was playing. So Carlos was the first person to ever show him anything.

Clinton Heylin: Robbie got that whole kind of thing from Ray Buchanan, so maybe he was kind of hiding. Maybe he didn't want anyone to realise what he was doing.

Arthur Rosato: Maybe it goes back to the stage fright thing, where he didn't want to look at the audience so he kept turning his back and Bob was the other way round.

Clinton Heylin: It was because of Robertson's stage fright that they cancelled the first time they played at the Winterland. Robertson's stage fright was so bad that he couldn't go on.

Joel Bernstein: I thought that he had a fever?

Clinton Heylin: That was a myth. Robertson seemed to have a rapport with Dylan in '66, but by the end of the '74 tour, I sensed it was disappearing.

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, by the end of that tour there was a little separation, but at that time Bob was kind of figuring out what he wanted to do. Now that he's done that tour, let's get up and do something else. You see, he's not an oldies type person.

Clinton Heylin: Right, at the end of the tour it was like - now I know what I don't want to do.

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, and if you listen to him singing, he was like screaming.

Joel Bernstein: Screaming, yeah. Everybody said that at the time.

Arthur Rosato: But if you listen back it's not, but in the context of the time it was

because you were comparing it to the originals.

Clinton Heylin: So what was the next contact after the '74 tour.

Arthur Rosato: After the '74 tour, I was off in Europe with Carlos Santana and I got a call from Bob saying they were doing this Rolling Thunder thing. He didn't call it that then, he just said that they were going to do this tour and they were going to start rehearsals in New York [at SIR].

That was fun, because [at rehearsals] I was the only [technical] guy. It was just the film crew and me. I had never tuned a guitar before in my life. So, Bob hands me this guitar! Luckily we were recording at SIR. So I go in the next room and I go, 'What do I do?' and the guy goes 'Oh it's easy, this is how you tune an acoustic guitar' and then goes, 'This is an electric guitar, this is what a strobe does.' (laughs)

So I got over that and Bob would come up with these weird set lists and I'd think, 'why is he talking to me about set lists? He's got all these musicians, he's got McGuinn, he's got everybody.' But it's the weirdest group of people; there's Mick Ronson for instance. Anyway, I had 36 guitars to take care of and I changed the strings on each one of those every day.

Bob was great, he would just let you do whatever you wanted and everybody kept coming to me because they thought I was in with Bob.

Clinton Heylin: The impression I got was that musicians were like joining every day.

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, well it was like that at the very beginning. Bob was infamous for asking people to come along. 'Yeah, come on down and I'm doing this.' And if there was a group of them in the bar at the same time:

'Yeah, come on down we doing this.' Well they were all friends with each other and it did make sense for them to all come down.

So those people just happened to be in the right place at the right time and that's how the revue turned into what it was. It didn't really grow after that. The length of the sets grew. In fact at one point Bob was saying, 'I could go out for a movie.' Because he would open the show and he didn't come on again for hours, so we found him a TV. He would have a TV in his room. They were like four hour shows.

Clinton Heylin: That must have been quite a contrast to '74?

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, '74 was different. That was pretty magical on one level, this was pretty magical on another. We had no idea what we were going to do, we didn't have itineraries, we just got on the bus and where we woke up was where we were. It was like a travelling show, but the next tour, the one that Joel was on, that was a strange one. That was very strange!

Joel Bernstein: I always got the feeling that the first one was a really original and amazing concept, but '76 seemed to me to be done in the shadow of the previous tour. I mean it wasn't new for a start, and the Bob's rapport with the players was gone. I mean at rehearsals he wasn't talking to anybody.

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, I don't think I said two words to him on the whole second tour, in '76.

I don't think he really wanted to do the tour to begin with. Secondly, he didn't really want it to be called Rolling Thunder. That was Barry [Imhoff]'s thing.

Joel Bernstein: Who came up with the name in '75?

Arthur Rosato: That was Bob. He got that from the Indian Chief.

But as soon as we got to Florida you knew, this isn't it. It had a totally different vibe.

Joel Bernstein: I got the feeling that it was more uptight and less fun.

Arthur Rosato: It was way uptight.

Joel Bernstein: Do you remember those rehearsals in the ballroom, where Bob was supposed to show up at ten o'clock and he wouldn't show up, or he'd show up at like 3.30.

Arthur Rosato: Well, that was his normal mode to do that, but this was different. He was petulant, he didn't want to be there and he let everybody know it.

Joel Bernstein: But what I found amazing was that even when he was there, he wouldn't talk to the band. He would just give people these looks.

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, and he would do these funny things. McGuinn was just a total gadget freak, he's just totally into that, but he also knows Bob isn't. He's the other extreme. But he wanted to show Bob these tiny MRX effects pedals, so he ganged like three of them together and instead of running them from a code to the ground and into the guitar, he stuck them right into Bob's guitar. So there were these three pedals sticking out of his guitar going right into the amp and Rodger is frantically trying to get everything together because he knows Bob has no patience for this kind of thing - and Bob's looking down at him - and he finally says to Roger, 'Will this make me play like Buddy Guy?' Roger looks at him, yanks the whole thing out and plugs it right back into his amp and there is never a word about it again.

Clinton Heylin: But Dylan was playing lead on that tour.

Arthur Rosato: No, Bob has a tendency to crank up no matter what and we always have to keep yanking him down. You have to kinda lean over and bring him down in the mix, because his off stage volume was tremendous sometimes.

When Ronson played with McGuinn it was just phenomenal. It was a killer. It was just so powerful, it would just take your breath away. That was his role; he was a great guitar player. But with Bob, you could see him just tweaking it in and trying to find little spaces in which to play. It's just Bobs playing style he's got this scrub-board style, he just plays through everything.

Clinton Heylin: But it was much more extreme in '76 than in '75.

Arthur Rosato: In '76 he was just pissed. He was doing something he really didn't want to do. When we went down further in the south, one place he came back raving, he came back raving out of the swamp, saying he saw all these lights and UFO type things going on. I thought okay, he's getting into it, he's relating to something he experienced.

Joel Bernstein: That was when he went to see Bobby Charles. We had some spare time after Baton Rouge.

Clinton Heylin: You had a lot of time after Baton Rouge, they cancelled the next gig.

Joel Bernstein: Well, when that tour was described to me originally, it was supposed to be a Gulf Coast tour. It was supposed to start in Clearwater and end in Corpus Christi.

Arthur Rosato: But by the time we got to Fort Collins he was definitely into it. Remember down in Florida we threw Steve Martin off stage (laughs). He was sitting on one of our road cases.

Joel Bernstein: He opened one of the shows for us. I think it was Gainesville. He was this totally unknown comedian.

Arthur Rosato: That was the time they started doing the paintings. It started out as nothing, but we decided to make it a group thing, so everybody had a panel. So they had these big 4 x 8 panels and everybody would be working on them.

Joel Bernstein: Was one of them Bob's?

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, Bob had one. Everybody had one. And then there was the thing with the scarves.

Joel Bernstein: Yeah. Obviously, Bob was serious about it. When he first showed up at rehearsals he was wearing a yarmulka. It wasn't part of a look, it definitely wasn't wardrobe, it was a religious thing. It wasn't a bandana, it was a yarmulka.

Arthur Rosato: It was a personal thing he never talked about it. And then pretty soon all of the musicians were wearing them and you thought: is this out of respect for Bob's beliefs? Bob's whole thing at that time was pretty much that magical aspect.

Clinton Heylin: He was heavily into astrology and tarot at that point. I assume that came from Sara. She was there in '75 wasn't she?

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, she was there in '75, but I don't remember her so much on the next tour. She was at Fort Collins and they had the kids there. Bob told me to make sure the kids didn't get on camera. I had to keep them out of the range of the cameras.

Clinton Heylin: In '75 he was working on the film. [*Renaldo and Clara*].

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, it was wild. It was just like this travelling troupe. When we finished that tour we started editing the film. The first edit was eight hours long! (laughs) Really, it was eight hours.

It was at the same time they were doing the Last Waltz. That weekend Bob was still working on his film and asked me, *'Do you think I should go up for that?'* And I said, *'Well, you know, it's Robbie and the guys, it would be nice if you went, but I know you're in the middle of this and I know it's hard if you drop off to do that and then get back into editing again.'*

But yeah, the first edit was eight hours and then they got it down to four hours and later there was a two hour version.

Clinton Heylin: The two hour version is just meaningless.

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, I don't get it. I don't know what's going on in that. But in the four hour one I would watch the skits and then think where's the music? I can't wait to see the music. Then the music would come on and it would be brilliant, and it would hold you for a long time, 'til the next skit. Then you'd start to flag and then more music like 'Isis' would pop up. But the music was incredible, that was the thing on that tour, the music was powerful and real. Everything was real about that tour, what we were doing and how we were travelling around, playing like Plymouth Town Hall and stuff like that. I mean we had to play the big money gigs like Hertford, Connecticut just to pay for it, but the purpose for doing it was the other gigs. Bob's a major fan of history. *'Who's the person, who the person worked for, where that guitar came from, who's played that guitar before.'* He likes to know that and he doesn't like new. If you look at him now he playing through Marshall stacks and that shit, but that's his rock 'n' roll part coming out.

Clinton Heylin: But there's also that

competitive streak. You do get that impression that he thinks: why aren't I as big as The Stones?

Arthur Rosato: That whole thing with Petty, I kinda had a problem with that. He wants to be a rock 'n' roll star. He doesn't know who he is. Here is a guy and he's playing with this rock band and he thinks they are the hot thing and this is rock 'n' roll. And I say no, *'He's rock 'n' roll, they are just copying him.'* He doesn't have to dress up, or dress down like them. That has always kind of bothered me, because he doesn't know who he is in the rock pantheon.

I had a couple of arguments with him over the years. One was, he asked me to get rid of one of the crew guys and I said, *'Well why?'* And he said, *'He looks too much like a hippy'* (the guy had long hair and a beard), and I go, *'Yes, but I need him for whatever.'* And he goes, *'Yes, I know, but can you do that for me.'* I said *'Bob, I went through too much shit in the sixties for me to fire somebody because of what they look like!'* And he said, *'Yes, your right. But geeze look at him.'* So I said, *'Bob, I'll take care of it.'* So I had him hide off the side of the stage. Then just before we left for Europe Bob said, *'You gotta get somebody else.'* So I called Europe, because we were that close to leaving. Anyway, I got somebody lined up over there, and we were playing at Merriweather Post - this is 1981 - and Bob comes off the stage and says *'Okay, you keep him.'* It was a good show, you know.

The other argument was - He's laying on his bed in the studio down in Santa Monica. To begin with, I don't like people talking to me while they are laying down. He's talking about the sound company I had picked. It

was a company that Neil Diamond used. I knew his production manager and he said, *'If you want to check out his system come up to Seattle.'* So I flew up with Neil and his band in his private plane and I checked out the sound system. It was really nice. It was everything we needed for the venues that we were going to be playing. So I worked out how much it was going to cost. Anyway, Bob's laying in bed and he says, *'You just picked them because you flew up in their plane.'* I just went off and I looked down at him and said, *'Don't you ever say that!'* I said, *'I've never done anything like that, I don't give a shit about airplanes, I go out to find the best sound for you...'* and I could see him beginning to fall back further into his pillow and he said, *'Okay, okay.'*

He was testing me. He tests people to see what they will do, just to get a reaction. But we didn't play that game too often. You see I was his only guy, he had people taking care of his personal things, but on the technical side, it was just me.

Clinton Heylin: The sound was great in '78. The band weren't good, but the sound was great.

Arthur Rosato: No that was the thing.

Clinton Heylin: Earls Court is a graveyard for sound but the sound was excellent.

Arthur Rosato: Oh yeah, he was just being a brat on that one. Bob would do things like that. We were up at the Warfield and he didn't like where the grand piano was. It was on a riser, up stage left or something. He decided he didn't like it there, but he didn't know where he wanted it. I'm sitting up in the balcony with him, so I said, *'Bob where would you like it.'* And he goes, *'Err, how about over there,'* pointing to stage right.

Instead of rolling it, because it was on a riser, these guys carried it over to the other side of the stage. And he's looking at it and he goes, *'No, how about the other there?'* So they carry it over the other side and I look at him and think he's at it again, he's doing it. And I'm watching these guys carrying a grand piano around stage as though it were an accordion! So finally he says, *'No, I like it back where it was.'* But he does that; he'll do that to a lot of people. He'll say something just to see where they go with it and on many occasions people will just run out and do it. But I'll say to myself, *'Does he mean that, does he mean the opposite or is there a third thing I ain't thought of.'* So that was my role to interpret all these things.

Clinton Heylin: If you are in that position where people will do anything you want, you've got to test people.

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, but it can be painful with 16 guys carrying a grand piano around the stage!

Clinton Heylin: When you said about the Neil Diamond sound system, that was the Weintraub period? I thought he was totally into Neil's show. I thought that's what he was trying to reproduce?

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, but at what cost? I mean Bob's ears are, well, if all the sound in the world came through a transistor radio, he would be happy. So what he had us do was disconnect some of the speakers in the floor monitors and replace them with four-inch speakers! So you have this little radio sound coming out and that was his monitor. In your own home it would sound fine, but when you're on stage with all these amps you just hear hisssss. So you just end up tuning down the amp, but he'd wanted to see those little speakers. So he'd

have us tearing these thousand dollar speakers apart and have us put these little \$2 Radio Shack speakers in there! He would do that to at recording, especially in Santa Monica, at Rundown. That wasn't the official name for the place. That was another Bob thing, calling it Rundown Studio. He just threw that out one day and next it became the official thing. That was never the name, people just picked up on what Bob said. It was another Bobism, they'd hear something and they run with it.

Clinton Heylin: The song 'Shot Of Love', which was recorded at Rundown, is credited to Peacock Studios.

Arthur Rosato: Oh right, I didn't pick up on that. But he would just make up things. He asked me what Street Legal meant. He'd heard the word, but he wasn't sure what it meant. So I explained to him about cars and things like that and he was happy. We would record something and put it on cassette, and he would go sit out in his car and listen to it and then say, 'Okay, yeah, that's a take.' Or he would listen to it in the pool room [at Rundown], there was a tiny little boom box and he'd listen on that. That's the way we did it. We'd never listen to it on playback through the studio speakers.

Invariably what would happen, is we would set a noon time to start recording and Bob would show up at six. The next day he would show up at four, and as it gets closer he would get more into it. Meanwhile, the band is getting worse, in fact they don't even want to see Bob. So by the time we're done, Bob's going, 'Isn't this great?' And they all want to kill him; so that's a typical recording session. To begin with, we would do like fifteen takes of a

song, because he would be so miserable. And as he got into the sessions there would be three or four takes. And most of the time we would get down to just one take and that would be it, because that was the take. And if you go back and listen to the fifteen takes, more often than not the first or second would be the take. That's the way it always worked with Bob. I told Bob I wanted to do 'Caribbean Wind' and he drove everybody crazy on that one.

Clinton Heylin: Was he actually re-writing 'Caribbean Wind' in the studio?

Arthur Rosato: No, no. When Bob came in, he has it here (in his head).

Joel Bernstein: I don't think I've ever seen Bob refer to lyrics.

Arthur Rosato: Yeah. It's his old songs he has the problems with... We carried the books and sometimes he'd just glance at them. If he was gonna do something, he'd just glance at it real quick.

Joel Bernstein: For instance, I remember in '76, when he and Joan did 'Lilly Rosemary...' in Salt Lake City, he just wrote down the first word of each verse, 'cause it's like sixteen verses or something. All he would need was that first word as a prompt.

Clinton Heylin: He still has a problem with the order of verses today. Did you notice a significant change in his manor when he started doing Christian material?

Arthur Rosato: He started working in the studio with different people, not calling that same group of people. He had a different thought on what he wanted to do.

Clinton Heylin: I meant really his manner.

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, I know what you mean. Actually, I thought it was a little easier, like a weight had been lifted off. He

always wanted to do something different, but sometimes the momentum would carry over and force him to do stuff. But now he didn't want to be responsible for this big organisation.

Clinton Heylin: Having only previously ever heard the shows, it's interesting to watch the video of Toronto '80, and then to see him laughing. You get the impression during this period that he had lost his sense of humour, but it's obvious from the video that that isn't the case.

Arthur Rosato: That was the thing, his sense of humour kind of went away and you didn't realise it at the time. Then when he was doing the born again stuff...during that period you could see he was listening to things differently. I played 'Sultans Of Swing' for him. The first time I heard it I thought this sound like Bob! So I turned Bob onto that and after that they came in and did 'Slow Train.'

Clinton Heylin: It's interesting that he picked Pick Withers.

Arthur Rosato: Well, Bob's a big fan of back-beat. We had discussions on that too. (laughs)

Clinton Heylin: You mean disagreements?

Arthur Rosato: Yeah. On the '78 tour we went through so many drummers. Keltner came down and he was obviously perfect, but he didn't want to go out. He's such a sweet man he came down just out of courtesy. One drummer came in, a black guy, he had a really strong backbeat, but he played it on every song, the same thing. Bob loved that. I said, '*Bob he's playing the same on everything. He's not playing the song. That's not where you want to be.*'

Clinton Heylin: But of course he later went out on the road with Keltner.

Arthur Rosato: That was something Jim

could do, he felt spiritually like he wanted to do that one.

Clinton Heylin: Dylan has this tradition of using bass players as bandleaders rather than guitarists.

Joel Bernstein: I think it's interesting about having bass players as bandleaders, in the sense of them having to telegraph Bob's changes to the rest of the band.

My feeling is that there are two ways you can be in a band with Bob. You can either say, '*We know the song, we know the arrangement. We are going to go to the chorus now, are you with us Bob?*' Or the other way is the Rolling Thunder way. Where someone watches Bob's weird, quirky, idiosyncratic sense of time, (which you can hear in his own acoustic solo playing very well, but which crops up also in the band stuff), and I thought Stoner could do that. He could telegraph Bob's changes to the rest of the band instantaneously. Everybody would take their cue, not from Bob, but from Stoner. Because you could never follow Bob.

Clinton Heylin: Dylan is clearly a far better guitarist than he allows himself to be on stage, at least acoustic guitar.

Arthur Rosato: That's the weird thing about it; he's really a great acoustic guitar player.

Joel Bernstein: A great acoustic guitar player.

Arthur Rosato: ... but if you listen to his electric guitar from '65 and listen to it now, it's exactly the same. There's no improvement.

Clinton Heylin: Do you remember the gospel tour, 'Saving Grace that's Over Me,?' Dylan plays lead and he clearly worked it out in advance and it's a proper lead break.

And it's the only proper electric guitar break that I can think of. It's not just a little eight-note thing. To me it's clear that on those shows he was focused on the idea, he had to get the thing across.

Arthur Rosato: [to Joel] Did you ever see him pick up an electric guitar and practice something?

Joel Bernstein: No. You would see him often with a writing guitar. He would have that acoustic guitar with him all the time. It wasn't one of the stage guitars. You had the sense that he was playing that a lot, but I never saw him with an electric guitar.

Arthur Rosato: No, the only time he would work out what the lead was, was when that break came around (laughs), that's when he would work it out.

Joel Bernstein: Sometimes he has ideas and if he could just place his fingers in the right spot to get the idea out he'd be fine, but he often just misses the fret. He will go to the eight fret when he should be on the seventh, and the whole figure is one fret off and it sounds horrific. It's a very odd thing.

Arthur Rosato: Sometimes he would pick up the wrong harp and he would go with it. If he played the wrong key it didn't matter.

Joel Bernstein: We started putting big stickers on the harps. Arthur started that. I have some from '78.

Arthur Rosato: Any band that plays with Bob sounds like Bob. No matter who it is or how long you've been playing, when you play with Bob, you sound like Bob.

Clinton Heylin: He went from a completely gospel show to playing a lot of his old hits. Did you get a sense of why that was?

Arthur Rosato: He wants to play what he wants to play. He doesn't want to be a performer on command. So when we were

doing the gospel thing he didn't want to be distracted by performing a show. He really wanted the audience to listen. That was the main thing. He figured the audience needed to listen.

Clinton Heylin: But six months later...

Arthur Rosato: Well you know he was getting yelled at the whole time. And it's a year later and he's still doing the same show. He was softening a bit. Also, at the Warfield shows he would have these famous musicians sitting in and they would want to play on something they knew... So that's when those songs kinda snook in, and he saw that it wasn't so bad. He could play those songs now and it wasn't that evil thing.

Clinton Heylin: There were some nice arrangements of some of the old material at that point.

Arthur Rosato: Yeah. He wants to make you understand what he's talking about. He wants you to listen. That's why he doesn't do lyrics sheets and stuff like that. He always was one for, '*If they can't hear it on the record then why should I put it on a lyric sheet.*' That's what he used to say.

... Even in rehearsal when he's singing a song, whether it's an old song or whatever, he's singing it with as much conviction as when he wrote it... Bob's as serious as you can get as an artist.

Clinton Heylin: What about the whole stage fright thing? He certainly didn't have a drink before the Gospel shows. He was forcing himself to do those shows and to be completely clear headed when he did them. Every night he's going up on stage and he's having to force himself physically. That must have been hard trying to force this down someone's throat?

Arthur Rosato: No, because with Bob it's

... 'You will listen, I'm taking control of this stage.' Even if he's doing 'Mr. Tambourine Man,' he's thinking about the version... he's in control, 'I'm playing this song for you now and your gonna listen.' He was real strong about that.

Clinton Heylin: So when the Rundown thing came to an end... Howard's death obviously shook up Dylan? (Howard Alk was found dead at Rundown Studios having apparently taken his own life).

