
from *Inside A Prune*

Hello again, and welcome to issue 18. I hope you enjoy our wide and varied selection of contents. As ever, our eternal gratitude to our contributors.

Things have been as busy as ever in Dylan World, touring continues apace. However, the show that has impressed me most is one now on DVD that I have never been that keen on when listening to audio only. I am referring to the partial release of the 1969 Isle of Wight show, which is not only of historical import but also gives a whole other slant to the event. Dylan is so involved, in control and confrontational. Another DVD you must get is *Changing Tracks* from Rock Milestones series on classic albums, in this case the peerless *Blood on the Tracks*. This is because your beloved editor features strongly in it, as do Mick Gold and Clinton Heylin, both famed for earlier appearances in *Judas!*

All these things going on – and, naturally, over and above all, the expectant wait for *Modern Times*. Soon, however, you are going to have to enjoy it all without *Judas!* beside you. Yes, it is my sad duty to tell you that we are building up to saying ‘fare-thee-well’ (or ‘goodbye’, if Bob is correct in thinking it a better word). We have come to a point where both of us have virtually no spare time left to keep the ship afloat at the quality standard we said we would maintain. You may have noticed that our proof-reading was skimmed on recently as we suffered under time pressure and had to wing it without our previous expert help. We tried hard to keep errors to a minimum but they’ve been proliferating. It goes deeper than that, too. One of the great pleasures of being an editor is encouraging an idea from its first steps through to the finished article. When time becomes so scarce that this sours from being a pleasure and starts to feel a burden, it is time to stop. Simply put, our respective various employments have left us no time to do the job properly.

However, this is not the final issue; two more are due, in October and January. It is, however, impossible for us to continue into the next calendar year, so what we are proposing is a double issue in December.

The final, double, issue will be in two parts. Issue 19 will be on *Modern Times* and issue 20 on everything else. Mick Gold, Clinton Heylin, Mike Marqusee and Larry Sloman are already in line to appear. In addition we already have *Razor Edge II*'s 2002 chapter and a fascinating interview revolving around the Cardiff 1966 show.

Please send in anything you have been meaning to write for us in the next few months, as this will be your last chance to appear (or re-appear) in the pages of *Judas!* If you do not want to write an article, then send in a letter telling us what your favourite articles have been over the years. Finally I should mention that it was good to meet with long term friends and to make some new ones at Bournemouth and, as I can still say it: ‘best wishes until next time to all of you.’

Andrew Muir

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Living in the Land of Nod: Dylan's Vision of America

by D. A. Carpenter

*The folk music scene had been like a paradise that I had to leave, like Adam had to leave the garden. It was just too perfect. In a few years' time a shit storm would be unleashed. Things would begin to burn. Bras, draft cards, American flags, bridges, too – everybody would be dreaming of getting it on. The national psyche would change and in a lot of ways it would resemble the Night of the Living Dead. The road out would be treacherous, and I didn't know where it would lead but I followed it anyway. It was a strange world ahead that would unfold, a thunderhead of a world with jagged lightning edges. Many got it wrong and never did get it right. I went straight into it. It was wide open. One thing for sure, not only was it not run by God, but it wasn't run by the devil either. (Bob Dylan, *Chronicles: Volume One* 292-93)*

And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. (4 Gen. 16)

I.

Dylan's vision of America catalogues the terrain of our post – Edenic land of Nod. His Adamic journey is not a godless one, but God does not run it either. There is good and evil, but the lines are blurred. It is never black and white with Dylan. His vision is a complicated one that pretends no answers. All he can do is record what he sees. However, his vision and journey is not aimless. He is in search for the uncloaked truth of the American experience. As Dylan notes in *Chronicles: Volume One*,

There was a broad spectrum and common wealth that I was living upon, and the basic psychology of that life was every bit a part of it, you could see the full complexity of human nature. Back there, America was put on the cross, died and was resurrected. There was nothing synthetic about it. The godawful truth of that would be the all-encompassing template behind everything that I would write. (86)

The 'back there' Dylan is referring to is the Civil War, where brother was pitted against brother and the dream of America as the new Eden was torn to shreds by canon balls and muskets. The American myth of paradise disappeared in smoke. What arose out of this self-crucifixion of the country was a world where the 'godawful truth' of the human condition couldn't be ignored. As Dylan says, this is the 'all-encompassing template' that can be found at the base of his work: the destruction of the Edenic myth and the horrifying knowledge that we acquired from this destruction. Yet even in the destruction of the myth there are still some preserved ruins of it that can be found in work like Dylan's.

Before dealing with Dylan's work specifically in this light we must first understand what that destroyed American myth was. Quite simply, the myth was that America was a new Eden, unspoiled by Old World history. It was a chance to start over. As R. W. B. Lewis states,

[T]he American myth saw life and history as just beginning. It described the world as starting up again under fresh initiative, in a divinely granted second chance for the human race, after the first chance had been so disastrously fumbled in the darkening Old World. (5)

Remnants of this myth have continued to exist in the form of the ever allusive American Dream: a chance to start over, to succeed, leaving the past behind as if it were part of another life. Unfortunately, we can't escape the Old World, our past, and Dylan was quite

aware of this; he even embraced that fact. It is inextricably part of us and every action we take. You can be sure that when Dylan looked forward early in his career the past was close behind.

One of the greatest proponents of this American myth was Walt Whitman, that is, of course, until the Civil War destroyed it. He is perhaps the first true American Adam because we can see in his work a naming and cataloguing of America and, after the Civil War, the pain of losing the idealistic landscape he explored. We can see Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* as the manifesto for the myth, the code of Adam in the beginning of a New World, so to speak. Lewis notes, 'Whitman manages to make us feel what it might have been like; and he succeeds at last in presenting the dream of the new Adam – along with his sorrows' (42). In the preface to the 1855 edition to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman presents a portrait of a poet with Adamic qualities, whose knowledge is commensurate to the understanding of the common people. He is to catalogue and reflect the new Eden: 'When the long Atlantic coast stretches longer and the Pacific coast stretches longer he easily stretches with them north or south. He spans between them also from east to west and reflects what is between them' (Whitman 16). Also, the Adamic poet is expected 'to indicate the path between reality and their souls' (Whitman 16). Here, one cannot help to call to mind Dylan's proclamation in 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall,'

*And I'll tell it and think it and speak it
and breathe it*

*And reflect it from the mountain so all
souls can see it
Then I'll stand on the ocean until I
start sinkin'
But I'll know my song well before I
start singin' (Lyrics 60)*

We can characterize the new Adam even further, as Lewis does:

There, in fact, is the new Adam. If we want to profile him, we could start with the adjectives Whitman supplies: amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary; especially unitary, and certainly very easily amused; too complacent, we frequently feel, but always compassionate – expressing the old divine compassion for every sparrow that falls, every criminal and prostitute and hopeless invalid, every victim of violence or misfortune. (Lewis 47)

We can see many of these qualities in Dylan; in fact, many of them could sum up the attitude of a lot of his work. Certainly Dylan is amused at the world around him in much of his early work, especially in any one of his talking blues songs. Who, but an amused Adam, can make light of World War III in 'Talkin' WWII Blues'? It is also a song where the speaker finds a girl in the war's aftermath and entices her to 'go play Adam and Eve' (*Lyrics* 64). Complacency is definitely something Dylan has been accused of. Joan Baez commented on this complacency to Robert Shelton, 'He criticizes society and I criticize it, but he ends up saying there is not a goddamned thing you can do about it, so screw it' (qtd. in Gill 68-9). However, Dylan's compassion far exceeds any action he has ever taken.