Arthur Rosato: I think that was the major reason we stopped. The last conversation I had with Bob during that period, he said he was gonna close the studio down and he wasn't gonna go out on the road 'til 1984. I mean he knew back then that he wasn't going to go back out until '84.

We were all looking at each other and we just didn't want to be in that place anymore. Like I said, Bob's really into history and that's not a piece of history he wanted to be around. We had worked that place, we made into what it was. It came to a point where it had become something else. It wasn't what it started out to be. Even before Howard's death Bob was trying to make [Rundown] into a commercial venture by renting it out. He said, '*We have all this gear, so why not let somebody come in and they can record here?*'

Clinton Heylin: Were they working on a film of Dylan's life or something when Howard died?

Arthur Rosato: No, but we had been shooting every night on that tour (1981).

Clinton Heylin: Renaldo and Clara style?

Arthur Rosato: No. It was less involved. We were doing skits, but Bob would write them after the fact, or he would just give someone some lines to say. There was this one French

guy, I can't remember his name [Roland Grivelle]. I think he became Bob in the film. We were shooting him a lot and then when we got back to Santa Monica with all this footage (16mm film shot on one camera) and we started editing and we said, "What are we trying to say? What is the movie?" We had no idea because there wasn't any movie; there were just all these parts and we put it together and then the holidays came up.

I know that Bob was pulling the plug on the project. I think he was doing it more or less as favour to Howard. Bob wasn't really interested; it was a home movie...

Clinton Heylin: He'd known Howard for twenty years at that point.

Arthur Rosato: He'd know him forever, but I think he was trying to let Howard go. I think Howard came on the tour as a favour. He was a still photographer, then he wound up doing a film. I think we were all on that tour for the same reason. I told Bob I didn't want to do that tour and he said, '*Oaky, you can play drums.*'

Clinton Heylin: That was a very odd tour, because although they were large places it wasn't an American tour. By which I mean he didn't cover America. It was about twenty-five shows and he missed a lot of places.

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, we were up in Milwaukee. That's where we started. The hotel we stayed in had a front desk that was in a big iron cage. It was one of those kind of places. You see Bob likes those hotels. No air conditioning and a place with lots of history. So we go there and Drummond checks out and goes some place else. (laughs) But yeah, that tour was strange and we didn't want to be on that tour. He kinda made reasons for us to be out there.

Clinton Heylin: So staying at the funky hotels was part of it?

Arthur Rosato: Yeah, Yeah. Bob's always been like that. One of the things he needs is to have a room with windows that open. I mean there's nothing odd about this stuff.

When we got back to Santa Monica we had no idea what we had. We had notes and pages of scripts that we had to type up. We started editing, but Bob wasn't really involved in it. Nobody got that involved and when the holidays came I went home. I heard Bob wasn't going to go on with it. He was doing it as a favour to Howard, because he loved Howard, but I think he was pulling the plug on it and I think between Howard's personal family problems and stuff and living alone in this studio. Anyway, I came back down again and talked to Bob, Bob was great, he's a real sympathetic human being, but he realised that it was an end of an era...

So we all packed up and said goodbye, and I went off and became Springsteen's video director. I called Bob at his house and

he wasn't home, but about an hour later he called back, just checking in to see how I'm doing. So he was concerned. He's had so many people around him all these years they kinda come and go, and I would like to think that I was more of a friend than that.

Clinton Heylin: Have you ever been asked to go back?

Arthur Rosato: No, not by him, not that I know of. With Bob I had done everything I could possibly have done. That's why I was leaving [after] that tour.

He's got different people around him now and different management and they insulate him so much. Everybody thinks they look after Bob's best interests, but Bob knows who his best interests are. Too many people are not protecting him they are protecting themselves. I don't like to play that game.

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Sounding Like A Hillbilly: 'Moonshiner'

by Robert Forryan

*I've been a moonshiner
For seventeen long years.
I've spent all my money
On whisky and beer.
I go to some hollow
And set up my still,
An' if whisky don't kill me
Then I don't know what will.*

*I go to some bar room,
And drink with my friends,
Where the women can't follow
And see what I spend.
God bless them pretty women
I wish they was mine,
Their breath is as sweet as
The dew on the vine.*

*Let me eat when I'm hungry
Let me drink when I'm dry,
Dollars when I'm hard up
Religion when I die.
The whole world's a bottle
And life's but a dram,
When the bottle gets empty
It sure ain't worth a damn.*

'The most exquisite version possible of the traditional song known as, among other things, "Moonshiner": a version in which he so fully inhabits the persona of the Old Derelict narrator (the grace-kissed soul as well as the voice of the man) that it is eerie...'

Michael Gray, *Song & Dance Man III*

'What's extraordinary about this recording of "Moonshiner" is how Dylan summons up the strength of characterisation to cram decades of experience, disillusion and resignation into his voice, while his subtle guitar and understated harmonica work perfectly to support the edge-of-the-grave moonshiner's vocals. It's ironic that this recording was made when some traditionalists were complaining that the 22-year-old Dylan couldn't even sing properly (remember the jibe of the coffeehouse owner recounted in "Talkin' New York": "come back some other day – you sound like a hill-billy. We want folk singers here").'

John Bauldie, *The Bootleg Series* booklet.

The thoughts which follow come about as a result of e-mail correspondence between myself and Andrew Muir in which we had both expressed admiration for the performance of 'Moonshiner' which appears on *The Bootleg Series* set. It was then that I decided that I wanted to write about the song, though I had no idea what I wanted to say. It is easy to like a Dylan performance (easier than hating one), much harder to say anything of interest about it. For there are few things as dull as a eulogy. So much Dylan writing, and I do not exempt myself from this criticism, drifts into endless adjectives, similes and metaphors leading nowhere. The only point of writing for a magazine is to communicate – and to communicate you must have something to say which, in turn, means having thoughts to convey. So often it seems that adjectives, similes and metaphors become excuses not to think. They are so often meaningless. What I

mean is that I come not to praise 'Moonshiner' but to talk about it and to see what happens.

This is always referred to as a traditional song, so we don't know how or where this song originated, or if it was once the creation of one individual. I'm not convinced that it meets the Woody Guthrie criterion: *'You can't write a good song about a whore house unless you've been in one'*. I'm not sure I agree with Guthrie's unimaginative views and I doubt that the author of 'Moonshiner' ever distilled moonshine. Whether he or she ever did or did not, I can well understand why this song reached out to the coffeehouse generation on the cusp of the Sixties. Moonshining was foreign to their experience, as foreign as Woody's dustbowl ballads and talking blues. But there was something about the old, mythic America that appealed to that generation; my generation. We had been brought up on Western films and TV cowboy series.

We bought into the concept of rugged authenticity and its natural superiority to sophisticated urban culture (even though the latter was our inevitable destination).

We learned our liberal values and our sympathy for the outsider from so many Westerns where the lone stranger stood up for truth and justice against the baying mob. I am convinced that the Hippie movement owed some of its attraction to the fact that it echoed our assumptions about Native American Indian culture. For those movies had taught us to admire the 'noble savage' and to believe that his values were superior to those of our parents. In Westerns the bad guys were the bigots. You never heard the hero say: *'The only good injun is a dead injun'*. So, as we slid into late adolescence, the authenticity and ethnicity of folk music represented a natural home. And songs that spun tales of early, rural America or that evolved out of an oral culture were simply irresistible, if they were good songs. They still are.

All of which explains why 'Moonshiner' endured. It appears to have been performed and recorded by many artists and is known under other titles, among them 'Moonshiner Blues' and 'The Bottle Song'. It often features on albums of folk material, being a particular favourite among those who compile collections of Irish drinking songs. The Clancy Brothers have recorded it as 'Moonshiner Blues' and their upbeat, party-style presentation - so different from Dylan's - is a typical performance of this song. Dylan's is the only slow version I have heard and it struck me as odd that Dylan could make something so beautiful out of this subject. What could possibly be attractive about a derelict,

drunken moonshiner? As Debbie Sims wrote in Issue 4 of *Homer, the slut*: *'For "moonshiner" read alcoholic because, although romantically put and sweetly sung, this is a song about a man whose whole life has been dominated by drinking and being drunk'*.

As I typed those words, I realised I knew little about moonshining, so I did some investigating. I knew that moonshine was some kind of illegally distilled whisky, but that was about all. I know more now. Moonshine can be traced to Ulster immigrants who settled in the Appalachian mountains in the eighteenth century. They brought their own poteen-making methods with them, which evolved into moonshining. They were Protestants with a historical attachment to William of Orange. Hence they were known as King Billy's men which, eventually, metamorphosed into Hillbillies - reflecting their political affiliations and their Appalachian homes.

In his book *Almost Heaven: Travels Through The Backwoods of America*, Martin Fletcher seeks out moonshiners in Rabun County, Georgia, *'the last real stronghold of moonshining in America'*. He meets a law officer whose father and grandfather were both moonshiners. *'There weren't no other jobs back then. Had it not been for moonshining we would have starved. That's what bought shoes for our feet.'*

Fletcher goes on: *'There was something distinctly comic about moonshining in Rabun County, Georgia. Everyone knew which families made moonshine... where they got their supplies and which welding shops made their stills. The moonshiners*

were mean but they were characters... when caught in the act, moonshiners considered themselves honour-bound to try to scarper through the woods even though most were now old men and often inebriated by their own product'.

Moonshining goes on in the hills because they need to be near streams so that the stills can receive the cold running water they require. *'The supplies and equipment are considerable. You need 800 pounds of sugar plus corn, yeast, malt and water to make 1,000 gallons of "mash". You need several large wooden or plastic barrels in which to ferment the 'mash' and turn it into "beer". You need the still itself – a copper or steel tank big enough to hold all the 'beer'. You need bricks or breeze blocks to line a furnace beneath the still, 100-pound propane cylinders to boil the alcohol from the 'beer', car radiators in which to condense the steam and containers for the ensuing 100 gallons or so of moonshine' – which is generally 95% proof.*

Fletcher describes moonshiners as *'an endangered species'*. Moonshiners were making moonshine long before it was illegal. In 1794 farmers in Western Pennsylvania rioted at news of a proposed tax on whisky. *'There was something almost romantic about these old rogues, and America would be a less colourful place without them'.*

The first version of 'Moonshiner' I ever heard was by Bob Dylan on the *Gaslight Tape* from October 1962. In my early days of tape collecting names like the *Gaslight* and the *Finjan Club* and the *Minneapolis Hotel* simply dripped with nostalgia for the

years of the Folk Revival. One imagines that this was not a one-off performance, but that it was a song Dylan had learned and that he carried with him as a usable item – a song to be pulled out when needed or when he was sufficiently interested.

The real subject of this essay is the outstanding 'official' recording of 12 August 1963 which appears on *The Bootleg Series*. As John Bauldie said, maybe there is a mystery attached to why it was recorded just then, since Dylan was clearly focussed on producing albums of original material. Nevertheless, he achieves an immaculate performance in what seems to have been a single 'take'. This suggests he was very familiar with the song by this time. There is a story about the Japanese artist, Hokusai: it is said that he painted a lion every day in the hope of one day painting the perfect lion. I like to imagine that Dylan had been striving to perform the perfect 'Moonshiner' and, having done so on 12 August 1963, he felt no need to ever perform the song again. In my dreams.

There are, inevitably, differences between this later version and the Gaslight recording. Most obviously, on the earlier live recording there is no harmonica. Also, the first verse is reprised at the end, making four verses in all. And the second and third lines of the third verse become:

*'Moonshine when I'm dry,
Greenbacks when I'm hard up...'*

In terms of the actual performance, the guitar work from the gaslight sounds less accomplished, the voice deeper. There is less stretching of vowels and emphasis is placed on different words, which is hardly

surprising. It's as if he's still wearing the song in, like a new pair of shoes that are too tight-fitting. Everyone says of *The Bootleg Series* recording of 'Moonshiner' that Dylan sounds as old as the moonshiner himself. Andrew Muir once said he sounded as '*aged as the oldest cask whisky*'. I think this is true, and I love the performance, but if you listen carefully I think you will find that the voice truly ages towards the end of the first verse when it breaks on the words '*don't kill me*'. Until then he's still a young man.

The language of 'Moonshiner' intrigues me. I wonder exactly how old the song is and how much these lyrics are traditional and whether they have been adapted by Dylan at all? One somehow doubts that the lyricist ever was a moonshiner – there is something too poetic and too self-reflectively modern about the words for that to be believable. The sly character of the old man is cleverly drawn. Moonshining being illegal he necessarily practises the art of deceit. This aspect of his nature is doubly alluded to in that the still is hidden in a hollow, and by the fact that he chooses to drink where :

*'The women can't follow
And see what I spend...'*

Women? Surely he means wife? Don't men habitually try to hide their pleasure-spending from their women, be it on alcohol, books, CDs or football? Or does this line allude to a further deceit of an adulterous or bigamous nature? The following lines:

*'God bless the pretty women
I wish they were mine...'*

seem to indicate that faithfulness is not on his agenda. In fact, it seems that there is no area of life in which this moonshiner is to be trusted.

The lines that I always lovingly return to when I'm away from the CD player and playing the song in my mind are these:

*'Their breath is as sweet
As the dew on the vine...'*

I think that a woman's breath is not the feminine quality that would most appeal to the average male nose (how many people really have sweet breath anyway?). Debbie Sims contrasts the breath of the women with that of the moonshiner and suggests that the contrast is a part of their attraction to him. But surely, it is the scent of a woman that is more alluring than her breath? And what is truly attractive about dew is not its smell (does it have a smell?) but its visual beauty as, say, it is caught and tinted by the sun, or its gentle dampness – and dew, that foggy, foggy dew, has long held a sexual connotation in folk music. But in this performance breath is sweet, for, as John Bauldie pointed out, these are what Dylan himself called '*exercises in tonal breath control*'. Listen to the way he extends the 'a' in that first line, or 'all my' in the third line. The way Dylan uses his breath here is as sweet as... it's just sublime. Even more sublime than the lovely 'Copper Kettle' in which he revisited the moonshining theme in 1970.

In the end, it's the performance that matters. He doesn't sound like a hillbilly, this is a folk singer we hear.

LIFE & LIFE ONLY: DYLAN MAKES 61

by Mick Gold

He's been recording for forty years, forty-three albums, never-ending tours. There's something Shakespearean about the complexity of his work; so many points of view expressed so vividly, but where is the author's voice? His intensely moral outlook is sung in so many frameworks: the stripped-down verities of folk-blues; the self-righteousness of 'Masters of War'; the visionary ache of 'Chimes of Freedom' and 'Lay Down Your Weary Tune'; the lysergic surrealism of 'Like a Rolling Stone' and 'Ballad of a Thin Man'; the exhausted amphetamine metaphysics of 'Visions of Johanna' and 'Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands'.

The contrasts continue with the bleak parables of *John Wesley Harding*, set in a landscape constructed from black & white Westerns and Israelite watchtowers; the corniness of *Nashville Skyline*, wallowing in simple sentiments as unselfconsciously as a hog in shit; the picaresque confessional tone of *Blood On The Tracks*; the sensual Semitic muse of *Desire*; the brooding menace of *Slow Train Coming*, devoid of doubt or forgiveness; the dreamy terminal ramblings of *Time Out Of Mind*. This baroque edifice is continually subverted by a cracked laugh: 'The love of my fans? John Lennon was shot by a fan who loved him.'

In suburban Wembley I was 16 when my sister showed me a feature in the *Evening Standard* about Bob Dylan's forthcoming concert at the Festival Hall (17 May 1964). I liked the photo. *Freewheelin'* had just entered the album charts. I bought it, dear reader, I bought a commitment that lasted my life-time. I was amazed by the poetry, politics, wit and musical exuberance. The deadpan sarcasm of 'Oxford Town' – '*Two men died 'neath the Mississippi moon. Somebody better investigate soon.*' The deluge of imagery on 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall', which was balanced by the simplicity of 'Girl from the North Country'.

And then there was 'Blowin' in the Wind'. I had somehow picked up the cliché that it was a 'Civil Rights anthem'. But the more I listened to it, the less I heard Civil Rights. Instead I heard a series of oddly allusive images: doves, cannon balls, mountains washed to the sea, like a series of broken Biblical dreams. And the 'answer' the song seemed to provide to the many questions it raised – war, racism, the individual at odds with society – was utterly ambiguous; either the answer was so obvious it was right in your face, or the answer was as intangible as the wind.

After the romantic colour image of Dylan and Suze Rotolo on *Freewheelin'*, the black & white cover of *The Times They Are A-Changin'* looked gaunt and haunted. By this time I had seen *Mother Courage* on TV, and realised that 'Only a Pawn in Their Game' could be called Brechtian – an insight into social mechanisms, songs about injustice that represented southern racists as another form of victim.

'North Country Blues' was even more impressive: the way in which Dylan's rasping voice took on the role of a miner's wife looking back on her life, '*the cardboard filled windows and old men on the benches*' conveyed a sense of economic decline and small-town emptiness in two concise images. '*It's much cheaper down in the South American towns, where the miners work almost for nothing*' conveyed the forces of global capitalism and the decline of the American working class in a few words. It was so simple, it was breathtaking.

Another Side Of Bob Dylan threw me sideways. Dylan yammering away, one long complex song after another without any respite, or musical variety. It sounded oddly naked, Dylan without any musical clothes. He had dozens of images and ideas, but hadn't found a musical language for them. He'd worn out the musical idioms of folk-blues but found nothing to replace them.

'To Ramona' was both generous and lyrical, it sounded like the way I would like to address a girl friend, if I ever got a girl friend. (By now I was 17, and seriously worried by lack of sexual progress.) 'All I Really Want to Do' was weirdly egalitarian. Through strange yodelling sounds borrowed from Jimmie Rodgers, Dylan conveyed a sense that sexual politics were A-Changin'. 'Chimes of Freedom' was a staggering downpour of images, a pantheistic account of imprisonment and release – '*Tolling for the aching ones whose wounds cannot be nursed, for the countless, confused, accused, misused, strung-out ones an' worse, an' for every hung-up person in the whole wide universe, an' we gazed upon the chimes of freedom flashing*'.

There was a sense of humanity in these lines that went beyond broad left politics, that embraced both neurotic students and vagrants sleeping on park benches, a community of the alienated. 'Ballad in Plain D' was awful. It was Dylan's attack on Suze Rotolo's sister who had thrown him out of her apartment, and whom he blamed for destroying his relationship. It was so mean-spirited, so self-justifying in such a pompous way. It was a surprise to realise that Dylan could fail on such a scale – maybe he was human after all. Dissatisfied, I drifted off listening to this self-pitying dirge.

Bringing It All Back Home was electric shock treatment. The speed-babble of 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' was as menacing and as incomprehensible as The Rolling Stones. I couldn't make out the words but '*twenty years of schoolin' and they put you on the day shift*' came across loud and clear. The moral certainty of CND and Civil Rights had been replaced by: '*i accept chaos. i am not sure whether it accepts me*'.

In the outside world something had been lost but, inside, even more had been gained. 'Mr. Tambourine Man' was a major work of art. An intoxicating tune, images of energy and exhaustion which never went anywhere but which never stood still. '*Take me disappearing through the smoke rings of my mind*', Kerouac's life on the road had somehow disappeared inside the skull.

Even more compelling (to my ears) was 'It's Alright, Ma'. It was endless, it was seven and a half minutes long, it turned the self-pity that marred 'Ballad in Plain D' into a black joke – I'm Only Bleeding. '*Flesh-*

coloured Christs that glow in the dark... money doesn't talk, it swears. Obscenity – who really cares?' It was the soundtrack of a nightmare that you could still remember when you woke up. 'It's alright ma, it's life and life only' suggested that this verbal vomit was also a survival kit. Dylan would... we all would survive this madness.

On the radio I started to hear this strange song. It was a cascade of organ chords with Dylan shouting, '*How does it feel? How does it feel?*' over and over again. I scanned every inch of *Melody Maker* and the music press, I learned that Dylan had made a six minute single but CBS were not sure that '*it would be right for Britain or the European market*'. They had no plans to release it. Obsessed, I was glued to the radio for hours on end with my finger on the record button of a primitive tape recorder. Occasionally I succeeded in capturing a few seconds of distorted sound. '*How does it feel? How does it feel?*' Dylan kept shouting. I wasn't sure if he was sneering at some loser in free-fall, or if he wanted us to share his exhilaration.

Fresh gossip about Dylan's lethal personality suggested it was the former, but even as his voice got nastier, the music became more seductive, more apocalyptic. The distinction between gangsters and statesmen was breaking down. The song was trying to tell me something important, but I couldn't make out the words! In a music shop in Charing Cross Road I found a copy of the sheet music. Napoleon in rags and the language that he used? I eyed the down-and-outs in the alleys of Soho. Of course! When you've got nothing, you've got nothing to lose.

I finally understood! You're invisible now, you got no secrets to conceal. There was something exultant in his voice as he denounced this rich kid. In some Zen-like moment of illumination I realised that Dylan's voice was sweeping us all over the edge. As if he was hurling himself into the abyss between success and failure. To lose your illusions was both frightening and liberating.

CBS managed to release the single. The album that followed was even more extraordinary. 'Ballad of a Thin Man' fused a gothic organ to jagged horror movie piano chords. It was quite electrifying, *'Something is happening here and you don't know what it is... (sotto voce)..do you?'* The song implied Dylan had seen through the phoney values of our academic system: *'You've been with the professors and they've all liked your looks, with great lawyers you have discussed lepers and crooks'*. It was so insidiously non-specific, done with a sneer and a gorgeous backing band. *'You're very well read, it's well known.'*

1966. Dylan toured England with a bunch of rock musicians. People paid money to boo. I went to university. For the first time I was confronted by earnest students with acoustic guitars who accused Dylan of 'selling out' folk music. I was puzzled – whom had he betrayed? Had Muddy Waters 'betrayed' the cotton pickers of Mississippi by going electric? Within a year, these students were forming bands and thumping out electric versions of 'With God On Our Side'.

Blonde On Blonde? I knew that Kasimir Malevich had painted White On White. Was this the Hollywood version?

Suprematism meets Jean Harlow? Someone said the initials spelt Bob. The cover photo looked blurred to me. Didn't anyone else notice? Was Bob losing his focus? In those days record shops had small booths at the back where you could sample the album of your choice. This one cost 50 shillings, an unprecedented sum. I went into a booth and heard this weird sound. The first song seemed to be recorded by a stoned Salvation Army band. Then it was a blues band who'd gone mad, all the precision and elegance of *Highway 61* had been replaced by a blues band having a nervous breakdown.

I stumbled out of the booth disorientated and didn't buy it. For days that weird sound stayed with me, I couldn't get it out of my head. Finally I had to buy the record, there was something insanely memorable about this sound. It took a long time to get used to these songs. They were complex yet abstract. *'Little boy lost, he takes himself so seriously'* – could that be Dylan? Or some put-down of his 'rival', Donovan? Could it be Dylan sneering at me and the rest of his hung-up audience? Eventually it seemed to resolve itself. There were grand themes of scorn and loss, of transience and eternity, of possessive relationships interspersed with emotional chaos. There were strange mood swings where time would accelerate, or slow to a tenth of its normal speed.

American society metamorphosed into a thuggish comic strip – *'The senator came down here, showing ev'ryone his gun, handing out free tickets to the wedding of his son'*. Acid? Hash? Speed? Heroin? People seriously debated which drug had inspired which song. But no drug could explain

those exquisite moments that connected the mundane to the sublime – ‘*We sit here stranded, though we’re all doin’ our best to deny it.*’ It wasn’t as immediately accessible as *Highway 61*, but eventually I had to acknowledge that the genius had done it again. Where could he go next?

Over the handlebars. The details were sketchy but *Melody Maker* reported his motorcycle wheel had locked, he’d flown through the air and fractured a vertebra. He would need a long time to recuperate. Everybody listened to *Sgt. Pepper* with its grandiose vision of society as a huge Lonely Hearts Club, with George Martin’s amazing production, those kaleidoscopic sounds and orchestral climaxes. Everybody must get stoned.

I had a girl friend at last. In winter she wore a coat that made her look like Suze Rotolo on the cover of *Freewheelin’*. I was smoking a lot of dope but still getting good grades, maybe everything would be alright. Dylan had been silent for a year and a half since his crash – an eternity in an era when the Beatles released a new album every six months. Rumours proliferated that he was paralysed, he was a vegetable, he was on a drug cure.

An underground newspaper reprinted an account by New York reporter Mike Iachetta who stumbled through the undergrowth in Woodstock to confront Dylan with these stories. ‘*They’re all true!*’ replied Dylan with a grin. Fragments of what purported to be new Dylan songs appeared in *International Times*. They resembled brain-damaged nursery rhymes – ‘*well you can tell ev’rybody down in ol’ Frisco, tell ‘em Tiny Montgomery says hello*’. Photos

appeared of Dylan with a bunch of musicians playing at a memorial concert for Woody Guthrie. They all had moustaches, and wore baggy 1930s suits. Strange.

In January 1968, snow covered The Lanes of Brighton when *John Wesley Harding* appeared in the record shops, sporting a grey photo of Dylan on the front with three weird-looking men. It looked like the graduation photo from a mental institution. The back cover was also grey, and carried a story by Dylan about three kings who were trying to get into Mr Dylan’s new record. They consult an oracle called Frank.

‘*And just how far would you like to go in?*’ asks Frank. ‘*Not too far but just far enough so’s we can say that we’ve been there,*’ said the first chief. This parable seemed to be Dylan’s snide enquiry to me and the other foot soldiers in the army of critics, journalists and freelance Dylan interpreters. Just how far did we want to go?

The music had a grey, monochrome quality. A band devoid of electricity or psychedelic flourishes. Dylan’s voice was clipped, shorn of extravagant metaphors. ‘*All Along the Watchtower*’ was two and a half minutes long but suggested an epic sense of civilisations faltering and falling. The understatement made it more ominous. A friend produced a Bible and pointed to chapter 21 of the Book of Isaiah and convinced us the two horsemen are bringing the message that ‘*Babylon is fallen, is fallen, and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.*’

It felt like a winter album, set in some bleak frontier town: part Old West, part Old Testament, where characters from a B movie of the soul – a joker, a thief, a drifter,

a landlord, a hobo, an immigrant – suffer the consequences of their actions. *‘There must be some way out of here...’* but the only exit the album suggested was in the last two songs – an exit into domesticity, into something safe and warm.

In April 1968 Martin Luther King was shot dead. In June it was Bobby Kennedy’s turn. Stoned and confused, we turned on the radio and John Peel began to play ‘It Takes a Lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry’. Even though this song had been recorded nearly three years earlier, it sounded insanely topical. *‘Well if I die on top of the hill, and if I don’t make it, you know my baby will.’*

Was it Martin Luther King who died on top of the hill, after seeing the Promised Land? Was Dylan singing about the orphaned ideals of Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King? At the end of the track, Peel started reading aloud the sleeve notes of Highway 61 Revisited. *‘We are singing today of the WIPE-OUT GANG. The WIPE-OUT GANG buys, owns and operates the Insanity Factory.’* Peel went on talking in a paranoid way: *‘It looks like the wipe-out gang have finally got here...’*

Things were getting weirder, but Dylan was getting more mellow. Walt Disney died and *Nashville Skyline* had a colour photo of Dylan smiling contentedly. Had someone switched their brains? The music seemed both stately and simple-minded. *‘If there’s a poor boy on the street, then let him have my seat, ‘cause tonight I’ll be staying here with you.’* Dylan was telling us he’d settled down. The scruffy Huck Finn character on the cover of his first album was now depicted as another person.

One of Dylan’s accomplishments had been the radical re-invention of himself on each new album. Now *Self Portrait* accomplished the dissolution of Bob Dylan’s ego. To call his album *Self Portrait* and then fill it with corny versions of other people’s hits was to use the Middle of the Road as his most radical stylistic move. There was even a recording of ‘Like a Rolling Stone’ from the Isle of Wight where you could hear Dylan forget the words of his own greatest song. *‘What is this shit?’* asked Greil Marcus in *Rolling Stone*.

I got a guilty thrill from *Self Portrait* because I found some of the music gorgeous. ‘Early Morning Rain’, ‘Let It Be Me’ gave me goose pimples, as if Dylan had a higher purpose; he was teaching us not to be afraid of our emotions. He was embracing vulgarity and sentimentality as part of life. Maybe he was acknowledging that the terminal ‘cool’ of the mid 60s was a kind of death trip. *‘i know there’re some people terrified of the bomb. but there are other people terrified t be seen carrying a modern screen magazine’* he had written on the back of *Bringing It All Back Home*.

He successfully dissolved the myth of Dylan – the avatar, the prophet, the spokesman of his generation. *New Morning* sounded like a bored married man trying to do an honest day’s work in the studio. The one quality Dylan had never previously lacked was conviction. *‘Have a bunch of kids who call me “Pa”, that must be what it’s all about.’* There was a slight crack in his voice as he sang the word ‘must’. Was he trying to convince us or himself? Perhaps he was suggesting that being a family man with kids was as illusory an achievement as

being the spokesman of his generation.

It was hard to relate these songs to the snapshot on the back of the album – a 20-year-old Dylan in a recording studio with Victoria Spivey. *'I is another'*. In 'Day of the Locusts', Dylan sang an account of picking up an honorary degree at Princeton University, and he reached for that old apocalyptic imagery with almost palpable desperation. *'The man standin' next to me, his head was exploding, well, I was prayin' the pieces wouldn't fall on me.'* *'We've got Dylan back,'* wrote a relieved Ralph Gleason in *Rolling Stone*. By this stage I no longer knew who Dylan was, so how could we ever get him back?

I thought of Auden's obituary for Sigmund Freud: *'To us he is no longer a person/Now but a whole climate of opinion.'* But that gave Dylan a coherence he had eschewed, made him the cornerstone of an ideology when his 'message' simply seemed to boil down to *'Stay free from petty jealousies, live by no man's code'*. He was living in New York with his wife and five children. A lunatic called A.J. Weberman went through his garbage at night, and published the results to prove that Dylan was a millionaire, Dylan was a junkie, Dylan had purchased extensive stock options in the military-industrial complex. We could no longer identify with Dylan. Increasingly, A J Weberman seemed to resemble every obsessive fan hunting the real Bob Dylan.

I began to understand that what started as a journey of discovery had turned into a labyrinth. Dylan was six years older than me, so I had thought of him as some mythical older brother reporting back on how he saw the world, and his frame of mind. But

he had done his work so fast and so radically that he had sketched out not a path but a universe, where every point of view contained its own opposite. From the stoned relativism of *Highway 61 Revisited* to the moral denunciation of 'Masters of War'. From the free-floating hallucinations of 'Mr. Tambourine Man' to the shit-eating grin of 'Country Pie'. From the limousine paranoia of 'Ballad of a Thin Man' to the abandoned landscape of 'North Country Blues'. He had become his own cosmos.

The artistic maelstrom Dylan packed into those eight years would never be equalled. As Duchamp said of the early years of Surrealism, *'It was the youth of the entire world.'* In 1971 Bowie made a plea to Dylan on Hunky Dory: *'Give us back our unity, Give us back our family, You're every nation's refugee, Don't leave us with their sanity.'* But the man himself had vanished, photographed like a ghost at Mariposa Folk Festival, gone to Durango with Sam Peckinpah.

Then after years of seclusion, raising children (and waiting for his contract with Albert Grossman to expire), he decided it was time to carry his goods to the marketplace again. *Planet Waves* arrived wearing Rimbaud-like sleeve notes: *'Wild! Drinking the blood of Innocent people, Innocent Lambs! The Wretched of the Earth, My brothers of the flood, Cities of the flesh – Milwaukee, Ann Arbour, Chicago, Bismarck, South Dakota, Duluth!'* This was the sound of Dylan mustering his courage for his biggest tour, 39 shows in 21 cities in six weeks.

When Dylan hit the road, President

Nixon was holed up in the White House devoting all his time and energy to stopping the US Senate from getting their hands on the White House tapes – Nixon’s recordings of himself instructing his Chief of Staff to obstruct the FBI’s investigation of the Watergate break-in. Dylan and The Band rattled round America giving solid, uninspired versions of their greatest hits. But in ‘It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)’ Dylan sang night after night that *‘even the president of the United States sometimes must have to stand naked’*. It was as if the song had been written for that moment.

The cry of *‘We’ve got Dylan back!’* gained new fervour after the genius of *Blood On The Tracks*. I’d finally split up with my girl friend after many anguished separations followed by reconciliation, forgiveness followed by recrimination. Miraculously, *Blood On The Tracks* seemed to view love through a prism, constantly revealing new insights and new perspectives.

‘Tangled Up in Blue’ captured the paradox of relationships perfectly. Tangled Up was involvement, Blue was loss. The two are inseparable. Relationships always involve surrendering part of your own ego, part of your freedom, to connect with another. ‘Tangled Up in Blue’ was a picaresque narrative that never ended. The singer and his lover are falling in love, falling out, falling all over the place, lost to each other in time and space, yet constantly meeting up again. The last verse seems to lead straight back to the first. It is a relationship that can never be resolved, but can never be broken off either.

‘You’re Gonna Make Me Lonesome

When You Go’ wove intoxicating images of *‘Flowers on the hillside, bloomin’ crazy, crickets talkin’ back and forth in rhyme’* together with a sense of the loss that all relationships leave in their wake. *‘But I’ll see you in the sky above, in the tall grass, in the ones I love, yer gonna make me lonesome when you go’*. Commitment was inseparable from pain. *‘Like your smile and your fingertips, like the way that you move your hips, I like the cool way you look at me, everything about you is bringing me misery’*.

‘Idiot Wind’ switched from generosity to contempt. *‘You’re an idiot babe, it’s a wonder that you still know how to breathe.’* But the perspective had changed from an emotional close-up to a telephoto shot of the whole nation – from the Grand Coulee Dam to the Capitol. The Idiot Wind was more than one man casting a hex, it was the press, it was Watergate, it was the daytime TV show of modern America.

Dylan’s album seemed to revolve around the breakdown of his marriage, but he was energized. He summoned up a sense of the community that folk music had once embodied, and went on the road with Roger McGuinn, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Elliott, Joan Baez, and David Bowie’s lead guitarist to celebrate America’s Bicentennial. This Bohemian gypsy poetic community was playing Bohemian gypsy songs. Scarlet Rivera’s violin (‘Scarlet O’Hara’ as Dylan enthusiastically introduced her on stage) lay at the heart of the music.

Sinuous Semitic melodic lines lay at the heart of his album *Desire*, Dylan’s voice lifting *‘in Hebraic cantillation never before heard in US song, ancient blood singing’* as

Allen Ginsberg described the sound in his sleeve notes. 'One More Cup of Coffee' seemed to be addressing the daughter of a gypsy king. '*His voice it trembles as he calls out for another plate of food*' summoned up a society that was precarious, patriarchal but with an erotic heart.

Desire was a key term for the Surrealists as they plotted to transform the world by unleashing their dreams. In Freudian terms, the pleasure principle triumphed over the reality principle. (When the Surrealists published their map of the world in 1936, Easter Island became the biggest country, while the United States vanished completely.) One problem in opening your heart up solely to Desire was that by the mid 1970s it branded you as sexist, not sexy – a distinction that both Dylan and Spinal Tap struggled to come to terms with. It was impossible to decide whether he was being ironic when he asked his latest conquest: '*Can you cook and sew, make flowers grow, do you understand my pain?*' in his ballad 'Is Your Love In Vain?', on *Desire's* follow-up *Street-Legal*.

The Rolling Thunder Tour wasn't just a bicentennial knees-up, or an attempt to spring Rubin Carter from jail. It was also an improvisational psychodrama filmed by Dylan and Howard Alk in an attempt to stage the American equivalent of *Shoot the Pianist* or *Les Enfants du Paradis*. Not surprisingly, the music in *Renaldo and Clara* was great but '*all the women ended up playing whores*' – to quote Joan Baez. Ronnie Hawkins played Bob Dylan, David Blue played a pinball machine and talked about those good ol' days back in the Village, while Bob Dylan played Renaldo,

whoever he was. The film reached an embarrassing climax in a scene where Joan Baez and Sara Dylan wrestled over Dylan's skinny torso while he consumed a bottle of brandy.

His wife left him. Newspapers ridiculed his avant-garde home movie. He got religion. The first time I heard *Slow Train Coming* I had this prickling sensation at the back of my neck. Mark Knopfler's insidious guitar lines and Dylan's fire and brimstone vision felt totally convincing. '*I don't care about economy, I don't care about astronomy*' – Dylan seemed to be rejecting both Marxism and astrology as ways of making sense of the world.

Liking the record posed problems for a Jewish atheist like me. Nick Cave came up with a brilliant interpretation by suggesting that *Slow Train Coming* was the first record that did justice to the sheer nastiness of Christianity. This may have been true, but also the album wasn't a break with Dylan's past. 'Like a Rolling Stone' was a moment of moral denunciation. 'When the Ship Comes In' and 'Blowin' in the Wind' were written in the language of Biblical parables. Also, there was a sense of inevitability that after blues and country music Dylan would wholeheartedly embrace the third great steam of American traditional songs – Gospel.

Just like Elvis, his real religion was the music. But there was a glint of racial malice in Dylan's account of '*all that foreign oil controlling American soil*'. Who were the guilty men? '*Sheikhs walkin' around like kings, wearing fancy jewels and nose rings, deciding America's future from Amsterdam and to Paris*'. His language was oddly remi-

niscent of neo-Nazi tirades about World Jewish Conspiracies. By the beginning of Reagan's and Thatcher's decade, the bizarre ego-games of *Renaldo and Clara* and the fundamentalist nastiness of *Saved* had thrown old fans like me off the trail. The scent had gone cold. '*The ghost too was more than one person*' – as he had pointed out in *Tarantula*.

The 1980s were bad for Bob. Bad movies. Bad haircuts. Bad records... and yet, there were still moments of power that wormed their way into my unconscious to join Mr Jones, the Idiot Wind, the exhausted north country miners, the whole ghastly crew. 'Every Grain of Sand' perfectly encapsulated a Blakean vision of everyday events being blessed, of holding infinity in the palm of your hand and eternity in an hour. Still more haunting was the spectre of Blind Willie McTell, the dead bluesman who was invoked to bear witness against the air-conditioned nightmares of modern America.

Through a sequence of sounds and smells and images – magnolia blooming, rebel yells, plantations burning, the ghosts of slavery ships – Dylan constructed his most sublime vision of American history. He seemed to suggest that the agony of slavery, and the dignity of the blues that it spawned, morally dwarfed contemporary America. But this masterpiece was left off of the album *Infidels* in favour of a clunky Zionist dirge ('Neighborhood Bully') with the strange excuse that he '*didn't think he recorded it right*'. His genius might be intact, but all sense of quality control had gone.

And then he was on the road again – as if, from 1988, he was re-incarnated as a

travelling musical salesman in the spirit of James Brown or B.B. King: one hundred and twenty shows a year, the hardest working metaphysician in showbiz. '*...don't be bewildered by the Never Ending Tour chatter. there was a never-ending tour, but it ended*' – he wrote in the sleevenotes of *World Gone Wrong*. On that album, he recorded an old ballad, 'Delia', and conjured up an almost magical sense of loss from the recurring chorus of '*All the friends I ever had are gone*'. It was the same chilling mix of hope and emptiness that I had first heard on *Freewheelin'*.

In February 1990, I saw Dylan at Hammersmith Odeon. He was brilliant. With guitarist G.E. Smith he had a sound that was supple, yet powerful. By the end of the show, his voice was disintegrating; but through intonation, through sheer will-power he could still inflect the world in a vocal phrase. I saw him again in the same venue a year later, and he was awful. A broken voice snarling out broken lines tangled up in phlegm. Everything was broken. I gazed in disbelief at the audience's adulation – an army of sad middle-aged men cheering in the darkness.

What strange sect had I joined? Were we doomed to keep trying to believe in Bob, because if we gave up, we would somehow cease to believe in our own lives, in our own struggles and our own dreams? '*When they came for Him in the garden, did they know?*' sang Bob over and over again. The song was so awful that I was hoping they would come and get him, and put him out of his misery. Had I become Judas?

Late Shakespeare, late Beethoven, late Dylan? *Time Out Of Mind's* terminal

ramblings seemed to bubble up out of the swamp of Daniel Lanois's echo-laden production. A fatalistic far-away feel permeated the album, from the opening words *'I'm walking through streets that are dead'* – to the 17 minute Alzheimer-bound story-telling of 'Highlands'. A tale without any beginning or end or point, escaping from close encounters with avenging feminist waitresses, sustained only by simple-minded clichés; *'Well my heart's in the Highlands, gentle and fair.'*

I found it touchingly remote. A narrative driven by a Charley Patton guitar riff but without any destination – except for those illusory Highlands. On 'Not Dark Yet', he recorded his most moving meditation on death. *'Shadows are falling and I've been here all day'*. A wonderful sense of transience and stillness in the words and the quietly repetitive piano chords.

'Work while the day lasts, because the night of death cometh when no man can work.' In interviews, Dylan claimed he had read those words in the Psalms, or somewhere in the Bible, but he was never able to pin down the quotation. (In fact, it appears to be not from the Bible at all, but from the writings of Ellen G. White (1827-1915), the 'prophetess' of the Seventh Day Adventist church. Ed.) When critics wrote that *Time Out Of Mind* was Dylan writing his own epitaph, he responded: *'It doesn't deal with my mortality. It maybe just deals with mortality in general. It's the one thing that we all have in common, isn't it?'*

By the autumn of 2000 I was a family man with two daughters. One of them was 17 – the same age as me when I fell in love with Dylan's bitter-sweet voice.

Unfortunately every time I tried to share with her the beauty of Bob Dylan's music, she left the room denouncing the sound of *'an old man groaning like an adenoidal donkey'*. I went back to Wembley (the suburb I'd grown up in) to see the great man still at work. I thought he was wonderful, though his voice walked a tightrope between *'sand and glue'* (David Bowie's description in 1971) and *'a mucoidal otherworldly husk'* (Alex Petridis's description in 2001).

He and his band tore into the opening number, 'Duncan And Brady', with self-deprecating grins as they over-emphasised the chorus: *'He been on the job too-oo lo-o-o-ong!'* He hammed up the old-time sentiments of 'Searching For A Soldier's Grave' with total conviction. He sang his first song – 'Song to Woody' – and he sang his last – 'Things Have Changed' – and somehow they seemed like different bits of one song. When he did 'It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)', I realised that the president of the United States who sometimes had to stand naked was no longer Tricky Dicky holed up inside the White House. It was Bill Clinton eyeing Monica Lewinski's thong.

Columbia Records announced a new Dylan album would be released on 11th September 2001 – *'Love And Theft'*. Those three words filled me with foreboding. The old goat was still at it. All those love songs, all those women. Dylan appeared to cram his commitment to monogamy into seven or eight years (from the crash in 1966 to hitting the road again with The Band in 1974). Since then, he had been busy looking for love.