He lets his work do the talking. As stated earlier, he denied any responsibility to be a leader, but continued to catalogue the human struggle with compassion. We can see this compassion, in fact, in songs about criminals ('Billy'), prostitutes ('Lily, Rosemary, and the Jack of Hearts'), hopeless invalids ('John Brown'), and victims of violence or misfortune ('The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll' and 'Hollis Brown'). Even the old divine compassion for every sparrow that falls makes its way into Dylan's work ('Every Grain of Sand'). The question we may come to ask is, are these Adamic qualities something infused in Dylan's work specifically due to Whitman's influence or did they come from somewhere else?

The Whitmanesque characteristics of Dylan's work have often been noted, primarily because they share these same qualities, but I would argue that these qualities do not come from direct influence of Whitman himself. Dylan probably read and appreciated Whitman. He has mentioned him on more than one occasion. However, it would appear that his understanding of these 'new Adam' qualities was filtered through another admirer of Whitman's, Woody Guthrie. After all, it is not Whitman that Dylan refers to as 'the true voice of the American Spirit' (*Chronicles* 99). It is Woody Guthrie.

The 'new Adam' qualities discussed above could easily be attributed to Guthrie, except for complacency. He was quite the opposite of complacent. Nevertheless, Woody was, in fact, a descendant of the Whitmanesque Adam. In fact, for Woody, there was an 'unspoken

assumption that he could cram the whole country into his songs; the belief – like Whitman’s – that *he* could say what America was’ (Klein 204). He even once jested in his journal, ‘I believe that I could be a better poet than Walt Whitman if only I didn’t have four children to support’ (qtd. in Klein 295). Like Whitman, for Woody ‘The world and history lay all before him. And he was the type of creator, the poet par excellence, creating language itself by naming the elements of the scene about him’ (Lewis 5). One only has to listen to a Woody Guthrie song to understand this. His songs detail the world he has experienced. In short, he wrote what he saw. He even noted this at the bottom of the page where he first wrote the lyrics to ‘This Land is Your Land.’ The note read, ‘You can only write what you see’ (qtd. in Klein 470). A prime example of this mantra is his seminal album from 1940, *Dust Bowl Ballads*, wherein he sings, ‘Well as I look around it’s mighty plain to see/ this world is such a great and funny place to be’ (‘I Ain’t Got No Home’). These lyrics are extremely resonant in Dylan’s work from the beginning. This can be especially noted in ‘Like a Rolling Stone’ and its chorus. For Guthrie, the world was indeed wide open and he spent his life singing what was so funny about it, good and bad. To be sure, Guthrie embraced his Adamic role, and what better theme song for an American Adam than ‘This Land is Your Land’?

Guthrie continually emphasized the need to catalogue and record everything he saw in the world. He even takes the opportunity to do so throughout his auto-

biography, *Bound for Glory*. One of the most memorable instances comes near the end of the autobiography where Woody is watching the wind blow trash and loose sheets of paper and newspaper through the back alleys of New York. Woody, observing from The Rainbow Room, addresses the blowing paper and compares it to himself,

But keep on trying to tell your message, and keep on trying to be a picture of a man, because without that story and without that message printed on you there, you wouldn't be much. Remember, it's just maybe, some day, sometime, somebody will pick you up and look at your picture and read your message, and carry you in his pocket, and lay you on his shelf, and burn you in his stove. But he'll have your message in his head and he'll talk it and it'll get around. I'm blowing, and just as wild and whirling as you are, and lots of times I've been picked up, thrown down, and picked up; but my eyes has been my camera taking pictures of the world and my songs has been messages that I tried to scatter across the back sides and along the steps of the fire escapes and on the window sills and through the dark halls. (Bound for Glory 295)

This could very well be considered a definition of the American Adam, especially when compared to Lewis’ definition. It is quite apparent that Dylan took Woody’s words to heart. Quite fittingly, the song considered by most as Dylan’s anthem, ‘Blowin’ in the Wind,’ echoes this

passage in its sentiment. In *Chronicles* Dylan notes that he read through *Bound for Glory* ‘from cover to cover like a hurricane, totally focused on every word, and the book sang out to me like the radio.’ For Dylan, ‘*Bound for Glory* is a hell of a book. It’s huge. Almost too big’ (*Chronicles* 245). Woody incites everyone with something to say, including himself, to ‘keep on trying to be a picture of a man.’ After reading the book and incessantly listening to Woody Guthrie, Dylan felt prepared to follow in the footsteps of this American Adam. Even before meeting Woody, Dylan believed it was his duty to continue in the tradition. As he notes, ‘One thing for sure, Woody Guthrie had never seen nor heard of me, but it felt like he was saying, ‘I’ll be going away, but I’m leaving this job in your hands. I know I can count on you’ (*Chronicles* 246).

In Dylan’s ‘Song to Woody,’ from his first album, *Bob Dylan*, he sings,

*I’m out here a thousand miles from my
home
Walkin’ a road other men have gone
down
I’m seein’ your world of people and
things
Your paupers and peasants and princes
and kings. (Lyrics 5)*