Nevertheless, on that fatal Tuesday, I felt compelled to visit the local Virgin store. As I left clutching my disc, I heard a radio announcing that the twin towers of the World Trade Centre had just collapsed. I started listening: *'High water risin', risin' night and day, all the gold and silver are being stolen away... high water everywhere.'* Listening to Mr Dylan's new album while watching silent images of suicide bombers blowing up the economic and military might of America, I felt like I was listening to a river of American music: hip-grinding R&B, banjos, jazz, Charley Patton. It felt like discovering a jukebox buried in a field some time between 1928 and 1958.

Dylan's attempts to become a crooner at the age of 60 sounded embarrassing to my ears, but several songs delivered the conviction and the grace I associated with his best work. 'Mississippi' was another glorious account of weariness and renewal, of being trapped and breaking free. 'Honest With Me' sounded like an old codger happy to take his leave of the modern world. And 'High Water (for Charley Patton)' was appropriately apocalyptic. On the silent TV screen, the dust and rubble

from the World Trade Centre was falling like snow over 4,000 bodies in Lower Manhattan. Out on Highway 5, Biblical fundamentalists were hunting for Charles Darwin. *"Judge says to the High Sheriff, I want him dead or alive. Either one, I don't care."* *High water everywhere.'* A few days after the destruction of the World Trade Centre, President George W Bush used the phrase 'dead or alive' in connection with the US getting their hands on Osama bin Laden. Old-fashioned gun law meets the new moral order.

Dylan still re-invents Bob Dylan every night. I think his voice has gone, but in a sense he was an old man when he started. *'I don't carry myself yet the way that Big Joe Williams, Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly and Lightrnin' Hopkins have carried themselves. I hope to be able to someday, but they're older people.'* he told us on the back of *Freewheelin'*. There's a Joycean inclusiveness to Dylan's many musical styles and political and spiritual constructs. Beyond the mystery and the mythology, he's still saying Yes to America, and the universe. It's life & life only.



Early Impressions

I love this album. The kitchen sink is there - the whole gamut of human emotions; and he hasn't revealed this richness of himself since the mid '70s. All the other albums since then have been narrower in scope, more single-minded, often charmlessly earnest, less capacious. They haven't had the warmth and joy and silliness and observed detail of everyday life and capacity for wonder that he reveals here. He's re-discovered that you can be complex: serious and comic, cynical and loving, despairing and hopeful all at the same time. And, as we've noticed in the past, this new mood was somewhat prefigured in the last song of the previous album: 'Highlands'. He was unable to change places with all the young women and men but he's discovered that there is another kind of pleasure and reconciliation to be found in his sixtieth year.

I said I love the album and I want to point out that this includes the jokes. The cornier the better. They are part of what makes the album feel the 'warmest' since *Blood On The Tracks/Desire*. I like the person who made these songs on *'Love And Theft'* more than the person who made all the records since the mid-'70s. There is, in addition to all the other tones and themes and seriousness, an approachability, a warmth, a sense of fun that is nice to be around. The silly jokes are so self-consciously silly. He's like an old grandfather cracking corny jokes to the kids who groan and laugh simultaneously. It makes the no-more-serious *Time Out Of Mind* sound like the work of a monotonous old grouch, for instance. It makes the no-more-spiritually-concerned religious songs of the '70/'80s sound like the ravings of Ehud Barak.

It's also wonderful to have some new aphorisms to match the quality of those 'from the '60s' masterpieces. I remember it back then, it was like having a living prophet (though of humanistic tendencies). All these years later he is still presenting us with suitable maxims as we struggle through this 'jolly' world of treachery and lies. *'Every minute of existence seems like a dirty trick'* but *'I've got nothing but affection for all those who've sailed with me'*. I find lines popping in to my head as I go through my everyday life: turn on the radio or TV and *'Things're breaking up out there...'*, climb the stairs too fast and I'm forced to face the fact that *'I'm short on gas, my motor's startin' to stall'*.

A Few Weeks Later

I said that I loved the album immediately. I spent the next couple of weeks trying to keep my enthusiasm within bounds, telling myself not to rush in to babbling out some over the top statement that I would come to regret. But deep inside myself I couldn't suppress my real feeling, which was growing stronger with each play - that I was loving the album more than I had loved anything since the mid 70s. All the other albums which I had defended and over praised during those 25 years - *Infidels*, *Oh Mercy*, *under the red sky*, *Time Out Of Mind* - I could at last admit as being essentially minor works. Of course, much better than almost anything else in anyone else's canon, but side by side with Bob's truly towering masterpieces they were inferior and I'd been fooling myself every time I'd pretended that they weren't.

Along comes *'Love And Theft'*, though, and it's obvious to me. No excuses needed, no indulgence required for a fading talent:

this is the real thing again - an unquestionable masterpiece to rank with his greatest work. And how can I be so sure? Because it is so unexpected, so groundbreaking, so varied, so surprising, so daring. It makes my jaw fall open with the newness of it, just like the masterpieces of the '60s did when he redefined everything. *Infidels*, *Empire Burlesque*, *Oh Mercy*, *Time Out Of Mind* all now seem like expected, almost predictable, pieces of Bob Dylan work - going over well-known terrain, hammering away at old themes, using familiar styles of language and music - most of them using the authorial tone of voice that we had become used to with Dylan. Some of it even feeling a bit like standard 'Rock' repertoire material. *'Love And Theft'* astonishes with its invention, with its quantum leap elsewhere. And how does he do this with (a) a worn out, limited voice (but which he uses with such intelligence and grace and wit that it becomes a transcendent instrument which imbues lines which, on paper look weakish, with genuine power and beauty so that they become, sung, at least as great as any line of great poetry, read) and (b) a rag-bag of lines and phrases and familiar genres? It's a miracle. He is a genius still.

A Continuing Delight

I love it more and more and think that it stands with the very, very best he's ever done. What I particularly like about it is that it is an album which is what it is rather than being about what it is; it distils the emotion or thought and becomes it rather than talks about it.

'Love And Theft' is about the experience of being a sixty year old Bob, without ever talking about the experience of being a 60 year old Bob. It is how he sees the world,

how he feels the world. In the same way as his works of genius from the mid-'60s were about the chaos he saw round him, and actually were works of chaos - jangling and mad, filled with tumbling, crumbling words and images of craziness, this album is about the experience of being what he is now. He doesn't talk about what it's like to be an old guy with grandchildren to whom you say silly things to make them laugh, he is the old guy saying silly things to make us laugh.

There's a marvellous example in 'Summer Days'. The summer days and summer nights of his life might be gone, people might think he's a worn-out star but he knows a place where it's still going on - the music he's playing. And when he enjoins us to lift up our glasses and sing, he really is, through this wonderful reconstruction of Sun-tinged rockabilly, proposing a toast to the King. The medium is the message, The message is the medium. Extraordinary art. And the only truly appropriate way of talking about it would be to make a similarly wonderful record about 'Love And Theft' in the style of 'Love And Theft', in the same way as he has made a wonderful record about the power and joy of rockabilly by its own terms.

Or in 'Sugar Baby', how the structure of the melody joined to the structure of the lyrics and his phrasing means that there are unexpected breaks in the delivery, moments where it is of necessity speeded up, moments where it is of necessity slowed down, leaving phrases temporarily incomplete - so that the experience of listening to it becomes one of experiencing fracture and fragility, vulnerability and tenderness, rather than having him simply make it the subject of the song.

In 'Bye and Bye' he actually is singing love's praises with sugar coated rhyme.

And while I'm at it, isn't the 'Lonesome Day Blues' verse about remembering his mother, just wonderful? And so true about how these moments happen. You're in your car/truck, about forty miles from the mill. You drop it in to overdrive, turn on the radio and - out of nowhere and for no perceptible reason - comes a sudden feeling of longing and that it would be just great to see your dead mother again and tell her about all the things that have happened since she's gone. I was driving in my car yesterday when this verse came on and it made me miss my mother so much. So powerful is his evocation of such a moment, he evoked such a moment in me.

And what about the wind whispering verse, where in the repeated line he suddenly drops in the additional 'something' (half-heard) like the something he half heard when the wind was whispering? Oh so simple and so perfect. He doesn't just describe it, he makes it happen to the listener, too.

To think that he could do something so new and surprising after all these years is heartening. It makes all those sort of standard rock records he's made since the mid-'80s (even including *Oh Mercy* and *Time Out Of Mind*) now look so obvious, almost pedestrian. With 'Love And Theft' he's truly broken the boundaries again. I have to say it is in my top three and that there are certain moments on it that seem to me among the best things he's ever done.

On The Road Again

by Glen Dundas

2001's last show was in Boston on November 24th. It was my 200th Bob Dylan concert, something that I tell very few of my friends at home about, but nevertheless an occasion that prompted congratulatory handshakes from many in the entourage that had followed the tour's last half dozen shows as it wound its way from Philadelphia up through the northeast coast of the United States. Peter Vincent, an old friend from England whom I had first encountered over a Manchester dinner 12 years previously, coincidentally attended his 200th Bob show that night as well, and celebratory refreshments flowed afterwards, the tone of the evening no doubt heightened by the knowledge that it was all over, for everyone, for one more season of touring. The late-night gathering in someone's hotel room included at least four people who had seen even more shows than Peter and I had, and was consequently well rehearsed on this theme.

Because that's become the principal reason why I still do it: the pre- and post-concert camaraderie, the travel, the stories, the friendships, etc. Dylan has become, over the years, the excuse for being there, not the 'raison d'être' anymore. Where Bob has visited, the people I know went as well, and so I did too. Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Fineman said it better than I can: *'It's the spirit of doing things, not the reason for doing them that is life'*.

It has become increasingly difficult to utilize that excuse, however, and get out on the road for these past several years. The last major set of concerts that Madge and I undertook was in 1995 (if one ignores the British trek in 2000, for which the opportunity to explore the sights from the Isle of Skye through Portsmouth was the principal rationale). Dylan's performance has generally improved during that period, but any collector will tell you that it is difficult to be very excited over most of that period's set lists.

So when I heard that Dylan was recording last May, optimism took over, and I calculated that a new release could be effected by September, and a tour with the new songs engaged undertaken over the next two months. We planned our vacations that way, so we could hit the road for 10 days each in October and November, taking in our biggest batch of shows in several years, with the concerts themselves the main attraction.

But not before one last fling with the old songs. Dylan's summer shows in the Midwest kicked off with a state fair appearance in Des Moines, Iowa on August 10th, a Friday, and since that was one of the few

shows of 2001 within reasonable driving distance (20 hours round trip), and because my good friend Ken Keiran lives there and would also attend, and because Josh Nelson had proposed flying into Minneapolis from New York and would therefore share four hours of otherwise lonesome travel with me, I decided to go. Seems like a lot of non-Dylan reasoning involved there, but I guess that accurately reflects my state of mind.

This was one of the very few times I've sat in the audience and wondered why in the name of hell I'm doing this. Somewhat typically for a tour opener, Dylan was going through the motions (maybe he wonders why in the hell he's starting another round of this incessant touring), the sound system sucked, the set list (except for 'I Threw It All Away') was typically mundane, and I couldn't help but wonder how the people at the far reaches of the grandstand (across the racing track from the stage) could possibly see Dylan at all.

The next day I spent with Ken and his family, and that rescued the weekend by some, but the long drive back home on Sunday left me with doubts on the advisability of spending that much time and money on something that just maybe had lost its flavour. Josh attended the two subsequent shows and reported that both were much better in all respects, but lingering doubts remained.

An early copy of *'Love And Theft'* thankfully arrived here before the tickets went on sale. Despite the many accolades collected by *Time Out Of Mind*, I've not been particularly enamoured with it. Couple of great songs, much of the

remainder improved upon in live performance, but not something I go back to very often. I loved this new CD from the first playing, however, and played it constantly for the 2-3 weeks preceding September 11th (ironically, the official release date), when other matters of the world consumed us all. But it was with increased anticipation that I returned to the Midwest, along with Madge, in late September.

From the tour's very beginning, Dylan had woven in much of the new material. Four songs each the first two nights in Washington State, then five for the two Oregon shows confirmed Dylan's interest in the new album.

(From Oregon, too, came the wire services' story of Dylan, because of the added security now enforced at many venues, being denied admission to the theatre because the guard there didn't recognize him. The stories painted a picture of a spiteful Dylan then demanding the guard's dismissal. The tale seemed apocryphal, and I later talked with someone who witnessed the incident and who described a playful Bob, who joked through the entire seven seconds it took for the scene to unfold. The security person, a female, had just then been stationed at the entrance, and as Dylan did not have a backstage pass, she tried to block his passage. When asked if a nearby roadie could identify him, he smiled, saying *'No, but my drummer could'*. Simply moving on, he then remarked that the guard would probably *'do a good job at the front door searching people'*.)

St. Paul was first for us. Most venues offered general admission, standing on the floor, and this daunted me considerably.

I'm short, so gaining a decent vantage point is always a problem, and I have little patience with talkers and screamers, so I am easily distracted on the floor. This first venue was the only one where I was so relegated (because of the lack of decent reserved seats), and it was pretty much a disaster. Two people simultaneously fainted beside us and cries of 'Doctor, Doctor' pretty well ruined 'Summer Days'.

The area's general pandemonium severely lessened my enjoyment of three of the other *'Love And Theft'* songs as well. Strangely, 'Sugar Baby' was the one song that shone through. I say 'strangely' because that's my least favourite of the new selections played that evening, and because it demands the attention of the audience to be appreciated. For the song's seven-minute duration, however, that's exactly what happened, and the crowd's silence was repeated in virtually every show thereafter – somewhat magically for a song virtually unknown to the rabble-rousers down front.

Two nights later 'Mississippi' made its first of what turned out to be (for me) six performances, and made the Chicago show worthwhile by itself. It's a great Dylan song, and there wasn't an unsatisfying execution among the six.

'High Water', a great enough song on *'Love And Theft'*, had seemed to me to offer promise to be even better live, and it did not disappoint at any show. The opening notes of Larry Campbell's banjo kicked off what promised to be a rollicking five minutes, and that promise was fulfilled each and every night.

A couple of my close friends find

'Summer Days' to be the most annoying track on the release, one comparing it to Brian Setzer's brand of big-band rock. The dominating bass-riff reeks of old-time boogie-woogie, of course, very similar to what Bill Haley was doing back in the mid-fifties. It's less noticeable live, more pure rock 'n' roll, which Dylan used to fire things each night after the acoustic set.

Milwaukee on Sunday night was memorable for two reasons. 'Lonesome Day Blues' is a personal '*Love And Theft*' favourite and it was the fifth song that night. Dylan's coarse vocals meld perfectly with the song's blues riffing, and he marched through it enthusiastically most every night. We also had seats that were comfortable – first row on the side, about a third of the way back, just a foot or so above ground level – and where the sound system seemed to perform very well.

Sitting beside me were two ladies who leaned back, put their feet up on the boards in front, obviously loved the show and, best of all, never uttered a peep all evening. Appreciating their appreciation, I offered to send them a CD of the concert as a souvenir, as soon as I received a copy, if they would confirm their interest by writing to me. One did write, and the joy at the recording's receipt that she later expressed by e-mail encouraged me to repeat the gesture at future concerts. Whenever I was allowed to remain undisturbed throughout a show by a neighbour's politeness, they were rewarded, and both of us added a new friendship.

'Cry A While' made its first appearance for us in Green Bay. The song's varied tempo and thinly veiled vindictiveness,

with accompanying humour, make this another of the new album's best offerings, no less so in concert. With so-so reserved seats, a friend's offer to share space at the stage barrier was too good to refuse. I'm not sufficiently rewarded by a front row view to stand in line for hours beforehand, but it is worthwhile to see a concert every year or so from that vantage point.

I could see, from up close, how easy these shows seem to be for Dylan. A hundred shows, year after year, take away the nerves, so it must be more of a problem for him to overcome the boredom. Dancing maniacs and pretty girls in front help somewhat, I'd guess, but a new batch of great songs must also alleviate the repetitious nature of his occupation. He's very workmanlike, with the new quickly blending in to form what is now a very professional stage show. I'm unsure how much I like that aspect, sometimes longing for some of the olden days' slipshod spontaneity, but the bigger and more middle-of-the-road audiences surely appreciate it. Seeing 15-20,000 people on their feet cheering has to be extremely satisfying for the man, after some 25 years of lukewarm reviews and lessened idolatry.

At Madison, a reprise of 'Mississippi', bolstered by 'Visions', 'This World Can't Stand Long' and my second listen to a live 'Moonlight' couldn't save the night for me. First a pretty young screamer (the pretty ones are always the worst – no one ever tells the pretty ones to shut up), then four old friends who were so impressed with themselves, meeting up at a Bob Dylan show, that they talked about it (loudly) all evening.

We missed the next three weeks, picking up the tour in Philadelphia, where Dylan did what appeared to be a practice run-through of the concert he was scheduled to give two nights later in New York City. Very similar set list, very different (and indifferent) performance, maybe the worst of the fall shows that I saw.

As expected, Dylan was up for *The City*, and *The City*, in the wake of September 11th, was ready for him. Nothing unusual in the set list, except for the anticipated 'Tom Thumb's Blues', but the renditions of both the new and old songs manifested the spirit the recovering citizenry both needed and wanted. Dylan spoke a few words, a rare event in 2001, noting that the vast majority of the songs played that night, including those from *'Love And Theft'*, were either written or recorded in New York.

Tiny Uncasville gave Dylan, in the wake of the tour's venue highlight, a chance to break from the established routine. He didn't do any of the new selections until well into the set ('Cry a While'), and did only four all night. Throwing in some of the more rarely heard songs of the fall, including a lovely 'I Threw It All Away', it seemed as though he was regrouping for the final three concerts of 2001.

Instead he seemed to go to sleep, as Manchester, NH rivalled Philadelphia for humdrum honours. But after the Thanksgiving Day break the energy rebounded again in Portland, Maine. He roared through the evening, and it was becoming more evident how well the *'Love And Theft'* offerings blended with the old and the not-so-old. My position in the

Civic Arena was quite similar to where we sat in Milwaukee, except that we stood. We leaned on the hockey boards, slightly elevated for an enhanced view, and with the boards' width giving a buffer between us and fans standing on the opposite side.

Three were immediately in front of us, and I noticed that they were very attentive, as were another couple beside me who, to my great pleasure, refused to let by any of the seemingly hundreds of people who tried to walk in front of us. I repeated my offer of souvenir CDs to both groups, and I later chatted by telephone with them. They were new to Dylan concerts and all were overwhelmed by what they had seen. Curiosity had brought them out, albeit with middling expectations, but the professionalism and energy of the show had clearly won Dylan new fans, although I'm sure that the *'Love And Theft'* songs impressed them no more than the others.

Boston's performance was a fitting enough finale to the tour, and also an acceptable 200th, although unremarkable in performance or song choice. All in all, the 10 songs from this latest collection that I saw Dylan perform ('I missed "Po' Boy"') surmounted the hassles and costs of the touring, making personal attendance worthwhile again. But things have changed, as for the first time since I began this nonsense back in 1989 I prefer the album cuts to the stage show, and still play them regularly on my car's stereo, in preference to the usual concert CDs.



Bow Down to Her on Sunday

by John Gibbens

Among the reviews of *The Nightingale's Code*, my 'poetic study' published by Touched Press in October last year, one common note was sounded. Whether the reviewer was appreciative (Paula Radice in *Freewheelin'*), dubious (Jim Gillan in *Isis*) or dismissive (Nigel Williamson in *Uncut*), the same point got picked on by each of them to demonstrate my occasionally – some said, and some said chronically – wayward thinking. This egregious fallacy was my suggestion that 'To Ramona', in its title, refers to the Tarot, and in particular to two cards, the High Priestess and the Wheel of Fortune. I'll restate my case in a moment. Here is how Paula Radice responded to it:

'I can accept... Gibbens's view that the cycle of the first seven albums (up to the "cycle" accident!) turns around a midpoint of "To Ramona" on Another Side Of Bob Dylan... Where Gibbens loses me is then putting forward, as part of the justification for this thesis, that the first part of the title – To Ra – means Tora, the Tarot, and the Latin rota or "wheel", and that these were deliberate inferences on Dylan's part. It just seems unnecessary, indeed counter-productive...'

And this was Nigel Williamson's view:

'... if you didn't see the significance in the fact that the first four letters of the title "To Ramona" spell TORA, which is the word on the scroll held by the High Priestess in the Tarot pack, then your appreciation of Dylan is superficial indeed. You're probably the sort of person who doesn't even appreciate that his early lyrics are characterised by the use of the metrical foot known as the anaapest. [sic]'

This is mere misrepresentation. I do not imply – certainly not in the section under discussion here, and I hope nowhere else – that someone’s listening which is not informed by the circumstances or connections I fetch to a song, whether from far or near, is therefore shallow or wrong or inadequate. If I propose a thought you had not already had, or convey some fact you didn’t know, am I thereby calling you ignorant? No: though not being able to copy the correct spelling of a word – like ‘anapæst’, say – from a book you are reviewing could be considered ignorant.

Never mind. For now, I’m interested in why this ‘To Ra’ idea of mine caught the flak. But first let me explain it a bit more. My argument seems not to have been clear in



the book, since none of the three reviews I’ve mentioned restated quite what I thought I had proposed. I’m not suggesting that Dylan juggled the four letters TORA to get Tarot and also ‘rota’, the Latin wheel, or that he would ever expect anyone to follow such a leap if he had made it.