Here, Dylan is walking a road other men have traveled and his eyes are his camera. This road, surrounded by paupers, peasants, and kings, is of extreme importance in consideration of Dylan’s *Highway 61 Revisited*, but at the moment we can take this image as an image of a displaced person, a weary traveler exiled

from home, or, in other words, Adam. Dylan’s voice seethes with giddy weariness as he sings this song, but it is a voice that carries the weight of many more than just his twenty-one years. It is the weight of the human condition and Original Sin that the ‘funny old world’ has revealed to him. He sings that it ‘seems sick an’ it’s hungry, it’s tired an’ it’s torn/ It looks like it’s a-dyin’ an’ it’s hardly been born’ (*Lyrics* 5). This figure of the weary traveler becomes displaced even further from home as Dylan’s work continues through his career. At the very end of the song the singer disclaims any hard living equality with Woody, ‘The very last thing that I’d want to do/ is to say I’ve been hittin’ some hard travelin’ too’ (*Lyrics* 5). Is the singer being modest or is this a futile, half-hearted wish by the troubadour to bypass the ‘hard travelin’’, possibly in the land of Nod, where the declining world is too much to bear? Of course, the traveler knows his duty and that the road ahead is rough; he will continue to travel, cataloguing the good, bad, and ugly of the land. It is this underlying attitude that propels Dylan’s work, which is an attitude partly indebted to Woody Guthrie and the American Adam role he played before Dylan came along. Dylan may have sung that, ‘I’m seein’ *your* world,’ but it’s quite apparent that Dylan knew that he was inheriting that world himself. While Woody’s influence played an integral part in the forming of Dylan’s impulse to explore America through song as some sort of Adamic, weary traveler, Jack Kerouac also played an important role in his development. Instead of just a weary traveler, Dylan became a mad,

weary traveler. Woody was the method and voice of Dylan's work. As Dylan notes,

The folk and blues tunes had already given me my proper concept of culture, and now with Guthrie's songs my heart and mind had been sent in another cosmological place of that culture entirely. All other cultures of the world were fine, but as far as I was concerned, mine, the one I was born into, did the work of them all and Guthrie's songs even went further. (Chronicles 248)

However, Kerouac provided the specifically American, almost Adamic, language of his time.

It is no secret that Kerouac, like Woody, had a tremendous influence on Dylan. The sentiment in much of Dylan's work somewhat parallels Kerouac's, where 'there is a sentiment ... that is a version of the omnipresent impulse in every generation for discovery of the new and unknown, a westering quest that may lead in any geographic or personal direction' (Sax 7). Dylan, now in his 60s, still demonstrates this impulse, especially in his Hamlet-like soliloquy 'Highlands,' where he sings, 'I got new eyes/ Everything looks far away' (*Lyrics* 573). This once again calls in to mind the role of the American Adam, which Kerouac also identified with, although there is a difference. Kerouac did it through traveling the land and writing about it, much in the same vein as Guthrie; Dylan may have the sentiment but it is from traveling through the consciousness and history of the land. Of course, Kerouac and Guthrie also did so, but Dylan seems to have stepped further

back from physical experience in contemplating the world around him. The impulse to discover is ever present in Dylan's work, whether it is discovery in the world or the self.

While Dylan notes in *Chronicles* that *On the Road* 'had been like a bible for me,' he also disclaims the hipster character portrayed in it,

Within the first few months I was in New York I'd lost my interest in the 'hungry for kicks' hipster vision that Kerouac illustrates so well in his book On the Road ... I still loved the breathless, dynamic bop poetry phrases that flowed from Jack's pen, but now, that character Moriarty seemed out of place, purposeless. (Chronicles 57)

Dylan may have left the Beat character and energy behind when he embarked on his early folk career, but their spirit and language, especially Kerouac's, remained a constant in his work. Allen Ginsberg, another Beat influence and friend of both Kerouac and Dylan, in a 1985 interview talked about Kerouac's influence on Dylan, specifically Kerouac's *Mexico City Blues*,

Somebody gave it to him and it influenced his poems – or 'blew his mind', as he said – it being the first book of poetry which talked the American language to him, and so influenced his writings, or turned him on to poetry, as he said at Kerouac's grave. (Ginsberg 170)

The fact that Kerouac's collection of poetry 'talked the American language to

him,' is extremely important to measure Kerouac's influence. As I mentioned earlier, it is apparent that Kerouac's language could almost be considered some kind of a particularly American Adamic language of discovery. Dylan tuned in to this language, which could capture the essence of the American experience of the fifties and sixties. There are definite signs of this new Adamic bop in Dylan's work, especially during the mid-sixties, but it is always shaded with the American language of the past. When considering Dylan's language in this light we can characterize it as a frantic, forward moving force that runs backward through time at every instance.

From Dylan's earliest immersion into folk he became interested in the language of the past, possibly in order to create his own language to express the present as manifested by the past. While living in New York City as a young, unknown folk singer Dylan would roam the New York Public Library, where he 'started reading articles in newspapers on microfilm from 1855 to about 1865 to see what daily life was like. I wasn't so much interested in the issue as intrigued by the language and the rhetoric' (*Chronicles* 84). Other than the fact that Dylan mentions this two pages before he tells us that the 'godawful truth' of this time period in American history would serve as a template for his work, he is also calling attention to his preoccupation with the language of the time. It is no wonder that every new word that came out of his mouth could sound so archaic, like it was that way from the beginning of time. It was ingrained with the fusion of

new and old, as if Dylan as Adam was the only one capable of naming things. When he gives something a name you don't ask any questions. It just seems right, just as Adam was able to capture the essence of the animals he named. 'And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof' (2 Gen. 19). When Adam named a horse a horse it was because it was a horse by nature. Whatsoever Dylan calls anything, it seems like that was the name thereof. It is the same when Dylan refers to a woman's mouth as a 'cowboy mouth' or, more importantly, Lucifer as 'the cowboy angel', the reference seems to be accepted immediately (*Lyrics* 154, 211). The way Dylan turns a phrase or coins certain metaphors that are so unique, but at the same time familiar, is reminiscent of the idea of Adamic language. The fusion of old and new solidified Dylan's language in timelessness, especially in the mid sixties with the albums *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited*, and *Blonde on Blonde*. In a 2004 interview with *60 Minutes* Dylan described some of his writing from this time as 'magic.'

I don't know how I got to write those songs ... Well, those early songs were almost magically written. Darkness at the break of noon/ Shadows even the silver spoon/ The handmade blade, the child's balloon/ Eclipses both the sun and moon ... Well, try to sit down and write something like that. There's a magic to that and it's not a Sigfreid and Roy kind of magic. It's a penetrating kind of magic. (60 Minutes)

The penetrating magic that went into a song like ‘It’s Alright, Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)’, the song to which Dylan refers, is what I have been referring to as Adamic. It is a language that is archaic in the sense that it refers to the core form of things, but also contemporary at the same time because of its immediate acceptance. The words get to the very heart of the matter; they penetrate to the deepest levels of meaning. Here Dylan is discounting any control over his creative process at the time, yet he somehow knew to write it down. It is a very private vision Dylan shares with us, but at the same time that private vision hits the core of every human experience. In a song like ‘Restless Farewell’ from his 1963 album, *The Times The Are A-Changin’*, he talks of his own creative and personal struggles,

*Oh, ev’ry thought that’s strung a knot
in my mind
I might go insane if it couldn’t be
sprung
But it’s not to stand naked under
unknowin’ eyes
It’s for myself and my friends my
stories are sung. (Lyrics 97)*

Here we have a very personal statement, but at the same time Dylan is speaking to everyone who will listen. He is speaking to everyone who feels the need to speak their mind, to communicate. When he says ‘friends’ it is not just his folk friends. It is anyone who is listening. When he continues, his scope widens to include any human being.

*But the time ain’t tall
Yet on time you depend and no word is
possessed*

*By no special friend
And though the line is cut
It ain’t quite the end
I’ll just bid farewell till we meet again.
(Lyrics 97)*

‘No word is possessed by no special friend.’ Dylan is acknowledging that his stories, his words, are not owned by him or anyone else. They belong to everyone as if they come from a common source of humanity. Dylan cannot explain the phenomenon of magic writing; he can only surrender to it and let it be without explanation. The words are his, but only for a moment. His genius is that he can channel these essential words, these core feeling and thoughts, which most people ignore. This almost mirrors the attitude behind Kerouac’s spontaneous prose. We may make special note of Kerouac’s comments in ‘Essentials of Spontaneous Prose,’ wherein under the headline of ‘Procedure’ he writes, ‘Time being of the essence in the purity of speech, sketching language is undisturbed flow from the mind of personal secret idea-words’ (Kerouac 57). It is an outflow of oceanic feeling that cuts to the core; it is Adamic in nature, which is why it encompasses past, present, and future.

Dylan’s eyes were always open at a young age and through his forefathers Whitman, Guthrie, and Kerouac, he acquired the tools and language to strike out on the highway, straight through the heart of the land of Nod, America. However, this land was too big for him to take in all at once. He had to condense it. As Dylan notes in *Chronicles*,

I wanted to understand things and then be free of them. I needed to learn how to telescope things, ideas. Things were too big to see all at once, like all the books in the library – everything laying around on all the tables. You might be able to put it all into one paragraph or into one verse of a song if you could get it right. (Chronicles 61)

Dylan did get it right. He captured the essence of things by making the huge seem small. The telescoping of everything he saw in America, past and present, comes full circle on his 1965 album, *Highway 61 Revisited*. In this album we really see a depiction of America as the land of Nod. The residents of its fictional world are expelled from Eden and relegated to Desolation Row. The American Adam tells us of his journey through the heart of Nod as he travels down Highway 61.

II.

In Greil Marcus' imaginative attempt to describe the dimension that Dylan's *Basement Tapes* rules, he really hits the nail on the head for the great majority of his work, not just the playfully mind-distorted *Basement Tapes*. Marcus' *Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes* was a much-needed step in the direction of understanding the world that Dylan's million and one archetypal characters inhabit. They are characters who create havoc, draw empathy, or give advice. Marcus attributes Dylan's creation of this world, which he calls the 'Invisible Republic,' to the influence of the folk revival of the fifties and sixties. He comments,

His milieu was that of the folk revival – an arena of native tradition and national metaphor, of self-discovery and self-invention. Here one sought and expected to take people as they appeared to be. It was a place of the spirit, where authenticity in song and manner, in being, was the highest value – the value against which all forms of discourse, all attributes inherited or assumed, were measured. One could make oneself up, as Bob Dylan did – creating a persona that caught Charlie Chaplin, James Dean, and Lenny Bruce in talk and gesture, Woody Guthrie and the French symbolists in writing, and perhaps most deeply such nearly forgotten 1920s stylists as mountain balladeer Dock Boggs and New Orleans blues singer Rabbit Brown in voice – but only if, whatever one's sources, the purest clay was always evident, real American red earth. (Invisible Republic 19-20)

While there is an undeniable essence of that rock and roll rebel without a cause ingredient in the milieu of Dylan's mid-sixties music, there is also the integral ingredient of the folk milieu that Marcus mentions, which is the driving force of Dylan's material from his early days in Dinkytown and Greenwich Village to today. Perhaps the most integral part of Dylan's, or any other folk artist of the 50s and 60s, education in the folk milieu was the seminal *Anthology of American Folk Music* edited by Harry Smith. This collection re-introduced the mystical core world of early American folk as performed by

now legendary, but nearly forgotten, artists of the 1920s and early 30s. In this collection we can see not only the roots of Dylan's invisible republic, but also an underlying consciousness of the American experience.

John Cohen of the New Lost City Ramblers, a group Dylan expresses considerable respect for in *Chronicles*, said of the performers newly discovered through Smith's *Anthology*, they 'became like mystical gods to us' (qtd. in *Invisible Republic* 87-88). Dave Von Ronk, a close friend of Dylan's early in his career, described the *Anthology* as 'our bible' (qtd. in *Invisible Republic* 88). What is clear from these two comments is that the *Anthology* became an almost divinely inspired compendium full of God's likely, and unlikely, messengers who lay undiscovered and unheeded, except by the very thorough aficionados, for approximately twenty-five years. These messengers spread the news of America's heritage, creating a feeling that the tradition could be continued; the news could be perpetuated. The past became a very live entity instead of a dead weight. It was a perfect education for the American Adam. If Milton had lived in the twentieth century and decided to set *Paradise Lost* en media res during the sixties, Raphael wouldn't have had to utter a word to Adam; all he would have had to do was set the needle on the *Anthology* and let Adam listen.

That there is a divine aura about the songs of the collection should come of no surprise. The original cover art of the collection, as Marcus notes, was

from a Robert Fludd compendium on mysticism, Smith used an etching by one Theodore DeBry of what Smith called 'the Celestial Monochord.' ... [T]he monochord was shown being tuned by the hand of God. It divided creation into balanced spheres of energy, into fundamentals; printed over the filaments of the etching and its crepuscular Latin explanations were record titles and the names of the blues singers, hillbilly musicians, and gospel chanters Smith was bringing together for the first time. It was if they had something to do with each other. (Invisible Republic 93)

They all did have something in common. In Smith's conception, their songs were the road map to an America that was overseen by God as we can note from the hand of God tuning the monochord, but ultimately run by every man, woman, and child that inhabited the world of the songs included on the *Anthology*. The monochord can produce a lot of notes up and down its neck, notes that all lie on the same string; the same core values and experiences that shape our life. Smith did not hap-hazardly create this collection. He knew what he was doing.