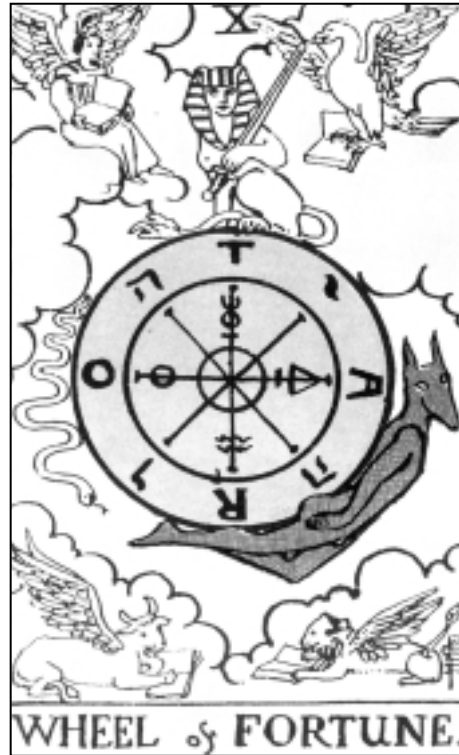
The letters appear like this, ‘TORA’, on the High Priestess card, and they also appear at the four cardinal points around the Wheel of Fortune, as T–A–R–O, just as N, E, S, W appear on a compass. But Dylan did not need to connect these himself – the link is made by A.E. Waite, who designed the pack in question, in his accompanying book *The Key to the Tarot*. He points out the letters and explains that they can be read clockwise from T in the ‘North’ position, back to T again, to spell ‘Tarot’; or from R in the South, clockwise, to read ‘Rota’; or from the T, anticlockwise, as far round as A, to read Tora. He further points out that this is the word on the High Priestess’s scroll, and that it stands for Torah, which is the Hebrew for law, or instruction, or direction, and the name given to the first five books of the Bible.

Before we go any further, there are a few supporting points I should make. First, these writings of A.E. Waite are not at all obscure or esoteric. The Waite pack is probably the most popular form of the Tarot to this day, and would have been by far the most likely pack you’d come across in 1964, back before the general revival of the ‘occult’ led to a profusion of new designs. Likewise, Waite’s book is one of the favourite beginner’s guides to the cards and has been reprinted many times. I bought it as a cheap, recently published paperback in the 1980s.

Second, we know that, many years later, Dylan took an interest in the Tarot and the Waite pack in particular. He ‘quotes’ the Empress card from it on the back sleeve of *Desire*. Even from a cursory look at the symbols and the ways of interpreting them, the influence of cartomancy – and especially the kind of symbolism that Waite draws from, mixing the biblical with the magical – can be seen both in *Street-Legal* and *Renaldo & Clara*. In the film, when Joan Baez appears as the Woman in White clutching a red rose, she echoes both the Empress, who wears a white gown sprigged with red roses, and the High Priestess herself, who wears a blue mantle over what I take to be a shimmering white gown. (It’s coloured white in places and blue in others – I think to give a moonlit effect. She has the full moon set in her crown and the crescent moon at her feet, and sits as it were in an alcove between two pillars, one black and one white.)

In Waite’s little instruction pamphlet that comes in the box with the cards, the High Priestess is said to represent, in a reading, ‘*the woman who interests the Querent, if male; the Querent herself, if female*’. She also stands for ‘*silence, tenacity, mystery, wisdom*’. (Which is about as much detail as any of the biographers have been able to disclose about the character of Sara Dylan, isn’t it?) For all her virginal and remote attributes, it’s the Priestess and not, for example, the much more ‘earthy’ seeming Empress, who signifies a sexual and romantic relationship with a woman.

Now perhaps we can see a link between the High Priestess and ‘To Ramona’, with its peculiar blend of ‘high’ philosophising



and sensual romancing. It doesn’t seem to me far-fetched to suggest that the song arises from the combination of experience of and meditation on this image. It’s interesting that ‘Torah’ should mean instruction or direction, given that the song mixes several direct instructions – ‘*come closer, shut softly your watery eyes*’ – with its more abstract teachings – ‘*Everything passes, everything changes*’ and so on.

Here I should make a third substantiating point. This stuff about the Tarot may or may not interest you, but I think you’ll agree that it is directly relevant to one period of Dylan’s work at least; that he clearly had its symbolism in mind about the time of *Street-Legal* and *Renaldo & Clara*, and that he invites us, as openly as he

has ever done with any outside source, apart from the Bible, to use the Tarot as a 'key' to some of his images. But that was then. Is it likely that he'd known about, let alone thought about the cards, and used their symbolism as a source for his art as early as the mid-1960s?

Well, the biographical evidence suggests that he learned about the Tarot from Sara, whom he most likely met sometime in 1964. Now here's a nice piece of circumstantial evidence. The cover photograph of *Bringing It All Back Home* was taken in the first weeks of 1965. Put the Empress on the back cover of *Desire* alongside Sally Grossman, the lady in red on the front of BIABH (much easier to see if you've got the LPs). Do my eyes deceive me, or is that almost the same pose? I hope I've made a case, at least, that Dylan's quite deep knowledge of the Tarot could go back a long way before *Renaldo & Clara*.

While I'm making this defence, I'd like to make a retraction too. In my book I claimed of the Dylans, '*We can date their meeting fairly accurately*'. This was showing off, because I was pleased with myself for having tracked down two decaying hurricanes that hit New York in the autumn of 1964 – on 14th and 24th September – and concluded that this must pinpoint the 'tropical storm' that is mentioned in the song 'Sara' as marking their meeting. They were the only truly tropical storms to reach the northeastern seaboard that season, but it's still just a guess, and a far cry from 'fairly accurate' dating.

I'd much rather, really, that they'd met a lot earlier, before 9th June 1964, for example, when *Another Side* was recorded.

Then maybe that storm could be the tremendous one of 'Chimes of Freedom', and they could be that 'we': '*Starry-eyed and laughing as I recall when we were caught, / Trapped by no track of hours...*'

The 'message' of 'Chimes of Freedom', with its Sermon on the Mount echoes, also chimes with that line in 'Sara' – '*A messenger sent me in a tropical storm.*' (The sentence is ambiguous: he was sent along by the messenger is the top meaning; but it can be read grammatically as '*How did I meet you?... [By means of] a messenger sent [to] me in a tropical storm.*')

If a 'real-life' Ramona is required, Sara is a much more natural one than, say, Joan Baez. The Tarot doesn't seem like Joanie's bag, and nor do the confusion and tears that Ramona shows. But the feeling of being torn that the song describes wouldn't be surprising in a woman, like Sara at that time, with a young child and a marriage falling apart.

Identifying Sara, or anyone else, with Ramona doesn't tell us much about the song (though the song might tell us something biographically about a relationship). But associating Ramona with the High Priestess, it seems to me, does add something to the song. It strengthens our sense of Ramona's dignity – '*the strength of your skin*', those '*magnetic movements*' – that counterbalances this temporary bewilderment and weakness. It heightens the feeling of reciprocity. If Ramona is, in her better self, like the Priestess, then she is herself the source of wisdom and knowledge, and this situation where the singer is spelling out the facts of life for her could as easily be reversed, as the last lines acknowledge:

'And someday, baby, / Who knows, maybe / I'll come and be crying to you.'

As the precursor to a string of notable 'advice-to-a-woman' songs – 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue', 'Like a Rolling Stone', 'Queen Jane Approximately' – the Priestess image reinforces a basic respect that underlies them, that keeps them, somehow, despite their outspokenness, from sounding merely gloating or contemptuous.

Much has been said of the viciousness, the sneer, the anger of 'Like a Rolling Stone', but what has kept it alive so long is the way that this is mixed with a kind of stateliness. And this stateliness pertains to the person that the song describes, just as it does in 'Queen Jane'. We may see the women, in the images, stripped of their trappings of comfort, prestige and power, but in the music we see them somehow the stronger for it. What makes the songs moving and lasting is the feeling that Dylan conveys, in everything apart from the words, that he's not crowing 'I told you so', but saying rather, as he says Ramona says, *'You're better than no-one / And no-one is better than you'*.



That is a philosophical constant of Dylan's work, a 'something understood' that keeps him on a level with us, however ostensibly preaching or haranguing or even vituperative his words. And this is what enables them effectively to preach and teach.

My reason for mentioning the 'To Ra' hypothesis in *The Nightingale's Code* was not so much to do with the High Priestess as with the Wheel, the Rota. Of course, this period of Dylan's life was a 'turning point'. What intrigued me was how consciously he seems to have realised it. The image of a wheel or ring is deliberately evoked in the front of *Bringing It All Back Home*, and it occurs in that key song 'Mr Tambourine Man', in the tambourine itself and in the 'smoke-rings' of the mind, and also in 'To Ramona': *'my words would turn into a meaningless ring... Everything passes, everything changes'*.

I go on to discuss how *Another Side* itself seems to rotate around this central point, 'To Ramona', turning from a positive first side – Incident, Freedom, Free, Really – to a negative second – Don't, Ain't, Plain,

Nitemare and so on; turning right round, in the end, from ‘All I really want to do is, baby, be friends with you’ to ‘It ain’t me you’re lookin’ for, babe.’ From there I go on to suggest an even wider wheel, still centred on ‘To Ramona’, with the three folk albums on one side and the three rock albums on the other. And there I leave you to decide for yourselves with what kind of consciousness Dylan could have created the ‘centre’ of such a wheel, when he could not know where it would stop.

Which brings me back to my original question, why the reference to such esoterica as the Tarot got picked up. If there is any substance to my idea of a larger organised form to the whole sequence of Dylan’s first seven records, then how did it get organised? It suggests a shaping power of imagination far beyond what the ordinary Selfhood could encompass.



The Canadian critic Northrop Frye wrote in *Fearful Symmetry*, his inspiring study of William Blake, ‘If a man of genius spends all his life perfecting works of art, it is hardly far-fetched to see his life’s work as itself a larger work of art with everything he produced integral to it’. This idea he expanded further in *Anatomy of Criticism*, which might flippantly be called the prequel to *Fearful Symmetry*, since it outlines the vision of all literature which he had seen through his reading of Blake: ‘It is clear that criticism cannot be a systematic study unless there is a quality in literature which enables it to be so. We have to adopt the hypothesis, then, that just as there is an

order of nature behind the natural sciences, so literature is not a piled aggregate of “works”, but an order of words.’

My aim in *The Nightingale’s Code* was simply to set such a vision of Dylan’s work afoot. To be honest – not wanting to launch an anti-advertising campaign – this was what I’d missed in the critical studies I’ve read. The observations accumulate but they don’t seem to assemble into a picture. It’s not clear what the details are details of.

I wanted to show how, for example, song might relate to song on an LP; how LPs themselves might be constellated in phases or cycles – or chapters, if you like. Also, what might be constants of the whole work, the forms and images that speak to each other across it. In this I seem so far to have failed, since the critic who was most responsive to the book, Paula Radice, took exception to precisely this schematic aspect of it.

The tenor of most Dylan criticism at the moment is to celebrate the diversity of his work – to multiply its breadth and open-endedness. At the same time, I believe the perception that Dylan’s work is a whole, even while it can’t yet be seen whole, is well established – for example among the readership of this magazine. Many people – I would guess it’s probably most of the people who enjoy his music – have the sense that it’s worth getting to know extensively. There may be a certain consensus on the highs and lows, as well as our own personal charts, but I think most of us feel that the body of work adds up to something more than a selection of its highlights, however collectively edited. Don’t you also find yourself more often drawn back to, and getting more out of, a Dylan record you

regard as second-rate, than is the case with many a first-rate record by other artists?

Of course there are two important obstacles to studying Dylan as Frye studied Blake. One is that he is alive, and we can't claim to see the work whole while it is still unfinished. The other is that it's not literature. What constitutes the canon of Dylan's work? 'Mr Tambourine Man', say, is an element of it, but what is 'Mr Tambourine Man'? The first track on Side 2 of *Bringing It All Back Home*, or any one of the hundreds of other performances by Dylan himself, or for that matter by anyone else?

In my book I opt for the official releases as forming a canon within the canon, so to speak. The artist himself gives some warrant for this. He doesn't, at least in later years, give his songs in concert until they're out on record – so that the live versions must to some extent be heard as subsequent variants of an original. The profusion of variants with Dylan has no real parallel among the poets of literature, but it's not an alien thing altogether.

The canons of poets are mostly synthetic; few are crystalline, fixed and simple. 'A' poem is often surrounded by a penumbra of other versions, earlier forms and later revisions. The 'death-bed collected' is the usual basis of a canon: the poems, and the forms of them, that were last authorised by the poet in their lifetime. But this needn't prevail. Whitman, Wordsworth and Auden, for example, are all felt to have done injustice to their early work with later changes, and so there is often an alternative version of the poems as they first appeared.

The canon of William Blake is, in fact, a

striking anomaly something like Dylan's. Not because Blake showed uncertainty in constituting his works: of him, more than any other English poet, we can say that the canon is 'writ in stone', since he personally, laboriously engraved in copper every single letter and punctuation mark of his completed poems. But the works he conceived are unities of word and image, and each copy of one of his Prophetic Books is unique, a combination of printing and painting.

If he had had the audience and the resources, there might be as many Miltons and Jerusalems as there are 'Mr Tambourine Men'. Well, almost. So the words of one of the poems reprinted in a book are not the actual thing that Blake made. This is why his work, though its influence grows year by year, is still regarded as obscure: because it is, and will be until there is a permanent free public exhibition of all his illuminated books together. At least there is, at last, two centuries on, an affordable one-volume, full-size reproduction (*The Complete Illuminated Books*, Thames & Hudson, 2000, £29.95).

For future generations, the canon of Dylan's work will pretty certainly include the concert recordings, studio outtakes and so on which are currently collected and curated by the fans. This is a fittingly democratic way for it to form, outside the ambit of the academies which Dylan has often berated. But I predict that the official albums will be the central structure around which the rest is organised, and I think that Dylan appreciates this, despite his pronouncements in periods of discouragement.

ment that he didn't really care about making records, so long as he could perform. This was when he didn't particularly care about making new songs either: compare and contrast with the clear sense of achievement that comes through in interviews now at having made 'a great album' in *Love And Theft*.

In an album, a set of songs is organised into a greater whole; in a concert they are organised into another, different whole. 'Sugar Baby' belongs at the end of "Love And Theft"; in a concert we might discover that it also belongs perfectly between 'Buckets of Rain', say, and 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue'. This independence of the songs, their constant movement in relation to each other, does not diminish the order of the canon, but serves to knot it all the more integrally together. It may seem to have no parallel with the way that poems appear in a poet's book, always the same words on the same page. Yet what Dylan does for us with his songs is quite close to the way that poets begin to be read when we know them well enough, so we can turn from one poem to another, cross refer, even read two poems side by side, nearly simultaneously.

When I called my book *The Nightingale's Code* I was obviously playing on the idea that Dylan is an enigma – that Dylanologists are still engaged in trying to 'decode' his lyrics. But I meant it more seriously in the sense of a 'code of behaviour', like the 'code of the road'. The word comes from the Latin codex, which means originally a block of wood. A block was split to form leaves on which to engrave important and permanent documents, such as laws.

In English the word 'code' – before it became synonymous with 'cipher' – meant 'a digest of the laws of a country, or of those relating to any subject' and 'a collection of writings forming a book' (Oxford English Dictionary). In other words, it's an alternative term for the 'canon' that I've been using here. To my mind, the 'code' in Dylan – in the secret-language sense – is simply his 'code' in this second sense: the integrated body of work in terms of which each part can be interpreted.

The resistance to my 'To Ra' idea – an arcane reference couched in a form rather like a cryptic crossword clue – springs I think from a generally healthy scepticism about hidden meanings and skeleton keys. Ingenious and cryptological explanations have fallen out of favour, due to their own excesses, and Dylanology pursues more sober, empirical and encyclopaedic projects. What was valuable, however, even in such wild theories as A.J. Weberman's, was their search for the 'thread' of Dylan's work. Weberman's 'plot', applied to Dylan's career up to the early Seventies, was the story of a Revolution betrayed by its leader (as far as I can make it out). He supplied for Dylan's country music the cry of 'Judas!' that had earlier been flung at his rock music.

If we don't find schemes like this – or Stephen Pickering's interpretation of the poet's progress in terms of the Cabala and Jewish mysticism – satisfying, it's because they seem reductive. Tying the form of artistic creation to another, extrinsic form, they restrict rather than expand its scope.

The problem with approaching poetry or song as 'code' is that code in itself is

meaningless. Once it has been deciphered it is ignored; it adds nothing more to the real message it was concealing. If a song is coded in this sense, then all our responses to what it 'seems' to be about would be like delusions. Hence our natural hostility to what is effectively a destructive form of interpretation. But a song can have 'hidden' or 'other' meanings in another way: not as concealed within it or 'behind' it, but hidden in the sense that we don't see them until we see the larger form of which the thing we are looking at is a part. These are the relations that give a work of art its third dimension, its depth.

The larger form is the artist's body of work and also the 'order of words' that Northrop Frye speaks of, the total form of literature. With Dylan, of course, we cannot say simply 'literature'. One of the reasons he strikes us as such an important figure is that an integral view of his work has to place it simultaneously in both literature and 'popular music' (there's no word as neat as 'literature' to describe this other field); and therefore he unites, or reunites, these estranged relations. He's not alone in doing this. Burns, Brecht and Lorca are three who spring to mind as co-conspirators, but their work has all ended up as books, and been subsumed into literature, and Dylan's will not be subsumed.

In fact, at the moment the emphasis is the other way, partly because of the nature of Dylan's writing in its current phase, and partly because that 'other' field—the golden triangle that lies between points A (for art music like avant-garde jazz), C (for commercial or chart music) and F (for the various shades of 'folk' music and field

recordings) — is at present, thanks to CDs and expiring copyrights, being formed into a canon of its own. In this respect *'Love And Theft'* is not 'retro' at all, because its encyclopaedia of 'thefts' goes hand in hand with a whole new level of documentation of its sources.

Reference-spotting can be illuminating, but it's not the end of hearing Dylan's music in an integrated way — and it may not even be the beginning. Let's say that the 12 songs of *'Love And Theft'* allude to 100 other records (it's probably not an overestimate): we don't necessarily get farther into it even if we track down every last one of them. The important thing would be to listen back and forth, so to speak. To know the why of one reference will tell us more than to know that 99 others exist.

Which brings me back to my Tarot reference. The point is not that 'To Ramona' is really about a playing card instead of a person, or that Bob Dylan once practised divination. The point is that the High Priestess helps us see the ground on which Ramona moves, a harmony to her melody, if you like. A further quote from Northrop Frye, from *Fearful Symmetry*, may suggest how John Donne and Woody Guthrie, Tarot and 'corpse evangelists', 'To Ramona' and 'Chimes of Freedom' all come to combine in the form we know as *Another Side*.

Speaking of the Renaissance humanists, he points out: *'They had in common a dislike of the scholastic philosophy in which religion had got itself entangled, and most of them upheld, for religion as well as for literature, imaginative interpretation against*

argument, the visions of Plato against the logic of Aristotle, the Word of God against the reason of man.' He goes on to say: 'The doctrine of the Word of God explains the interest of so many of the humanists, not only in Biblical scholarship and translation, but in occult sciences. Cabbalism, for instance, was a source of new imaginative interpretations of the Bible. Other branches of occultism, including alchemy, also provided complex and synthetic conceptions which could be employed to understand the central form of Christianity as a vision rather than a doctrine or ritual...'

It remains only to say that in Dylan's case the matter of references and possible allusions is slightly complicated by that aspect of him that plays the Riddler or the Jokerman. 'Rainy Day Women #12 & 35', anyone? Well, 1, 2, 3, 5 are the first four prime numbers, and the next in the sequence is 7, and this is the first track on

Dylan's seventh album. I've also speculated that they're the numbers of hexagrams in the I Ching – something else he's known to have been interested in, and once refers to openly: 'I threw the I Ching yesterday, said there might be some thunder at the well.'

An interesting reading in the light of Blood on the Tracks, though ambiguously put. I'd assume it was hexagram 51, Thunder, moving to hexagram 48, The Well, but it could be the other way round. Either way, the judgment on The Well is fitting for that fresh tapping of former powers: 'The town may be changed, but the well cannot be changed. It neither decreases nor increases...' And the Thunder of the I Ching, as described in the translator Richard Wilhelm's commentary – 'A yang line develops below two yin lines and presses upward forcibly... It is symbolised by thunder, which bursts forth from the earth' – is something that might well be called Planet Waves.

So to return to Nos 12 and 35 – hexagram 12 is Standstill or Stagnation, and *Blonde On Blonde* is all about stasis and stuckness. Richard Wilhelm comments: 'This hexagram is linked with the seventh month... when the year has passed its zenith and



autumnal decay is setting in. That seventh album again, and according to my seasonal arrangement of Dylan's records, *Blonde On Blonde* is an autumnal work.

And 35? That's called Progress and the image is of the sun rising over the earth. What lies beyond the stasis of *Blonde On Blonde* is, whaddyaknow, a New Morning.

These are plausible references for the numbers, if you think they are there for any reason. They're also both biblically important. Twelve, as in tribes and apostles, and 35 as a number of the apocalyptic proportion, as stated in the formula of Revelation, '*a time, and times, and half a time*', i.e. 1 of any unit, plus 2 of it, plus a half = 3.5 and any of its multiples, like 7, or 70, or 35.

The formula occurs, in fact, in chapter 12 of Revelation: '*And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.*' ('Rainy Day Women', anyone?) '*And the*

earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.' ('*They'll stone ya when you're tryin' to be so good*' anyone?)

Yet the suspicion is strong that they could actually be any numbers, and that what they mean at the beginning of the record, attached so arbitrarily to a title so arbitrarily attached to its song, is: prepare to be baffled.

And yet, and still – why those particular numbers? Follow the Riddler into the labyrinth, but let a thread unwind as you go, or you may end up lost in there.

A final quote from Northrop Frye. Of Blake he says: '*He is not writing for a tired pedant who feels merely badgered by difficulty: he is writing for enthusiasts of poetry who, like the readers of mystery stories, enjoy sitting up nights trying to find out what the mystery is.*'

Me and Mr. Jones

Bob Dylan and the Revolution

by Peter Doggett

'You've got to live up to your responsibility as a culture hero. You're DYLAN, man, every freak has a soft spot in their heart for you' (Dylanologist A.J. Weberman, 1971)

'The Weatherpeople, the heaviest of white revolutionary groups, deliberately took their name from a line in "Bringing It All Back Home"' (cultural historian Roger Lewis, 1972)

'I've never been into politics' (Bob Dylan, 1984)

This is a story of cultural power and misguided zeal; political violence and passionate rhetoric; deluded hero-worship and defiant individualism. It centres around a man who, for more than three decades, has consistently declared his lack of interest in politics, of whatever hue; and a cast of underground warriors who chose this same man as a beacon of revolutionary hope. It involves some of the most notorious (or heroic, depending on your slant) US political groups of the late 60s and early 70s; a prison radical whose assassination briefly reconnected the 'movement' with its icon; a counter-culture stalker who took it upon himself to become that icon's public conscience; assorted members of the Beatles; and Bob Dylan, the man who penned the words *'don't follow leaders'*, and was promptly claimed as the standard-bearer of a revolutionary vanguard he never wanted to join. Strange days indeed...

The story begins with the leaders of the black revolutionary movement: the Black Panther Party. They emerged from Oakland, California in 1966, and rapidly became a national force, part Marxist revolutionary vanguard, part provider of community aid to America's ghettos. By June 1969, FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover was dubbing the Panthers as *'without question the greatest threat to the internal security of the country'*. He selected them as the chief target of the FBI's COINTELPRO campaign, which invested millions of dollars and thousands of government personnel into infiltrating and undermining 'subversive' organisations.

The explosive collisions between police and party in the late 60s produced a constellation of heroes and martyrs. Prime among them was the Panthers' founder, Huey P. Newton, jailed for his role in a shoot-out in which a police officer was killed, and Newton himself seriously injured. From October 1967, when the confrontation occurred, until he was released (and later cleared on a legal technicality) in August 1970, 'Free Huey' became one of the clarion calls of the American left, black and white.

The journey of Newton and the party he created was chronicled in *Seize The Time*, a 1970 book by Bobby Seale, Newton's first colleague in the Panthers. By the time it was published, Seale was himself in prison on murder charges (he was eventually acquitted). He had won further notoriety as one of the Chicago Eight, a group of leading radicals who were alleged to have fomented the riots at the Democratic Party Convention in 1968. Seale's stature as a revolutionary icon was assured during the

Chicago trial, when the judge ordered him to be bound and gagged in the courtroom after interrupting proceedings with demands for his constitutional rights to be upheld.

Among his tales of police brutality and revolutionary fervour, Seale inserted a chapter entitled 'Huey Digs Bob Dylan'. The setting is the home of radical lawyer Beverly Axelrod in 1966: Newton and Seale are laying up the pages for the first issue of their party newspaper, cunningly titled *The Black Panther*.

'While we were laying that paper out, in the background we could hear a record, and the song was named "Ballad of a Thin Man" by Bob Dylan. Now the melody was in my head... but I didn't really hear the words. This record played after we stayed up laying out the paper. And it played the next night after we stayed up laying out the paper. I think it was around the third afternoon that the record was playing. We played that record over and over and over.'

'Huey P. Newton made me recognize the lyrics. Not only the lyrics of the record, but what the lyrics meant in the record. What the lyrics meant in the history of racism that had perpetuated itself in the world. Huey would say: "Listen, listen – man, do you hear what he is saying?" Huey had such insight into how racism existed, how racism had perpetuated himself. He had such a way of putting forth in very clear words what he related directly to those symbolic things or words that were coming out from Bobby Dylan.'

'I remember that the song got to the point where he was talking about this cat handing in his ticket and he walked up to the geek, and the geek handed him a bone. Well, this didn't

relate to me, so I said: "Huey, look, wait a minute, man". I said, "What are you talking about a geek? What is a geek? What the hell is a geek?" And Huey explains it.'

Newton's explanation runs for almost a page: "a geek", he tells Seale, "is usually a circus performer", who has been badly injured and can't work any longer. But he knows no other life than the circus, so he agrees to do the lowliest jobs just to stay in the community. Maybe he even agrees to eat live chickens in a cage as a freak attraction.'

Newton continues:

'These people who are coming in to see him are coming in for entertainment, so they are the real freaks. And the geek knows this, so during his performance, he eats the raw chicken and he hands one of the members of the audience a bone.

'Then to put it on the broader level, what Dylan is putting across is middle-class people or upper-class people who sometimes take a Sunday afternoon off and put their whole family into a limousine, and they go down to the black ghettos to watch the prostitutes and watch the decaying community.(...) That makes the middle-class and upper-class people, who are down there because they get pleasure out of it, freaks.

And this goes into the one-eyed midget. What is the one-eyed midget? He screams and howls at Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones doesn't know what's happening. Then the one-eyed midget says, give me some juice or go home. And this again is very symbolic of people who are disadvantaged. They're patronizing Mr. Jones, the middle-class people. You know, they're not interested in them coming down for entertainment. But if they'll pay them for a trick, then they'll tolerate them, or else

they'll drive them out of the ghettos. This song is hell. You've got to understand that this song is saying a hell of a lot about society.'

Seale digests this explanation, and notes: 'Bobby Dylan says, you don't know what's happening, do you, Mr. Jones? And to hand him the naked bone was too much – was really too much.'

An insignificant if amusing interlude, you might think, suggesting that Huey P. Newton missed his vocation as a literary critic. But as Seale explains later in the chapter, 'Ballad of a Thin Man' came to occupy a key place in the imaginative landscape of the Panthers:

'This song Bobby Dylan was singing became a very big part of that whole publishing operation of the Black Panther paper. And in the background, while we were putting this paper out, this record came up and I guess a number of papers were published, and many times we would play that record. Brother Stokely Carmichael [who popularised the phrase "black power" – PD] also liked that record. This record became so related to us, even to the brothers who had held down most of the security for the set.

The brothers had some big earphones over at Beverly's house that would sit on your ears and had a kind of direct stereo atmosphere and when you got loaded it was something else! These brothers would get halfway high, loaded on something, and they would sit down and play this record over and over and over, especially after they began to hear Huey P. Newton interpret that record. They'd be trying to relate an understanding about what was going on, because old Bobby did society a big favor when he made that

particular sound. If there's any more he made that I don't understand, I'll just ask Huey P. Newton to interpret them for us and maybe we can get a hell of a lot more out of brother Bobby Dylan, because old Bobby, he did a good job on that set.'

At his home, shortly before his arrest in 1967, Newton was caught on camera, stripped to the waist, surrounded by cultural debris – the San Francisco phone directory, a Wes Montgomery album, issues of *The Black Panther*, radical black texts. In his hands was the *Highway 61 Revisited* album.

The black power movement of the late 60s was sharply divided between cultural nationalists, who spurned all vestiges of white ideology, and Marxist revolutionaries, who were prepared to align themselves (at least on some issues) with elements of the white New Left. The first group dismissed rock radicals out of hand; poet and dramatist Amiri Baraka (formerly known as LeRoi Jones) described white protest songs as '*passionate luxurious ego demonstrations*', doubtless well-intentioned but flawed by their creators' status as oppressors.

Amongst the black Marxists, however, Dylan retained a more privileged position. Eldridge Cleaver, the Panthers' Minister Of Information in the late 60s, noted in an essay for the left-wing paper *Ramparts* that Stokely Carmichael had used Dylan's '*Mr Jones*' line to denigrate his opponents in a vicious TV debate.

Cleaver himself was renowned for his equal devotion to Dylan and to Mao Tse-Tung. In an open letter to California Governor Ronald Reagan, written from

prison in May 1968, he warned that Dylan's '*empty handed beggar is at the door, except that his hand is not empty any more. He's got a gun in his hand. And he's stopped begging. In fact, he's nearly stopped talking, because it's becoming clear to him that hardly anyone is listening. When he finally stops talking altogether, he is going to start shooting. Have you been listening to me, Governor?*' (*Post-Prison Writings & Speeches*)

That year, black activist Julius Lester offered an alternative interpretation of 'Ballad of a Thin Man' to readers of the US radical newspaper, *The Guardian*:

'There is a class of whites who call themselves liberals, who will agree with anything a revolutionary may say up to the point of agreeing to what must be done to solve the problem. At that point he "puts his eyes in his pocket and his nose to the ground", as Bob Dylan so graphically described the phenomenon of consciously refusing to see. The white liberal is the Mr. Jones who knows that something is happening and knows what it is and all he can do is become filled with despair.' (*Revolutionary Notes*)

Lester's Mr. Jones apparently knew more than Dylan intended. But the same article demonstrated that Dylan's words were open to endless readings in the late 60s, all of them favourable to the prophets of black liberation. He concluded his assault on closet liberals by asserting that the time had come for them to step aside, and for true revolutionaries to unite: '*Everybody's saying they ain't gon' work on Maggie's farm no more*'.

While the Black Panthers flirted with Dylanology, other sectors of the New Left

were also engaging with Dylan's work. As Roger Lewis noted in *Outlaws Of America*, 'The figure of Bob Dylan seems to overshadow every other single performer in both influence and ideas. His lyrics are cited with the same familiarity as the Torah to the Hassidic Jew.'

Familiar quotations littered the pages of the radical press, usually appended as incontrovertible truths: 'He not busy being born is busy dying'; 'Money doesn't talk, it swears'; predictable lines from 'Ballad of a Thin Man' and 'Maggie's Farm'. Feminist activist Marilyn Salzman Webb could borrow some of Dylan's rhetorical power by heading a crusading column in *Win* magazine 'A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall', without needing to connect the two texts any more overtly than that. Writing in the programme for the 1969 Woodstock Festival (itself named after the town where Dylan lived at the time), Yippie leader Abbie Hoffman opened with the expected scriptural quotation ('He not busy being born...') and ended a vehement passage about the Chicago Eight with the promise: 'The hard rain's already falling and it wasn't just the politicians that are getting wet'.

His comrade Jerry Rubin went a step further in his utopian brochure for 'Yippieland'. This post-apocalyptic paradise would be a land where 'The Pentagon will be replaced by an LSD experimental farm', etc. etc. Meanwhile, Rubin vowed: 'At community meetings all over the land, Bob Dylan will replace the National Anthem.'

Like holy writ, Dylan's lyrics were regarded as failsafe ammunition for the radical cause. Yet one white New Left

organisation took their identification with Dylan, and their commitment to the revolution, several stages further than the rest.

With doomed inevitability, the American left fragmented as the crisis of the late 60s neared its climax. Students For A Democratic Society (alias SDS) was launched in 1960 as a vehicle for idealistic, young socialists to operate outside the straitjacket of the Communist Party. As the twin crusades of the late 60s – Vietnam and black power – gradually merged into what became known as 'the Movement', SDS occupied the same vanguard position amongst white radicals as the Panthers did amongst their black comrades.

Yet at the moment when it should have been at its most potent, SDS was split by arguments about correct revolutionary tactics. One faction argued that the organisation should play a supporting role to the Marxist working-class, and should not be distracted by calls for black liberation, international solidarity and feminism. Their opponents took a broader perspective, declaring that the struggle for black power should take precedence over traditional Communist calls for a working-class uprising; and that students and young Americans in general represented a potentially revolutionary force in their own right, regardless of their class origins.

The latter faction announced themselves with a paper titled after a marriage of lyrics from John Sebastian (of the Lovin' Spoonful) and Bob Dylan: *Hot Town: Summer In The City, Or I Ain't Gonna Work On Maggie's Farm No More*. Two months later, at the SDS Convention in June 1969, they presented a lengthy manifesto for

their revolution: *'You Don't Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way The Wind Blows'*. Both titles were apparently suggested by Ted Gold, a popular member of SDS.

Gold's borrowed rhetoric stuck. As the SDS Convention debated the pressing issue of how exactly the American ruling class should be overthrown, his preferred faction became known as 'Weatherman' – or, later, the Weathermen. (Or, later still, in a gesture of anti-sexist solidarity, the Weather Underground.)

The Weatherman collective soon outgrew SDS. In September, they mounted their first violent demonstration, outside the courtroom where the Chicago Eight were being tried. In October, they staged several 'Days Of Rage' in the same city, hoping to bring tens of thousands of activists onto the streets. Instead, fewer than a thousand joined the protest, several hundred of whom (including most of the Weatherman vanguard) were arrested.

Faced with the reality that they did not control a mass organisation, Weatherman took the decision to go underground, and become an urban terrorist group. So it was that Bob Dylan's name was regularly cited in press stories about bomb explosions at New York City's police HQ, the Bank of America and (their most stunning PR coup, in 1972) the Pentagon.

Through it all, Dylan's words remained Weatherman's shared language. Lorraine Rosal's August 1969 plea that feminism should be added to the group's revolutionary palette was titled *Who Do They Think Would Bury You* (from 'Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands', of course). While

the self-styled Motor City 9 faction from Detroit showed a predilection for Doors quotations, the original Weather leaders kept the faith. *Bring The War Home* (i.e. from Vietnam to the American streets) joined *Power To The People* as a common slogan in their letters and manifestos; Dylanology quickly translated that into an August 1969 pronouncement titled *Bringing The War Back Home*. Weather activist Shin'ya Ono (Yoko Ono's cousin) recognised the irony of naming their group after a class of person whom Bob Dylan had declared unnecessary, and issued his own manifesto: *You Do Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way The Wind Blows*.

There was even a Weatherman songbook, with which the underground revolutionaries celebrated their outlaw status in their hideaways. The Supremes' 'Stop! In The Name Of Love' was rewritten as 'Stop Your Imperialist Plunder'; 'Maria' from *West Side Story* became 'Kim Il Sung' ('the most beautiful sound I ever heard'), and in an uncanny prophecy of punk, 'White Christmas' mutated into 'White Riot' ('I'm dreaming of a white riot/just like the one (on) October 8th').

Dylan's work was presumably too sacred to undergo mass transformation, and only 'Lay Lady Lay' was considered suitable for inclusion – retitled 'Lay Elrod Lay' in honour of an unfortunate Chicago attorney whose neck was broken during the Days Of Rage. (A Weatherman was duly arrested for his attempted murder; it later emerged that Richard Elrod had bumped his head into a brick wall while attacking one of the Weather protestors.) Lines such as *'You thought you could stop the*

Weatherman/But up-front people put you on your can' (for the 'whatever colours...' section of Dylan's song) suggested that most of the collective's creative power had already been exhausted on the Supremes.

Weather's resident Dylanologist, Ted Gold, was one of three activists killed in March 1970 when a bomb they were assembling in a Greenwich Village townhouse accidentally exploded. (Another of the dead was Diana Oughton, a society heiress instantly celebrated in glossy magazine articles, and later on album by Grace Slick and Paul Kantner of Jefferson Airplane.)

After Gold's death, the regular poaching of Dylan phrases slowed, although the Weather Underground remained a small but still threatening terrorist force in America until the late 70s. In December 1970, however, at the height of the underground press debate over Bob Dylan's radical credentials, Weather issued a manifesto designed to update and clarify their original *You Don't Need A Weatherman*. It was titled *New Morning – Changing Weather*. As Weather historian Ron Jacobs noted, the statement 'took its title from a just released album by Bob Dylan. Both the album and the statement shared a reflective, yet resolute mood.'

In *New Morning – Changing Weather*, the Weather Underground reached out for the first time towards the youth counter-culture of America, recognising its search for liberation (sexual, chemical, musical) as a sister crusade to its own call for the overthrow of the US establishment. 'People have been experimenting with everything about their lives, fierce against the ways of the

white man,' wrote Weather leader Bernadette Dohrn. 'They've moved to the country and found new ways to bring up free wild children.' They might even have built themselves a cabin in Utah, to catch rainbow trout. In the eyes of the revolutionary hurricane that was the Weather Underground, Bob Dylan was still setting the mood for the Movement, even with an album dismissed by other elements of the New Left as self-obsessed and conservative.

The debate about Dylan's political sincerity had first erupted when he apparently turned his back on the protest movement, a move signalled by the release of *Another Side Of Bob Dylan* in 1964. At Newport in '65, and again in Britain during the 1966 tour, left-wing traditionalists allied themselves with folk purists outraged by Dylan's dalliance with the evil ghosts of electricity.

In the first issue of the San Francisco radical paper *Steps*, published in December 1966, Frank Bardacke defended Dylan's apparent apostasy from the movement after reprising the case for the prosecution:

'He is seen as a threat to the left, representing an anti-political response to the increasing crises in American life. It is often said that he has rejected politics and retreated into his own private concerns and fantasies. (...)

The left has been mistaken. It is not only the Negroes who are in chains, but all Americans who are trapped by an uneasy boredom, by loneliness, and by god knows what else. These are the chains that Dylan wants to break. He is convinced that the only way to freedom is through an understanding

of his own personal dilemmas. And he knows that such an understanding will involve him in an exploration of the terrible anxiety of middle class American life. [Bardacke continues by itemising this theme in Dylan's writing, with particular emphasis on "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream" as a critique of "a totally commercialized America" – PD] So Bobby Dylan has escaped. He has held onto his dangerous fantasies. And he intends to 'blow their minds'. In a society where the most important restrictions of freedom are the limitations on consciousness, "blow their minds" is the rallying call of freedom fighters. It is roughly equivalent to the cry of an older historical period: "break your chains".

Between the lionisation of the Panthers and the Weather Underground, and the empathy of Frank Bardacke, however, many of those who had regarded Dylan as the very embodiment of radicalism were beginning to air their suspicions about his true convictions.

They were aided by his comments in public and in private. Playing devil's advocate in the 1968 *Sing Out!* interview, Dylan memorably teased Happy Traum: 'How do you know I'm not, as you say, for the war?' Around the same time, he played the same mind game with a self-declared radical, photographer Elliott Landy:

'I started talking about politics with Bob because I was involved in the anti-war movement. But he didn't want to talk about it: he didn't seem to be concerned with it. I asked him, "You mean you're not into politics? How can you write songs like "Masters of War" without being political?" He told me, "I'm just into using language. I pick up what's in the air, what's on people's minds,

and turn that into words." His joy was in moulding phrases, not making statements.'

I remember one time when he said he might even consider voting for George Wallace for President of the United States. (...) I could not believe I was hearing this from the "leader" of progressive popular political thought.' (Dylan In Woodstock)

Dylan's apparent indifference to contemporary politics seeped into the mainstream, fuelled by the lack of anthemic statements and radical zeal on albums such as *Nashville Skyline* and *Self Portrait*. American leftist poet Tuli Kupferberg mourned the loss of his revolutionary idols: 'Dylan's times are changin'/Che's blood it is running out'. More directly, journalist Ray Gosling (writing in *International Times*, alias *IT*) was one of many commentators to note that 'Bob Dylan has made a fortune for the Columbia Corporation, and it is wrong'.

Nashville Skyline was so transparent an album that many critics assumed it must be opaque; radicals searched through its banal homilies for oblique comment on the Vietnam War. Yet the retrospective unease sparked by that 27 minutes of country comfort deepened when Dylan released *Self Portrait* in June 1970 – the month when Weatherman bombed the New York police, and the Black Panthers invoked a Revolutionary People's Convention, threatening to 'inflict total destruction upon Babylon'.

'Steve' reviewed *Self Portrait* for the British underground weekly *IT*: 'Dylan's no longer a leftist – he's as far right as you can get – at least on the evidence of this album. He's complacent, uncaring, and seemingly dedi-

cated to a solid conservative way of life. (...) This is the paradox: Dylan can still identify with the misfits and the rejected; he can still feel for the rebels; but his own writing is now set firmly on the establishment side.'

Yet the hip media was still prepared to cast Dylan a line. 'Steve' noted: "*Self Portrait*" is probably the most important Dylan album yet – either as a colossal put-on (which it might well be), or as a consolidation of the changes in his head since "John Wesley Harding." In a rival paper, *Frenz*, an anonymous reviewer took up this theme: 'Only two readings really stand the test of all 24 songs: firstly, that the statement has a finality about it ... "This", he is saying, "is what I am". (...) The second side of the argument is that the album is final, and that Dylan has given up any struggle within himself to "move on".'

The terms of this debate, and the depth of this concern, seemed irrelevant to the man who had shocked and tantalised Traum and Landy. Still less did Dylan seem likely to be bothered by the 20-page ramblings of a New York Dylanologist named A.J. Weberman, self-styled leader (and, at this point, sole member) of the Dylan Liberation Front (or DLF). Weberman somehow found 'the rationale behind Dylan's current apoliticism' within 'In Search Of Little Sadie'; and in an early sighting of his soon-to-become-legendary concordance, dared to translate the lyrics of 'The Boxer'. He picked up on the commonly-held conceit that Paul Simon's song had been inspired by Dylan, and then rendered each line into radical prose: 'I have squandered my resistance (= I have given up fighting American fascism).'

Strangely, Weberman's obtuse barbs – accompanied by his virtual stalking of Dylan's new home in Greenwich Village – caught a nerve, both in the singer and the wider radical community. Over the next 18 months, Weberman was a constant presence in Dylan's life, sometimes ghostly, sometimes all too corporeal. The apolitical hero of the Panthers and Weatherman was slowly, insidiously cut down to size – and, if Weberman is to be believed, back into a semblance of radical shape.