It is apparent that Smith had a vision of America, or at least its heritage, in mind when he compiled the eighty-four selections for the *Anthology*. The songs intermingle with each other as if they are telling a continuous story or painting a large portrait. 'They dissolve a known history of wars and elections into a sort of national dream, a flux of desire and

punishment, sin and luck, joke and horror – and as in a dream, the categories don't hold' (*Invisible Republic* 107). These songs are a condensation of America. They are the legends and myths that the core American heritage is based upon. In this collection there 'is the suspicion that there is, somewhere, a perfectly, absolutely metaphorical America – an arena of rights and obligations, freedoms and restraints, crime and punishment, love and death, humor and tragedy, speech and silence' (*Invisible Republic* 124). In this light we may recall R. W. B. Lewis' description of the original American Myth before the Civil War where America was perceived as a fresh start without history. What the *Anthology* represents is the remnants of this myth after the songwriters realized that the past could not be escaped. It is the real American myth. It is the idea that there is that core American identity somewhere out there. Even if it is only in metaphor that it still exists.

The appearance of the *Anthology* in 1952 marked a point in time where the American past, at least its musical past, was reclaimed as something new. The past was not a burden because it was a new discovery, which is a characteristic of the original American Myth.

The illusion of freedom from the past led to a more real relation to the continuing tradition. The vision of innocence stimulated a positive and original sense of tragedy. Without the illusion, we are conscious, no longer of tradition, but simply and coldly of the burden of history. (Lewis 9)

While the music of the collection hearkened back to the past there was still the illusion that it did not dictate the present. This is something that can seem a bit contradictory. How exactly can reclaiming the past lead to freedom from it? If this is seen in regard to the way myth and legend often make a situation seem much more acceptable, then the contradiction is entirely justified. The past becomes acceptable because its reality is distorted. One might wonder why there are so many folk songs about outlaws and violent crime. To be sure, a normal person does not revel in crimes committed; yet folk songs seem to celebrate their occurrence. Why is the song 'Stackalee' and its many permutations such an enduring story? A man ruins another man's hat who, in turn, swipes the other's Stetson until his ruined hat is paid for. The next thing you know there is a dead body and a legend that continues, to this day, reminding us, according to Dylan, that

no man gains immortality thru public acclaim. truth is shadowy. in the pre-postindustrial age, victims of violence were allowed (in fact it was their duty) to be judges over their offenders – parents were punished for their children's crimes (we've come a long way since then) the song says that a man's hat is his crown. ('About the Songs' 3)

By reclaiming the past through a story such as this it is possible to root out what was behind the story that led to its myth-making while also giving a sense of distance from the actual violence of the situation. Dylan may joke that the song

proves 'that a man's hat is his crown,' but in joking it is also a very serious statement. It is not just that the hat is a crown, but that it is something to actually kill over. Of course, there were other factors behind the dispute, but it is the one furthest from the reality, the disrespected Stetson, of the situation that takes precedence. Overall the past is reclaimed as a different time that has relevance in the present due to its mythic status. It becomes pleasurable and appealing then to continue to perpetuate it as something from a mythic tradition than from a reality of history. This concept holds true for much of the history we learn as children. Lincoln used to do his homework by writing with charcoal on a shovel. George Washington chopped down the cherry tree, had wooden teeth and, of course, never told a lie. In these myths, and others like them, there is a reclamation of a lost innocence. There is a momentary release of the burden of the reality of history.

The folk artists of the 50s and 60s were free to believe that they made the past part of the present by adopting its myth. The folk revival made this old world, America's past, or as Marcus labels it, 'The Old, Weird America,' seem like something new again, but timeless at the same instance. There was indeed something very new about the folk revival when Dylan came along with his guitar, harmonica, and sheepskin jacket. He was at a crossroads of the tradition. In *Chronicles* he notes this crossroads, in regard to the time he grew up, on a larger scale, 'If you were born around this time [1941] or were living and alive, you could feel the old world go and

the new one beginning. It was like putting the clock back to when B.C. became A.D.' (*Chronicles* 28). Dylan, in his usual hyperbolic style, makes a pertinent point about his development as an artist. A major change would come in the U.S. at the end of WWII, just as the U.S. drastically changed after the Civil War, the time that would serve as a template for all of Dylan's work. On a smaller scale, Dylan would be putting the clock back as the remaining artists of the *Anthology* died out. 'He was present to witness an extinction, to see the last members of a species disappear. Thus it was left to him to say what went out of the world when the traditional people left the stage' (*Invisible Republic* 196). This is another way in which Dylan serves as an Adam. He was continuing the tradition of those who catalogued their own areas of existence in America. Dylan just did it on a larger scale. He was there to tell anew, but he was always conscious of the past. He has always been time obsessed in the face of timelessness. He plays with that illusion of freedom in tradition in order to embrace the past. As we shall see, this is why the question of freedom in 'Like a Rolling Stone' is a double-edged sword. To be free of the past is to avoid responsibility, but without responsibility freedom can be a dangerous thing. The illusion of the past as tradition, as something less concrete than reality, plays an integral part in the role of the American Adam. He is able to see the past with new eyes.

Perhaps Dylan was able to retell the story of the *Anthology* better than any other artist because he recognized what made the songs tick. He understood the

essence of the songs. In *Chronicles* he describes a time during his early years in Greenwich Village when he ‘unzipped’ an old folk song entitled ‘Pirate Jenny’ in order to understand how the song was so ‘cutting edge’ (*Chronicles* 275). He was aware that there was something ingrained in these songs that made them so timeless. A bit earlier in the autobiography he describes the world that the folk music of the *Anthology* and other songs for him and his understanding.

*I had already landed in a parallel universe, anyway, with more archaic principles and values; one where actions and virtues were old style and judgmental things came falling out on their heads. A culture with outlaw women, super thugs, demon lovers and gospel truths . . . an invisible world that towered overhead with walls of gleaming corridors. It was all there and it was clear – ideal and God-fearing – but you had to go find it . . . Folk music was a reality of a more brilliant dimension. It exceeded all human understanding, and if it called out to you, you could disappear and be sucked into it. I felt right at home in this mythical realm made up not with individuals so much as archetypes, vividly drawn archetypes of humanity, metaphysical in shape, each rugged soul filled with natural knowing and inner wisdom . . . It was so real, so more true to life than life itself. It was life magnified. (*Chronicles* 235-36)*

It is clear that Dylan instinctively saw the archetypes, the eternal truths that were

the basis of the folk songs. It is almost as if he understood them in a Faulknerian sense, that he knew to look for the eternal verities of the heart that lay at the core all good artistic expression. He understands that an artist must leave

no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed – love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. Until he does so, he labors under a curse. He writes not of love but of lust, of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value, of victories without hope and, worst of all, without pity or compassion (Faulkner 1).

In this way he was able to write in an Adamic language because he knew how to get to the core of things. He grasped the archetypes of humanity and built his own work upon it, presenting life magnified in a condensed way. This description of the folk universe could easily be applied to Smith’s *Anthology*, which, in its own form, not just the cross section of American folk songs, but also its packaging and hand-book, seeks to condense and magnify life at the same time.

The songs of the *Anthology of American Folk Music* proceed like news bulletins. In fact, instead of providing the lyrics for the songs, Smith condensed them into what could be called newspaper headlines. For example, his lyrical description for ‘Stakalee,’ a song Dylan would cover in the early 90s, is ‘THEFT OF STETSON HAT CAUSES DEADLY DISPUTE. VICTIM

IDENTIFIES SELF AS FAMILY MAN.'

Another headline, and a very charming one at that, for a song Dylan would also go on to cover, 'King Kong Kitchie Kitchie Ki-Me-O,' or better known as, 'Froggie Went A-Courtin',' was 'ZOOLOGIC MISCEGENY ACHIEVED IN MOUSE FROG NUPTIALS, RELATIVES APPROVE.' The funny thing about these seemingly outlandish headlines is that they perfectly describe the essence of the songs. No questions need be asked. Of course the relatives approved of the mouse frog nuptials! Why wouldn't they? It just seems it has to be that way. The precision of these condensed lyrical headlines, and Dylan's awareness of the archetypes of humanity, brings us back to Dylan's statement, which was quoted earlier, 'I needed to learn how to telescope things, ideas.' As we will see, Dylan achieves this in much in the same way as Smith. He understands what makes the song, which makes it possible to telescope everything into one; to strike the proper note on that 'Mystical Monochord' that Smith thought so important that he placed it on the cover of his compilation.

Let us go back to that cover illustration of the *Anthology* where the monochord divides the world in half and then open a map of the U.S. to where Highway 61 runs through America. We can see that they are somewhat similar images. We may also note that Bob Dylan is from an area at the top of the map, where Highway 61 begins, just below the celestial hand tuning whatever song that highway has to offer. In this way, Dylan becomes a traveler through the core experience of American heritage.

III.

Dylan is quite aware of just what kind of history Highway 61 holds. Not only was he born right at its starting point, in Duluth, and grew up around it, in Hibbing, but he was also educated by the stories and music its legacy envelops. As he notes in *Chronicles*,

Highway 61, the main thoroughfare of the country blues, begins about where I came from ... Duluth to be exact. I always felt like I'd started on it, always had been on it and could go anywhere from it, even down into the deep Delta country. It was the same road, full of the same contradictions, the same one-horse towns, the same spiritual ancestors. (240-41)

This highway was at the center of that metaphorical, or archetypal, America he was looking for and trying to describe in his music. He would travel that road and catalogue its stories. It is the lifeline of his Invisible Republic. For Dylan it was a microcosm of the human experience just waiting to be discovered and it was where many of his musical and historical concerns lied. Elvis grew up just off Highway 61. It is also on this road that Robert Johnson, another almost forgotten, but legendary blues performer who was rediscovered during Dylan's early years in Greenwich Village, supposedly sold his soul to the devil for guitar skills that could scorch the human soul with every note. (In *Chronicles*, Dylan tells the story of how John Hammond, upon signing Dylan to Columbia, gave him an early copy of the newly discovered Johnson recordings

before they were released. His music and story had a profound affect on the young Dylan.) In *Like a Rolling Stone: Bob Dylan at the Crossroads* Greil Marcus details the rich history of Highway 61,

Bessie Smith, the Queen of the Blues, died on Highway 61 in 1937, near Clarksdale, Mississippi, where Muddy Waters grew up and where, in the 1910 and '20s, Charley Patton, Son House, and others made the Delta blues; some have pretended to know that Robert Johnson's 'Cross Road Blues' was set right there, where Highway 49 crosses Highway 61. Elvis Presley grew up on Highway 61, in the Lauderdale Courts public housing in Memphis, not far away the road went past the Lorraine Motel, where Martin Luther King was shot in 1968. ... The highway doesn't give out; from Hibbing, it would have seemed to go to the ends of the earth, carrying the oldest strains of American music along with business men and escaped cons, vacationers and joy-riders blasting the radio – carrying runaway slaves north, before the long highway had a single name, and, not so much more than a century later, carrying Freedom Riders south. (Like a Rolling Stone 166-67)

It was a highway as real in myth and legend as it was in fact, where one could get lost in the history of the U.S. The freedom of traveling the open road carried the weight of the nation and past travelers' experiences, as if anyone who stepped on the road was responsible for everything that happened before, all the way back to

when the road was merely dust. A traveler could get lost on that highway if he didn't remember that.

There should not have been much surprise that Dylan would create an album that, at least in title, pays homage to Highway 61, a place where the America he knew unfolded. The album released prior to *Highway 61 Revisited, Bringing It All Back Home*, even hints that Dylan is indeed going to be 'bringing it all back home.' Not only was he bringing back his rock and roll roots, but he was also bringing back his subject matter to the essence of folk music and its myths as pertained to his home terrain. Now that Dylan was 'back home' he could revisit the mythical highway he grew up around and all its characters, archetypal characters that he connected with in the folk revival. He could look at the territory with new eyes. It would seem that his folk apprenticeship had come to an end. He had unzipped the metaphorical world of folk that contained the kernels of American experience. After that, something snapped and nothing would ever be the same again. All of those old stories became new, but the timeless truths were the same. The biggest truth was and is that we all bear some mark upon our souls as we travel that highway through the heart of Nod.

Even though Dylan grew up by Highway 61 and all the stories of the road would have surely inspired him" it would seem that Hank Williams planted the seed for this album and its most famous track, 'Like a Rolling Stone.' Anyone who has seen the documentary of Dylan's 1965 tour of England, *Dont Look Back*, may

remember a scene where Dylan does an impromptu performance of Williams' 'Lost Highway' in a hotel room with Joan Baez and Bobby Neuwirth. Greil Marcus describes this memorable moment:

With Baez singing harmony, it's the first time in the film that Dylan seems engaged by a song. 'I was just a lad, nearly twenty-two,' he sings, as if the words are his, with a Hank Williams whine that somehow doesn't seem fake. 'Neither good nor bad, just a kid like you.' 'No, No,' says Neuwirth. 'There's another verse, 'I'm a rolling stone.' Dylan picks it up, and it's odd that he left it out, because it is the first verse. (Like a Rolling Stone 120-21)

It is odd that Dylan would forget this verse (he also forgot the second one altogether), not only because it was the first, but also because he would soon write 'Like a Rolling Stone.'