New Morning followed four months after *Self Portrait*, as is usually noted by Dylan biographers, *Rolling Stone* critic Ralph J. Gleason penned an effusive welcome for the album, titled 'We've Got Bob Dylan Back Again'. Less often quoted is the context of his jubilation:

'Here we are. Tim Leary armed and dangerous in Algiers. Nixon armed and dangerous in the White House. Bombs bursting in Rochester and guns firing at random in Cairo. The Kent State massacre being blamed on the massacred. Jackson's dead accused of violence and the poison spreading all around, as no man can trust his brother and the country an armed camp. (...) As we go into this dark night we will need what light, what sustenance we can get and that is just what [Dylan] has given us. The brightest light and the strongest sustenance of all - hope. This is a hopeful album and my God how we need it.'

There was much more in the same sentimental vein. Yet Gleason's paranoia was well founded. During 1969 and now 1970, the Nixon administration had hardened its defences against the dissent and disgust

aroused by its handling of the Vietnam War. The COINTELPRO intelligence operation against the Black Panthers – involving surveillance, spies, infiltrators, forged letters and faked phone calls, even murder, anything that would topple the black power movement into self-destruction or at least mutual distrust – had softened the black-gloved determination of 1967 and 1968.

As Neil Young is still reminding us, there were *four (anti-war students) dead in Ohio*. Violence and discord had replaced the pacifist solidarity of the civil rights and anti-war crusades. Weather had gone underground; many of the left's most prominent leaders were in prison, in exile or in denial of their past; meanwhile, the Vietnam conflagration was spreading into Cambodia. It was a time both for terrorism, and for retreat; a new morning of individual anguish, not collective glory.

Gleason's reference to Timothy Leary illustrated how much the landscape had changed. The high priest of acid culture, a gentle guru who favoured turned-on introspection to political revolution, had been imprisoned in California on drugs charges. The Weather Underground had arranged his escape and he had fled to the apparent sanctuary of the Black Panthers' overseas embassy in Algiers, staffed by the exiled Eldridge Cleaver. Leary left behind a desperate call to arms: *'The conflict which we have sought to avoid is upon us. (...) Listen. There is no choice left but to defend life by all and every means possible against the genocidal machine. (...) Resist physically, robot agents who threaten life must be disarmed, disconnected by force ... Arm yourself and shoot to live ... Life is never violent.*

To shoot a genocidal robot policeman in the defense of life is a sacred act.'

In this troubled climate, the comforting, bucolic imagery of New Morning failed to satisfy those who believed they too were sheltering behind barricades. *'(Dylan's) like a ghost of his former self, and it drives me up the wall'*, complained psych-folk-rock protestor Country Joe McDonald. *'I don't know where the real Bob Dylan went, but I don't believe this one ... I don't know what happened to him, but something did - and he disappeared.'* Rumours that Dylan had joined, or was at least financially supporting, the Zionist pressure group, the Jewish Defence League, did nothing for his underground credentials.

Blinded by his own fervent radicalism, yet still under the spell of Dylan's iconic power, A.J. Weberman personified the disappointment of the left. He coined a theory: Dylan's lack of political commitment could only be explained if he was addicted to heroin, which Weberman named his 'current bag' (or c.b. for short). He applied this 'proof' to Dylan's previous work, with the aid of his notorious concordance, in which virtually every noun was assumed to denote 'dope' or 'junk'. Even the bland word 'something' apparently meant 'heroin' in Weberman's eyes; according to this crazed scholarship, the line *'if you see your neighbour carrying something, help him with his load'* actually translated as *'if you see your neighbour carrying heroin, help him with his stash of eleven bags of junk'*. (Numerologists please note: in Weberworld, a load is always eleven bags full.)

The c.b. theory solved other mysteries in Dylan's career, like the 1966 bike crash – a suicide attempt, Weberman declared, from which Dylan had only recovered by opting for 'a living death – his c.b.'. Yet Weberman's most fiery prose was reserved for Dylan's failure of political zeal, which was caused by – well, you can guess:

'Bob is now part of the power structure and is a reactionary force in rock. This is a result of his having many millions of \$ – "relationships of ownership" (who owns what). "They whisper in the wings, etc." (they prompt the politics of the rich). Another factor is Dylan's c.b. which makes him susceptible to arrest and also generally kills political response. Dylan must be dealt with. He has decided to return and live close to the culture he ripped-off and betrayed. But for how long?

"All Power To The Good Dylanologists – Free Bob Dylan From Himself."

As Dylan had once written, it's people's games you've got to dodge, and Weberman's involved analysing Dylan's garbage for tell-tale signs of his c.b.; harassing him on the street; even invading Dylan's home. In an unwise attempt to calm this righteous storm, Dylan agreed to talk calmly to Weberman (who recorded at least one conversation, which was made briefly available in the late 70s as a Folkways album, and chronicled several more encounters in the underground press).

A.J. duly reported to the counter-culture that *'Dylan said he didn't dig the Panthers because of their position on the Middle East situation - "Little Israel versus all those ...". I tried to explain to D how the*

Panthers believed that everyone has a right to live, Jews, Arabs AND Palestinian refugees.' Dylan excused himself by claiming, *'I don't follow politics'*, but did apparently attempt to appease Weberman by promising, *'I will write a song about political prisoners on my next album'*. A.J. also claimed that Dylan offered him a job within his entourage, plus exclusive access to his forthcoming recording sessions. But he was determined to hold out against these capitalist baubles: *'I know D's still into his c.b.'*, Weberman wrote, *'& he was trying to cool me out by using his charisma & offering me his "friendship", trying to co-opt me and the DLF, but we will fight on – till we win.'*

To mark Dylan's 30th birthday in May 1971, Weberman staged a Dylan Liberation Front demonstration in front of his Greenwich Village house. *'You're Invited To Dylan's Birthday Party'*, said his flyer. *'Dylan still sells millions of LPs to young people although he never plays concerts for them & despite the fact that Dylan made his reputation by putting down the establishment he now owns office buildings, stock in large corporations and dresses & looks like a businessman when he appears in public.'*

Sadly for Weberman, though fortunately for Dylan, the singer was out of the country for his birthday - in Israel, in fact, which might have sparked another volley of A.J.'s rhetoric had he realised. Despite the Weberman diatribe about Dylan's fashion sense and stock holdings (the left was now struggling to come to terms with the fact that many of its counter-culture heroes were multi-millionaires), it was Bob's drift away from the correct political

line which most infuriated his arch critic.

In a piece probably written before the birthday party, but not published in Britain until *IT* 106 in mid-June 1971, Weberman spelled out the details of Dylan's treachery:

I have come to the conclusion that Dylan has turned into A HYPOCRITE AND A LIAR back in late 1967. Bob Dylan, the same cat who wrote MASTERS OF WAR, a caustic indictment of munitions manufacturers, bought at least \$20,000 worth of stock in LING-TEMPKO-VOIGHT (LTV), a large Amerikan Corporate Giant which manufactures anti-personnel bombs for use against the people of Vietnam... If Dylan thinks he's gonna get away with shit like this that slimey motherfucker is fuckin crazy. A CAPITALIST PIG. About 3 months ago Dylan invested \$250,000 in an office building on Times Square and Broadway (1500 Bdwy)... So Zimmerman takes money from the hip community (most of his fans are freaks) and gives it back to the establishment which hippco-people generally despise...

So now I realize that despite Dylan's millions, heroin has turned him into a general rip-off artist who uses the reputation of the old groovey right-on Dylan to sell unimaginative, asshole shit to millions of young people.'

Then, of course, there was the question of Israel: *'DYLAN SUPPORTS RACIST & COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATIONS_ the Jewish Defence League is a militant organization whose aim is to attack anyone they believe to be anti-Jewish ... In my opinion these people are a disgrace to the humanistic traditions of Judaism.'* And Weberman alleged for the first time in print that Dylan had contributed \$5,000 to

the JDL - under the name (Freudians please note) of his late father, Abe Zimmerman.

Weberman's New York hustling - the garbage raids, the street demos, the bulletins and diatribes which filled the underground press - attracted a coterie of admirers. They included the equally sphenetic street singer and avowed anti-capitalist, David Peel; and Jerry Rubin, leader of the Yippies (Youth International Party), an anarchic hippie organisation equally devoted to surreal, dope-crazed humour and the overthrow of the Nixon administration. Like Bobby Seale of the Panthers, Rubin had been one of the Chicago Eight; not being a black activist, he had succeeded in staying out of jail.

Together, Weberman, Peel and Rubin broadened the horizons of the DLF, which was rechristened the Rock Liberation Front (RLF). As outlined in the US radical mag *Freedom*, the RLF allowed itself an array of targets, notably *'rock singers who claim to represent the youth culture and who have long hair and have the trust of the kids, but are really no better than businessmen - except instead of producing Kunga butter they're producing records, they produce culture.'* Taken to its logical extreme, this would have entailed disavowing almost every working rock musician of the era; after all, even the distinctly non-commercial David Peel had been paid to issue two albums on Elektra, a musically diverse but politically non-aligned corporation.

As ever with Weberman, though, publicity took precedence over political logic. The RLF's first victim was neither particularly long-haired nor, in 1971, claiming to represent any part of youth

culture except himself, his wife and their two daughters: Paul McCartney. Weberman and his pals staged a mock Macca funeral in front of his in-laws' apartment on Park Avenue in Manhattan. Then they marched on the offices of Rolling Stone and the *Village Voice*, both of which were equally culpable of hypocrisy in the RLF's eyes.

McCartney was a soft target: he'd been reviled in the rock media for both his post-Beatles music and his supposed blame for the Beatles' break-up. While John Lennon was chanting '*Power To The People*' and campaigning for the IRA, and George Harrison was raising millions for famine relief in Bangladesh, McCartney was farming in Scotland. Lennon thought the fake funeral was '*funny as shit*', adding that he hoped the RLF wouldn't be after him next. To forestall that possibility, he arranged to meet Weberman, Peel and Rubin when he moved to New York in September 1971; and for several weeks thereafter, he prominently displayed a lapel badge which read: 'Free Bob Dylan'.

A.J. Weberman wasn't the only curse from which Dylan might have wished to be free in late 1971. He was also uneasy about the imminent publication of a biography by journalist Anthony Scaduto, especially after Weberman had told him that Scaduto was threatening to expose Dylan's supposed drug habit and homosexuality. '*He told Dylan I was doing a hatchet job*', Scaduto recalled to Johnny Rogan. '*Before then, Dylan wouldn't co-operate.*'

In an effort to ensure that Scaduto remained in shallow waters, Dylan agreed

to offer him a degree of input, sitting for several hours of interviews and even reading Scaduto's manuscript. '*He was a hell of a nice guy, sweet and charming, except when he got to the point where he said, "I don't want you to write anything about my wife and kids";*' Scaduto remembered. '*He meant not a word, not even her name or the kids' names. I just ignored his demand.*'

During their discussions, political issues were obviously raised. In a New York Times magazine profile of Dylan, published to coincide with the biography, Scaduto noted: '*In the last couple of years, some who deified him as a leader of the radical movement have expressed fears that he is no longer lashing out against a system into which he refused to fit.*' He quoted Dylan on the subject of political groupings: '*My enthusiasm has altered. In this day and age one can't put one's faith in organizations and groups. There has to be a certain amount of comradeship, root beginnings and moral justification to allow one to put his mind and body on the line.*'

Despite that, Scaduto raised the intriguing possibility that Dylan might recently have met leading members of the Black Panther Party. He stated that one of the Panthers' attorneys, Gerald Lefcourt, had written to Dylan on behalf of the Party's Chief of Staff, David Hilliard, asking if the singer would play a benefit concert for the BPP, or at least make a substantial contribution to their funds. The FBI's COINTELPRO assault on the Panthers, plus the harassment of several major police departments, had sparked a long series of armed confrontations between activists and the men they called

‘the pigs’. Several prominent Panthers had been killed; dozens more were in prison, awaiting trial. Most of the Party’s resources had to be directed towards attorneys’ fees and other legal expenses. Even with their ‘Supreme Commander’, Huey Newton, now out of prison, the Black Panther Party was on the verge of financial collapse.

According to the story Scaduto had heard on the underground telegraph, Dylan had agreed to meet Newton and Hilliard – but the encounter faltered almost immediately, when Dylan began to lecture the Panthers about their antagonism towards Israel. Scaduto was told that Hilliard had sprung to his feet in anger, saying: ‘*Let’s get out of here. We can’t talk to this Zionist pig!*’ The more placable Newton is said to have intervened, telling his comrade to ‘*Cool it*’, and continuing the conversation for another hour. Dylan, however, was unwavering in his response: ‘*I can’t help you as long as the Panthers are against Israel*’.

Scaduto confronted Dylan with this account, but received a curt response in vintage *Dont Look Back* style: ‘*What meeting? Why don’t you talk to Huey about it?*’ Panther sources also denied that the liaison with Dylan had taken place. Scaduto noted that, in any case, he’d been informed that Hilliard had been in jail and Newton in China when the meeting was supposed to have occurred. Hilliard was convicted and jailed in July 1971; Newton left for a comradely two-week trip to China in late September 1971; Scaduto’s article appeared in the *New York Times* on 28th November 1971. By this reckoning, Scaduto had presumably been told that Dylan and the

Panthers had met in late September or early October 1971.

Tantalisingly, there is no concrete evidence to confirm or rule out the Panthers/Dylan meeting. Newton wrote his autobiography, *Revolutionary Suicide*, in 1972/73; he made no mention of Dylan in the book, despite Bobby Seale’s earlier testimony about his infatuation with ‘Ballad Of A Thin Man’. If the meeting had occurred and Newton had felt betrayed by his musical hero, then he might have wished to conceal the episode; or, perhaps more likely, he could have devoted a chapter to honkies who talk loud but end up saying nothing.

Two decades later, David Hilliard also published an autobiography, *This Side Of Glory*; once again, Dylan was absent from the text. There is no record that Hilliard shared Newton’s admiration for *Highway 61 Revisited*; but in the early 90s he would certainly have been aware of the potential media interest in an encounter with one of the century’s most prominent cultural figures. Equally, both Newton and Hilliard may have felt that another brush-off from a white liberal wasn’t worthy of reporting in the midst of the assassinations, jail sentences and internecine warfare which was the BPP’s lot in the early 70s. Or, of course, the meeting might never have taken place.

In his Dylan chronology, *A Life In Stolen Moments*, Clinton Heylin pinpointed the meeting almost a year earlier than Scaduto, in December 1970. He wrote: ‘*The meeting does not go well and both sides part without finding any common ground*’. Heylin also penned an informative biographical sketch about Dylan’s collabo-

rator in film, Howard Alk (*Telegraph* 18), in which he argued convincingly that it may well have been Alk who introduced Dylan to the Panthers.

The film-maker had involved members of the Party in two of his projects, *American Revolution II*, and *The Murder Of Fred Hampton*. The latter documented the December 1969 assassination of a leading member of the Panthers' Chicago chapter, during an early-hours police/FBI assault. Despite police claims that they had been attacked first, subsequent forensic work proved that no more than one bullet had been fired by the occupants of the Panthers' apartment, compared with several hundred coming from police guns; that, anyway, the police had fired first; that Hampton appeared to have been drugged by a police informer masquerading as a Panther before the raid took place; and that he was shot twice in the head while he lay semi-conscious in his bed. In the hands of Dylan and Jacques Levy, it might have been the perfect subject for a cinematic protest song.

Intriguingly, Heylin pointed out that *The Murder Of Fred Hampton* was funded by none other than Albert Grossman, who told Alk: '*That man's [Hampton] got to be heard*'. Yet this circumstantial evidence doesn't prove any more than that one of Dylan's key associates was a Panther sympathiser. Given the estranged nature of Dylan's relationship with his manager at this point, Grossman's financial contribution to Alk's film might have made Dylan less likely to add his own support, not more.

Likewise, A.J. Weberman's January 1971 account of conversations with Dylan,

in which he noted that '*Dylan said he didn't dig the Panthers*', doesn't confirm that he had actually met the black activists, merely that he had discussed them with A.J.

Yet there is one more concrete piece of evidence to suggest that, at the very least, Dylan had the Black Panthers and their crusade on his mind in the final months of 1971. In November that year, he issued a single which was greeted as his first protest song since the mid-60s. Its subject was another radical black icon, and Panthers member, who had just died in a shoot-out with the law: George Jackson.

A footnote in Michael Gray's *Song And Dance Man III* highlights one of history's vanishing acts: '*When "Soledad Brother" was published, the "Sunday Times" called George Jackson "one of the great voices of the American left". Now you look him up in vain in almost all the major encyclopaedia and in the reference books on who's who in recent political and public life. He's become an unperson.*'

There were two caricatures of George Jackson current in the early 70s. The first described a petty criminal driven to extreme violence during his years of incarceration; who masqueraded as an apostle of civil rights and righteous radicalism in an attempt to win parole; who cruelly tossed a guard to his death from a Soledad Prison parapet; and who was killed during a savage escape attempt, during which several police officers were butchered. The second was a mythic hero, an American Che, a symbol of black oppression and the promise of liberation, the movement's premier philosopher and rhetorician, who was illegally retained in prison for a \$70

robbery, framed for one murder, and then set up so that he could be executed. The truth, as ever in the recent history of America, has been lost in a swirl of rival conspiracy theories.

Some dates to remember: Jackson was charged with murder, alongside two fellow inmates (collectively the Soledad Brothers), after a prison officer was killed in January 1970; seven months later, his brother Jonathan Jackson died in a shoot-out outside a California courtroom, having taken a judge and several jurors hostage in an attempt to win his brother's release; George Jackson's collection of letters from prison, *Soledad Brother*, was published to ecstatic reviews from the underground press in November 1970; Jackson died on 21st August 1971, in San Quentin prison.

His fate was linked in counter-culture mythology with that of Angela Davis, a black professor and Communist Party activist who (it was alleged) provided Jonathan Jackson with the guns with which he took his hostages. She had regularly written to George Jackson in prison, but went on the run after Jonathan's death. She was caught two months later, and remained in jail, charged with conspiracy to commit murder, until being found innocent on all counts in June 1972. In her honour, John Lennon penned possibly his weakest song ever, 'Angela'; while the Rolling Stones celebrated her in the vaguer but noticeably less crass 'Sweet Black Angel'.

Bob Dylan chose instead to write a song mourning the death of Davis's imprisoned comrade. 'George Jackson' was released on 22nd November 1971; recorded on 4th

November; and written, so CBS Records informed the press, a day earlier. Some accounts of Dylan's career have him rushing to the studio, overcome by his grief at Jackson's death; in fact, more than two months (and enormous press coverage, both over and underground) passed between the shooting in San Quentin and the composition of Dylan's song.

Had Dylan met the Black Panthers during the intervening weeks, they would doubtless have informed him that Jackson had been appointed an honorary Field Marshal of the Party and that his death was the most significant tragedy to date in the sorry history of black liberation in America. Whether or not his interest was piqued by Newton and Hilliard, or Weberman, or simply the pages of the New York press, Dylan was reportedly moved to read *Soledad Brother*, and then channel his sense of loss and outrage into song.

A.J. Weberman was overjoyed by the apostate's conversion. He told the Liberation News Service that Dylan was 'coming around'; to Anthony Scaduto, he boasted: *'I feel great. When I started harassing Dylan through the media, I didn't think my chances of affecting him were too good. But the objective of the DLF has been reached. I don't think Bob would have changed without the DLF's pressure.'*

Yet Scaduto was among those who challenged the sincerity of Dylan's concern for George Jackson. Having initially opined that *'it works as music, and as an effective verbalization of the anguish so many felt over the killing'*, he began to talk to his friends in the Village, and discovered that they were less convinced by Dylan's gesture.

Subsequently Scaduto fired off an acerbic letter to the *Village Voice*. 'I said that if Dylan was not being about honest about his feelings,' he explained to Johnny Rogan, 'then he was no better than anyone else in rock'n'roll. I don't know why I wrote it. I'd been in a pub down the Village. I was drunk. I banged it off and felt sorry about it afterwards. We had no contact after that.'

Rolling Stone magazine commented: 'The song immediately divided Dylan speculators into two camps: those who see it as the poet's return to social relevance and those who feel that it's a cheap way for Dylan to get a lot of people off his back.' *Village Voice* critic Robert Christgau countered that 'Dylan responded with real human sympathy to a hideous assassination that "Rolling Stone" chose to fudge over with a notably pusillanimous account.'

British commentators were equally divided. Mick Farren of *IT* said: 'I may be naive, but I really feel that Dylan has put out this single because Jackson's murder is something that, even in his seclusion, he cannot ignore.' But another British underground newspaper, *Ink*, asked: 'Is George going to be turned into comfortable myth? Betrayed through brave, liberal pop songs and posters?' More pertinently, it reported: 'The Managing Director of CBS London, when asked if some or all of the profits of this record were going to the now empty defence funds of George's brothers (Soledad, Mangrove) replied: "There has been no discussion of this so far".' *Ink* suggested that Dylan fans should wait for the song to appear on an album, and meanwhile send their 50p to the Soledad Brothers or Mangrove Nine defence funds.

To my knowledge, Dylan has never commented on George Jackson, or his song, in any interview. Yet there are clues within his lyrics as to the depth of his emotional and political involvement. For example, the opening lines ('I woke up this morning/There were tears in my bed/They killed a man I really loved') suggest an immediacy of response unlikely in a man who had only discovered how passionately he felt after reading a book. Factually and philosophically, in fact, there was nothing in 'George Jackson' that betrayed any deeper knowledge of his subject's life and beliefs than Dylan could have learned from the six o'clock news. 'They were frightened of his power,' he said of the prison guards, 'they were scared of his love'; but love, especially for his captors, was an emotion markedly absent from most pages of *Soledad Brother*.