*I'm a rolling stone all alone and lost
For a life of sin I have paid the cost
When I pass by all the people say
There goes another boy down the lost
highway ('Lost Highway')*

While the first verse of 'Lost Highway' would seem to indicate that it is merely 'Like a Rolling Stone' that owes a debt to the song, we must also remember that the album that 'Like a Rolling Stone' appears on is *Highway 61 Revisited*. The album presents us with a metaphorical 'lost highway' of America, where every one of the album's approximately 70 characters is paying for their lives of sin. One would be hard pressed to find a character that is not

in need of redemption on the album. Indeed, anyone listening to the album is witness to many boys, and girls, (now men and women) rambling down that lost highway as Dylan tells us what he sees in pure archetypal folk form. The world of *Highway 61 Revisited* is a place where the paupers, peasants, princes and kings of 'Song to Woody' appear to us. The younger Dylan had only told us that he was 'seein' your world of people and things/ Your paupers and peasants and princes and kings' and it was not even *his* world or cast of characters. (*Lyrics* 5) It was *your*, Woody's world, and even though the young Dylan may have understood it, he was not yet able to claim it as his own. After his apprenticeship he was ready to take the responsibility. Now, on *Highway 61 Revisited*, Dylan is showing us this world and the paupers, peasants, princes (and princesses), and kings and this time the world and the archetypal characters are entirely his.

This 'Lost Highway,' the world of *Highway 61 Revisited*, is strewn with those who are 'alone and lost' and most of them are oblivious to that fact. It is not for their benefit that we travel through this Invisible Republic, but ours. Even the speakers in the songs, who are trapped on this highway due to their own sins and selfishness, are aware that they cannot be helped just like the speaker in 'Lost Highway.' From 'Like a Rolling Stone' through the last song on the album, 'Desolation Row,' there is a sometimes assaulting, sometimes stern, sometimes playful, sometimes aloof voice telling us 'where it's really at' and that we better

listen up good or we will end up stuck on this road. We may even envision a hipster version of Virgil leading the listener through Hell and Purgatory. Underneath the final high-whining harmonica notes of 'Desolation Row,' a completely metaphorical place, a nowhere, signifying that life on this highway doesn't lead to anywhere anytime soon, we may even hear a faint echo, if we listen closely, of that rolling stone of 'Lost Highway' warning, in a Hank Williams whine, 'Take my advice or you'll curse the day you started rollin' down that lost highway' ('Lost Highway').

The listener starts out on Dylan's highway as if a great odyssey is about to begin. It is as if something extraordinary has happened and something extraordinary did happen: 'Like a Rolling Stone' was born. Suddenly there was someone who could see to the core of everything and was not letting anyone get away with obliviousness. In 'Like a Rolling Stone' the advice we get as listeners is implied through a vituperative attack on a 'you' that encompasses everyone, even the listener, whether you think you have done something wrong or not. Of course there are many speculations as to who the actual 'you' of the song is, but overall the song is much deeper than an attack on a single 'you.' If you really listen to the song you get the feeling that Dylan is indicting you personally. So, what's the advice? Overall, it is 'We're all guilty of something and you better take notice,' but more immediately it is, 'Listen up close cause you don't want to be the focus of this verbal attack!' This attitude of telling-it-straight defiance is set by one unforgettable beat. The famous

opening snare shot heard around the world 'that sounded like somebody'd kicked open the door to your mind' (Springsteen 286) signified that something had snapped, that the levee broke with a resounding crash. Robert Penn Warren may have said it best when he wrote; it was 'as though the bung had broke on that intolerable inwardness' (*Brother to Dragons* 24). No, Warren was not talking about 'Like a Rolling Stone,' he was talking about the core human feeling when the moment comes when you have to face that dark inwardness of your soul and make a choice between accepting or denying it. 'Like a Rolling Stone' makes you face that moment. The door to your mind is not just opened; it is *kicked* open before everything you don't want to face can hide in the forgotten parts of your mind. What this enables is something that Norman Mailer describes in defining the hipster, a mindset that could be seen in Dylan's mid-sixties work. For the hipster there is a 'dynamic view of existence for it sees every man and woman as moving individually through each moment of life forward into growth or backward into death' (Mailer 4). In 'Like a Rolling Stone' Dylan makes this dynamic clear. Again, there is a choice to be made, forward to growth or backward to death. The double-edged question of freedom that arises by the time 'Like a Rolling Stone' concludes presents us with this dynamic as well as the question of responsibility.

When the levee breaks and the flood comes pouring out of the soaring organ that follows the opening beat we find that it is story time. We are cross-legged looking

up at the storyteller from the carpet; a brief glimpse of innocence long since lost.

*Once upon a time you dressed so fine
You threw the bums a dime in your
prime, didn't you?
People'd call, say, 'Beware doll, you're
bound to fall'
You thought they were all kiddin' you
You used to laugh about
Everybody that was hangin' out
Now you don't talk so loud
Now you don't seem so proud
About having to be scrounging for your
next meal (Lyrics 167)*

This first verse sweats irony, setting the mood for the entire song. It is a fairy tale beginning, 'Once upon a time' as most fairy tales do. However, we soon find out that this isn't your typical fairy tale. It just about contradicts everything a fairy tale could stand for. Dylan could have named the song 'Fairy Tale Lost' with apt appropriateness. On top of this, the speaker is telling the story to the person who lived it. Of course the subject knows that she used to dress 'so fine' and act half-heartedly charitable. She knew. She was there and now she is knocked off her pedestal. She cannot laugh about those beneath her, she is down there with them. So what is the point of the speaker reminding her of all this as if she has forgotten? At this point, it seems it is merely to rub it in, but there is something else behind this story. It is the opening of a lecture that has some point in mind.

The subject already knows her own tragic story, as does the listener. It is a story that has been told time and time again. X has everything he or she could ever want

and does not appreciate what they have when Y happens and knocks them down more than a few pegs. Dylan 'was telling those who were listening a story they already knew, but in a manner that made the story new – that made the familiar unstable, and the comforts of familiarity unsure' (*Like a Rolling Stone* 19). As has been mentioned earlier, Dylan gave everything a new spin. The way Dylan tells the familiar story here makes it impossible not to stop a moment and ask, 'Am I guilty of that?' For the 'you' of the song this story could not be anymore familiar, yet it seems she has to listen to it as if it had happened to someone else. A process of defamiliarization is taking place here. Because Dylan is telling this familiar story as if it were new, the listener and 'you' must take a step back and look at it from a different perspective. The subject of this story may very well have gone through this social degradation, but just because someone experiences something does not mean that they understand what exactly happened. This is why the story is being retold. The speaker is saying, 'Look what happened!' And just as the subject begins to fully realize what happened, the speaker gets to the point of the story.