Michael Gray astutely decried the song's most revealing verse: 'Jackson says in one of his letters that, from now on, he's just going to divide people into the innocent and the guilty'. As Dylan re-states this, it is Us and Us, not Us and Them:

*'Sometimes I think this whole world
Is one big prison yard
Some of us are prisoners
The rest of us are guards.'*

This, one might feel, is Dylan's only authentic contribution to the song; also the sentiment most at odds with Jackson's political philosophy.

A.J. Weberman was triumphant in late November 1971. His hero had returned to the path of political correctness, and he had been instrumental in Dylan's conversion.

He no doubt reckoned that Dylan had made good on his promise, ten months earlier, to write a song about political prisoners. (As an aside, the RLF's first target, Paul McCartney, was moved to write his first piece of political protest, 'Give Ireland Back To The Irish', in February 1972. As with Dylan and 'George Jackson', many radical observers doubted his sincerity.)

A.J. also had an announcement to make: *'John and Yoko are the newest members of the Rock Liberation Front, a group dedicated to exposing hip capitalist counterculture ripoffs and politicizing rock music and rock artists.'* Dylan, Lennon, Weberman: his pantheon was complete.

Yet his pride was shortlived. On 2nd December 1971, the *Village Voice* carried a letter from the Rock Liberation Front - David Peel, Jerry Rubin, Yoko Ono, John Lennon, but decidedly not A.J. Weberman. As the text made clear, the RLF had turned against its founder:

'We ask A.J. Weberman to publicly apologise to Bob Dylan for leading a public campaign of lies and malicious slander against Dylan in the past year. It is about time someone came to Dylan's defence when A.J. published articles and went on radio calling Dylan a junkie - which he never was attacked Dylan for "deserting the movement" - when he was there before the movement and helped create it - and publicised Dylan's address and phone - exposing Bob and his wife and children to public embarrassment and abuse.'

Weberman is to Dylan as Manson is to the Beatles - and Weberman uses what he interprets Dylan's music to try and kill Dylan and build his own fame. Now A.J.

Weberman takes credit for Dylan's George Jackson song. More egocentric bullshit. Dylan wrote it in spite of Weberman and in spite of "the movement". Dylan wrote it because he felt it.

A.J. Weberman's campaign - and the movement's complicity with it - is in the current fad of everyone in the revolution attacking each other and spreading false rumours about each other. It's time we defended and loved each other - and saved our anger for the true enemy, whose ignorance and greed destroys our planet.'

The Rock Liberation Front's missive was accompanied by a contrite note from Weberman: *'Dear People, please accept my apologies for past untrue statements and also the harassment of Bob Dylan and his family. From now on I'll leave them alone. If any nasty articles come out about him I'm sorry. I wrote them long ago and I'm doing my best to have them killed. Sincerely, A.J. Weberman, Minister of Defence, Rock Liberation Front.'*

This volte-face was staggering. Lennon had worn Weberman's 'Free Bob Dylan' badge in public for months; now he and his right-on pals were distancing themselves from A.J.'s Yippie tactics, which they had outspokenly supported. What had happened to sever Weberman from his fellow rock liberators?

Yippie leader Jerry Rubin provided the answer in an interview with Jon Wiener, the author who uncovered Lennon's FBI files. "Dylan came to my house," Rubin told him, "and complained about A.J. Weberman. He said he had been in Israel on his 30th birthday and A.J. was picketing his house in New York and it was written up in the papers there so he had to cut his Israel trip

short. So I forced A.J. to apologise publicly to Dylan. Yoko actually got him to write the letter in the Voice. I thought that when Dylan saw he was free of A.J., he'd be so appreciative that he would agree to tour the country with John and Yoko, raising money for political causes and rallying people to go to San Diego. We'd make musical history as well as political history. The whole thing was going to revive the 60s. That was my plan”.

Rubin's account was not entirely accurate; some six months passed between the birthday event, and the expulsion of Weberman. Moreover, he claimed credit for instituting a plan which Lennon believed he had conceived. Yet the link between the RLF's attack on its founder, and the proposed Lennon tour of America, seems inescapable. As Lennon told a reporter in December 1971, 'We're just in the inception of revolution'. He intended to strike the first match.

Allen Ginsberg recalled in 1983, 'Yoko Ono and John Lennon decided that they would go on a tour of all the persecuted areas, the hot spots as they called them: to visit Lee Otis Johnson, who was in jail in Texas for 30 years for a joint, John Sinclair, Angela Davis, and others. So they formed a giant touring group and went to Ann Arbor.' There they played a benefit concert on 10th December 1971 for John Sinclair, leader of the radical White Panthers, who was serving a ten-year sentence for possession of two marijuana cigarettes. Two days after the show, Sinclair was released. Lennon greeted this as the first victory in the second American Revolution.

Ginsberg explained that the Lennons 'had an itinerary: they were going to wind up

in 1972 at the Republican Convention in Miami [the location was switched from San Diego during early summer 1972 – PD]. It might have resulted in enormous cultural changes, a sort of cultural revolutionary shot.' The former Beatle rightly considered that if Bob Dylan could also be persuaded to join the crusade, its power would be infinitely multiplied. He was encouraged by Ginsberg's testimony that on 17th November 1971, Dylan had joined him to record 'Going To San Diego', an anthem for the proposed demonstration.

'Lennon was trying to get Dylan into the tour,' Yippie activist Steve Albert told Jon Wiener. 'We couldn't ever get a commitment from Dylan. But Lennon said he was sure that if the tour started getting big headlines, Dylan would jump into it.' The FBI certainly believed so: an informer's report in January 1972 noted that 'PCPJ (New York People's Coalition For Peace & Justice) is presently planning to hold a peace concert at an unknown location in New Hampshire during the New Hampshire Presidential Primary. Plans presently are to have John Lennon and Bob Dylan take part in the concert.'

None of the concerts ever took place; the Yippie/RLF crusade never left port. As Allen Ginsberg noted, 'The FBI and Immigration and the Narcotics Bureau got together to try and expel [Lennon] from the country. Lennon – and Yoko Ono, who was a citizen – had to drop their whole political campaign.' Other pressures mounted on Lennon: he and his wife were involved in a custody battle over Yoko's daughter, and their efforts were severely hampered by the immigration dispute; plus he slowly began

to feel as if he was being used by these American radicals as a symbol, rather than a participant (still less a leader). In a mean-spirited moment, he lashed out at Jerry Rubin's supposed body odour, and his 'superstar ego' (and Lennon knew whereof he spoke on that subject). Through it all, Dylan remained at a discreet distance, having moved away from the Village to escape Weberman – and, perhaps, Lennon.

May 1972 found Lennon in court, battling to retain his right to remain in the USA. On the advice of his lawyer, Leon Wildes, he made it clear that he was no longer a threat to the US administration. *'They think we're going to San Diego, or Miami, or wherever it is,'* he said plaintively on *The Dick Cavett Show*. *'We've never said we're going. There'll be no big jam with Dylan, because there's too much going on.'*

Dylan was one of those who responded to Wildes' call for testimonials from prominent citizens, to justify Lennon's continued presence in the country. His warm words carefully avoided any hint of political activism: *'John and Yoko add a great voice and drive to this country's so called ART INSTITUTION. They inspire and transcend and stimulate and by doing so, only help others to see pure light and in doing that, put an end to this mild dull taste of petty commercialism which is being passed off as artist art by the overpowering mass media. Hurray to John and Yoko. Let them stay and live here and breathe.'*

As the momentum of the San Diego/Miami campaign ebbed away, so too did the heat of the Dylan/George Jackson controversy. An occasional critic still

vented his anger, such as David Walley of *IT*, who in a review of Scaduto's biography quipped that Dylan had become *'the Howard Hughes of the counter-culture. Having surrendered to the void, he has ceased to be an anticipated item. He can no longer mystify anyone except by inventing reasons for his name to appear in scurrilous rock-'n'-roll papers. And this was the idol?'*

Walley's judgement was prescient. Attention in the underground press switched away from Dylan (and indeed black liberation) during the early months of 1972, focusing instead on Nixon and Vietnam (in the States) and Ireland (in Britain). Yet there was one heart in which the old scars still burned.

In spring 1972, A.J. Weberman resurfaced, angry as hell at Dylan, as usual, and at Lennon as well. His rationale was the controversy over the album of George Harrison's Bangladesh benefit concert, from which all proceeds were supposed to be directed towards the famine victims. *New York* magazine had printed an article by Peter McCabe, alleging that Beatles manager Allen Klein was directing \$1.14 from the sale of each album into his own pocket; and that Columbia Records were stealing another 25¢ for Bob Dylan's services.

'Now it's time for others to speak out,' Weberman rampaged. *'Self-proclaimed radicals John and Yoko should either come out for or against Klein. The sidekick, Jerry Rubin, should make a public statement too. As should Bob Dylan regarding the twenty-five cents Columbia is getting from each album. He's willing to make a public squawk over Scaduto's book by going to the Voice office but not about the Bengalis getting*

ripped off. The mark of a shallow egotist.'

A review of Toby Thompson's Dylan book in the final issue of the British paper *Ink* around the same time provided a telling snippet of A.J. gossip. The pseudonymous 'Judas Priest' warned that Thompson's *Positively Main Street* would 'cause apoplexy among hardcore Dylan freex everywhere, and was allegedly the cause of A.J. Weberman's nearly successful suicide attempt'.

It was difficult to imagine even Weberman being so upset by the mild revelations in Thompson's affectionate book that he would seek to take his own life (an allegation that cannot be substantiated, incidentally). If suicide had ever been on Weberman's mind, it was more likely planted there by an act of betrayal from the people he had assumed were his closest comrades: the Rock Liberation Front. Out of the blue, some four months after the paper published Weberman's apology to Dylan, and six months after the same text had first appeared in the States, A.J. wrote to *IT*'s London office to retract it. He had never sounded more impassioned, or more aggrieved:

'I guess you took my apology at face value – but dig it, there was a lot behind it.

Like what would you do if John Sinclair's wife approached you and said that she believed that John & Yoko's appearance at the upcoming Sinclair benefit depended on your making that apology to Dylan. Then Jerry Rubin told me that if I'd apologise to Bob, John and Yoko would probably bail out political prisoner Dana Beal...

... and then your friends on the left went after you. That attack on me was bullshit - Jerry Rubin encouraged me to attack Dylan

–he came over to my pad and told me that the DLF was RIGHT ON and that Dylan was definitely a pig – and I looked up to him at the time.

David Peel played at the birthday party, supplied the sound equipment etc., and John Lennon wore a FREE BOB DYLAN–DLF badge on the front cover of the "New York Post", said Dylan took junk in a "Rolling Stone" interview [not in any text I've seen – PD] and wrote I DON'T BELIEVE IN Zimmerman... not a word of this was mentioned in their attack on me. It was like entrapment – they egged me on, gave me the equipment then busted me for it.

I didn't write that apology – John Lennon wrote it and I signed hoping for the best. I guess one of the reasons I did it was cause of [the] George Jackson single – I thought that Dylan might really be gettin back into it – but as it turned out Dylan kept all the bread from that single and just did it to get me off his back.

You see I really want to believe in Dylan – or wanted to... now I'm convinced there's really no hope of getting Dylan back into the movement – he's just too conservative in lifestyle and politics.

What I said about Dylan and JUNK is the fuckin truth. All the apologies in the world won't change what I learned about him by applying the analytic method of criticism to his poetry. He still owns office buildings on Times Square and still has millions of dollars. He supports the reactionary Israeli government instead of supporting progressive elements within Israel and has left the city for an estate on Long Island.

Now I'm friends with John and Yoko. In fact I'm going over to see them after I finish

this letter.. and I hope to get them to make some statement that I was unfairly pressured into making that apology though I must admit a lot of the blame rests on my shoulders. It hurt me a lot - I was really depressed for days - cause I feel I let down my people in England. I swear to you it will never happen again. POWER TO THE PEOPLE.'

Pointedly, Weberman signed his letter from the 'Dylan Archives', not the DLF or the RLF. Lennon never spoke a word in his defence. Henceforth A.J. became an increasingly isolated figure, never short of campaigns, but bereft of fellow campaigners. His revolution had burned out without ever showing flame.

Twice in the following years, the fall-out from the Dylan/George Jackson/RLF fiasco glowed back into life. Audiences at the initial shows on Dylan's January 1974 tour with the Band were greeted by a strangely familiar figure, handing out flyers with an equally familiar message:

'Free Bob Dylan? Why pay high ticket price\$ when Dylan is worth million\$?'

The Dylan you'll see is an imposter. The real Dylan was killed by cynicism brought on by: 1. Use of hard drugs (speed and heroin); 2. Capitalism – the ownership of war stock (Ling Tempco Veight) and real estate such as 1400 Broadway in NYC; 3. Support of rightist groups like the pro-Nixon Jewish Defence League, which wants to leave the fate of the survivors of the Nazi Holocaust in the hands of right-wing Germans such as Haldeman, Zeigheiler, Erlichman, Kalmbach, Buzhardt, etc. Evidence of Dylan's death can be seen in the lyrics of his recent songs excepting George Jackson.

But Dylan refused to meet with Jackson's mother and kept all the money from the song for himself! This was his first good song in years – before that his garbage got more attention than his poetry - and the only reason he wrote it was to get moderate A.J. off his back.'

The author was, of course, A.J. Weberman. His intervention inspired this exchange between Dylan and *Rolling Stone* reporter Ben Fong-Torres, during an interview in Montreal, a week into the tour:

'Q: I'd like to ask you about the rumors about your giving some of the profits from this tour to the Israeli war effort. One rumor has it that you're sending money in your father's name, and you've been characterized as an "ultra-Zionist".'

A: I'm not sure what a Zionist really is. I don't know how these things get started, really. It's just gossip.

Q: You told Newsweek that there's a new generation, that "everybody's thinking the same thing". Basically, that this isn't a time we need protest songs. Do you really believe that "everybody's thinking the same thing", and that you no longer need to write "message" songs?

A: There's still a message. But the same electric spark that went off back then could still go off again – the spark that led to nothing.'

A month later, a rather closer Dylan acquaintance raised the JDL issue in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, two days before Dylan's shows at the Oakland Coliseum just outside SF. In late 1971, Joan Baez had begun performing 'To Bobby', a song which pointedly called for Dylan to return to the movement. 'Won't you listen to the

lamb, Bobby,' she sang plaintively, *'they're crying for you'*. (Straying into Weberman territory, one might note a line from Planet Waves, Dylan's first proper post-1971 album: *'I ain't haulin' any of my lambs to the marketplace anymore'* [*'Tough Mama'*].)

Now Baez's sister Mimi Fariña penned an open letter to Dylan, regarding the continued rumours that he was using some of his tour profits to aid the Israeli war effort. She doubted the veracity of these reports, she wrote, but added: *'The money you earn is the money we are willing to give you... if it is going to support the taking of more lives, we should know that before we buy our tickets.'* Dylan didn't respond to this voice from the past.

When he returned to the road in late 1975, he was promoting a single – his first overtly political statement since 'George Jackson'. Once again, he had read a book by an imprisoned black man, and chosen to chronicle the inmate's case in song. Perhaps mindful of the criticism he had aroused by keeping the royalties from 'George Jackson', Dylan agreed that the proceeds from two Rolling Thunder Revue shows should go to the defence fund for Ruben 'Hurricane' Carter, a middleweight boxer imprisoned for a murder that he swore he hadn't committed.

As with Jackson, the debate about Carter's innocence has continued ever since. Joni Mitchell added a spark of contrariness to the Rolling Thunder excursion by becoming the first of the participants to doubt Carter's sincerity. But Dylan kept the faith: *'He's a righteous man... he's not your typical bank robber or mercy slayer.'*

A dissenting voice was raised in *The National Review* in April 1976. Under the title *Rock Music, Bob Dylan & The Outlaw Business*, it represented one of the most brutal (if cynical and factually challenged) assaults ever published on Dylan and rock culture in general. Some choice extracts:

'Successful pop stars are skilful market researchers, anticipating trends, performing for their constituencies the same function as the Establishment media - saying what their public wants to hear. With shameless sincerity they croon the messages of the moment, accurately reflecting the up to date counterculture fad...

Most successful in skimming the energies of the Outlaw Assembly Line... is Robert Zimmerman, who first conned his way onto the media stage by taking the name of a Welsh lyric poet & chanting plastic songs to a barbiturate beat... Sneering hatred and contempt, amplified and broadcast electronically, he created hateful realities for millions of adolescent listeners.

Then, in 1972, smarting from the accusation that he had copped out, Dylan electrifies the counterculture with his elegy for George Jackson. Once again hatred is turned against the Establishment. The record is a sensation. Zimmerman fans weep in gratitude that the bard has come back to fight injustice. Enormous airplay! The single rockets to the top! Dylan is again the Messiah! There is only one little flaw in the operation; there is one person who is not around to share the royalties and the applause. The slain martyr, George Jackson, is dead. [Hey, an early Zimmerman song was about another slain martyr, Medgar Evans.]

But no matter, there's a new seeding of

discontent, a new victim to sanctify, a new generation of gullible youth thus encouraged to nihilist sacrifice and stupid rebellion. And a new wave of popularity for the clever kid who in one album made more money in imitating Guthrie than Woody ever saw in his life. It's the Outlaw Exploitation Game, folks, more fun and easier than Texas oil-drilling. Just wait until the next martyr is discovered and watch it gush. Who's next? Here comes Hurricane Carter and another cheap shot at the charts...

Does Dylan stand on picket lines? Get his head busted by company police? March at Selma in the hard rain? . . . Yes, we know what we was against. But what was (is) he for? (Besides fake nostalgia.)...

It's no accident that the Weathermen, the most publicized group of Dylan groupies, that bewildering, fugitive band of terrorists now cut off from their culture and condemned to underground existence, took their name from a depressing Dylan song...

The author of this jaundiced diatribe was none other than our old friend Timothy Leary, whom we last glimpsed en route to Algeria, Weather Underground pistol by his side, heading for the sanctuary of the Black Panther compound run by Eldridge Cleaver. Much had changed since 1971. In a fit of ultra-left righteousness, fuelled by COINTELPRO infiltrators, Cleaver had split the Black Panther Party and declared Huey Newton to be a traitor to the cause of black liberation. Supporters of the rival factions gunned each other down; the Nixon administration watched with glee.

Cleaver soon headed for France, and gradually his revolutionary fervour ran dry. He negotiated a trip home, claiming to

have undergone a 'born-again' religious conversion.

Leary too had found his way back to America. He fled Algiers, alleging that Cleaver had attempted to hold him and his wife prisoners. In Switzerland, he gave himself up to agents of the American government, who flew him to the States. There he served the briefest of prison sentences, despite having escaped at the start of the decade only a few months into a ten-year stretch. Rumours spread amongst the scattered, beleaguered remnants of the Weather Underground that Leary had won his freedom by testifying against the activists who had freed him from prison and engineered his flight to Africa. Weighed alongside his own desertion of the movement, Leary's accusations against Dylan carried no power, left no mark.

'My songs were never political in the sense of dogma,' Dylan told interviewer Marc Rowland in 1978. *'As far as somebody getting beat up and going to jail for a crime they didn't commit, that's injustice, that's not politics. I'll fight against it like anyone else would. It's something I don't think any one political party can solve.'*

His supposed comrades from the late 60s counter-culture provided few reasons to shake his disinterest in politics, especially the revolutionary brand. That former scourge of 'pig' culture, Eldridge Cleaver, moved swiftly from evangelical Christianity to the Mormons and the Moonies, before becoming a stalwart of the Republican Party now headed by his old adversary, Ronald Reagan. Huey Newton was shot dead in 1989, long after he'd erased any trace of his hero status with well-publi-

cised drug abuse, sexual violence and even murder. His Black Panther Party bowed and broke under the strain of COIN-TELPRO, becoming little more than an adjunct to local social service departments.

One despairing batch of BPP radicals formed the ill-fated terrorist organisation, the Black Liberation Army, a revolutionary vanguard with no following among the people. The Weather Underground met the same fate; its leaders are still being tracked down and tried for their crimes of violence. John Lennon was shot in 1980, shortly after renouncing his early 70s radicalism. A.J. Weberman turned from Dylanology to the eternal conspiracy web of the Kennedy assassination, among less healthy pursuits. George Jackson, as Michael Gray pointed out, is virtually forgotten. And Bob Dylan now offers a stark brand of eschatological rhetoric – dark prophecies of destruction and decay, leavened not by radical zeal but by surreal humour. He appears not to have veered from his 1974 view that the late 60s movement was ‘a spark that led to nothing’.

Yet even in this age of political apathy and post-Marxist conservatism, vestiges of Dylan’s close encounters with the radical left remain. In 1996, the Maoist International Movement staged a Prison

Awareness Week at the University of Massachusetts; one of the highlights was apparently a heartfelt, irony-free performance of Dylan’s ‘George Jackson’ by an unnamed activist. Quotes from that song litter the websites of American anti-prison campaigners, testament to the continued political power of Dylan’s name and words.

In the final years of his life, Eldridge Cleaver veered back and forth between drug connections and the lecture circuit. In his latter guise, he continued to fill his speeches with Dylan quotations, regularly opening his oration with a 35-year-old phrase: *‘I’ll know my song well before I start singing’*. Erratic to the last, Cleaver now claimed to be both a conservative and a radical; through each incarnation, his devotion to Dylan remained intact.

And early in 2002, Huey P. Newton was treated to a TV biopic on the PBS network in America, directed by radical black filmmaker Spike Lee. Reviewer after reviewer noted that the screenplay credited Newton’s two biggest influences as being Mao Tse-Tung – and Bob Dylan. ‘Hit ’em with that Zimmerman!’, cried the Newton character. And from the soundtrack echoed the familiar chords of ‘Ballad of a Thin Man’. Somewhere, Mr. Jones is enjoying the last laugh.