Dylan asks, 'How does it feel?' One might imagine an interlude line between the verse and chorus where he says, 'Now that you see the whole picture,'

*How does it feel
How does it feel
To be without a home
Like a complete unknown
Like a rolling stone? (Lyrics 167)*

Just so the subject does not provide a simple stock answer that usually comes out when someone asks, 'how does it feel,' Dylan repeats the question. 'How does it feel?' says Dylan. We may answer, 'It feels terrible!' Then he recants, 'No, how does it *really* feel?' Of course now the subject and listener are shocked by the probing persistence of the second question. There is no offhand answer that will suffice. We really have to think about *how* it feels. It is a question of contemplation rather than inquiry and while we sit there dumbfounded probing our souls the singer continues to define the state of the subject. She has no home. She's like a complete unknown. She's like a rolling stone. Here we may notice that the only concrete statement of being is 'to be without a home.' The next two are similes, which are likened to being without a home. This arrangement places a significant importance on the state of having no home and what may result from that fact.

If we go back to the original metaphor of Dylan as an American Adam we can begin to understand what 'home' means to Dylan. In the first verse of 'Like a Rolling Stone' it would seem that Adam has found his Eve in Miss Lonely. They are the original rolling stones, expelled from their home and made to travel an unfamiliar land while paying for their sins. The subject of the song has suffered the same fate. Ever since our mythical parents were sent out on the road there has seemed to be a drive in the human condition to find a home when things get tough, somewhere they can call their own and feel free. In essence, this is what the early American

myth was and what its offspring, the American Dream, came to be. In this first chorus what we are dealing with is not just an image of a physical home, but home as a state of mind. Just as being 'like a complete unknown' and 'like a rolling stone' are more about a state of mind than anything as concrete as a physical home. The subject has 'no home' because she never bothered to pay attention to the realities of life and selfhood. Perhaps she never realized that there was a 'home' when she was on top, that there is a core set of human values that should take precedence over everything else. Like Adam and Eve, she has to define the word 'home' for the first time. By the time we reach the second chorus, and continuing on to the third and fourth, 'home' is a concept that she has come to understand, but has no idea how to get there. The speaker certainly is not dropping any hints at this point.

This shift in understanding takes place in the three remaining choruses where 'to be without a home' becomes 'to be on your own/ with no direction home' (*Lyrics* 167). Now the subject is no longer 'without a home.' She has one she just doesn't know how to get there. In the following verses and choruses there is a feeling that the subject and the other characters that inhabit the song have been cut off from what truly makes them human, which, is perhaps why they are portrayed so outlandishly in some sort of farcical fairy tale. Even physically everyone needs a place to call home. The people indicted in this song seem to have forgotten that. All they may know is that they once had a home, but they've lost it somehow. The

three choruses seem to be saying, 'You've rambled and lived the high life, but you've got nowhere to go back to now that you've lost your way.' This is a sentiment that speaks for the American Dream and its impulse for discovery, particularly in the 60s, when an overwhelming impulse to leave home and discover seemed to turn against itself as the direction home faded more and more.

When Woody Guthrie rambled around the U. S. singing 'I Ain't Got No Home' he was singing about those who were unwillingly displaced from their homes, but that displacement enabled him to observe the world for what it really was. It is a place where 'the gamblin' man is rich and the workin' man is poor' or, as he sings in 'Pretty Boy Floyd,' 'And as through your life you travel,/ Yes, as through your life you roam,/ You won't ever see an outlaw/ Drive a family from their home.' And while Woody rambled over that ribbon of highway and rode the rails, he was never 'without a home' and he always knew what direction home was. He always returned home no matter how long he was rambling. He never lost his way. This may seem tangential, but I want to clarify that there is a choice to be made in the freedom to choose to discover and experience the world. You can always keep your home close to your heart or you can lose it as you travel that lost highway. Of course, in 'Like a Rolling Stone' we are dealing with people who have chosen the latter. In fact, it would seem that in the second verse there is the appearance of a character that could be likened to the rolling stone of Williams' 'Lost Highway'.

*You've gone to the finest school all
right, Miss Lonely
But you know you only used to get
juiced in it
And nobody has ever taught you how
to live out on the street
And now you find out you're gonna
have to get used to it
You said you'd never compromise
With the mystery tramp, but now you
realize
He's not selling any alibis
As you stare into the vacuum of his
eyes
And ask him do you want to make a
deal? (Lyrics 167)*

Again, the speaker is telling this 'you' a story she already knows, as he will throughout the entire song, but now we are introduced to another character, the mystery tramp, who eerily reminds us of Robert Johnson at the crossroads making a deal with the devil. The Devil's vacuum eyes are ready to suck out the guitarist's soul with the deal sealing handshake. While this reading is darkly appealing and certainly fits in the sardonic fairy tale mode of the song, it would seem that it is the rolling stone of 'Lost Highway' that best fits the mystery tramp character. There is the possible 'rolling stone' namesake that could point to this, but there is also the image of a passerby running across the speaker in 'Lost Highway' and saying to him or herself, 'I'll never end up that way.' The subject of 'Like a Rolling Stone' could have been that passerby who said she'd 'never compromise with the mystery tramp.' It is apparent that this mystery

tramp was a glimpse of things to come for Miss Lonely, but she was too high on her horse to take his advice. ("Take my advice or you'll curse the day you started rollin' down that lost highway"). If she had listened to him she may have set her life right before she fell to traveling that lost highway. Now she realizes that 'he's not selling and alibis,' or she has no excuses as she looks into his sunken soulless eyes. Certainly there is a soul disappearing, or rather, one that has disappeared, whether the mystery tramp is a devilish figure or Williams' rolling stone.

With the final line of the verse there is one of the most futile requests in all of American balladry, a plea that is a last ditch effort of a soulless individual who is not taking responsibility for their actions. 'Do you want to make a deal?' hangs in the dead air of the moment. It is only answered with the chorus. There are no deals to be made. It is that kind of thinking that got the subject into trouble in the first place as is seen in the next verse.

*You never turned around to see the
frowns on the jugglers and the
clowns
When they all come down and did
tricks for you
You never understood that it ain't no
good
You shouldn't let other people get your
kicks for you
You used to ride on the chrome horse
with your diplomat
Who carried on his shoulder a Siamese
cat
Ain't it hard when you discover that*

*He really wasn't where it's at
After he took from you everything he
could steal (Lyrics 167)*

The speaker continues to let the subject know where it's really at as opposed to the diplomat who she discovered too late 'wasn't where it's at.' The image of the diplomat on a flashy 'chrome horse' brings to mind the kind of double talk and jive a car salesman turned politician might sweet talk you with, not to mention the shrewd art of making deals in their favor. Apparently Miss Lonely should have made a deal with the mystery tramp, a seemingly sympathetic character now when compared to this diplomat with his high class Siamese cat. Instead she made some deal with him that left her with nothing, which makes you wonder just how much 'everything he could steal' really was. However, after another prompt from the speaker to think about how it feels, Miss Lonely seems to be back living the high life she used to know in the final verse, making us wonder if the diplomat had stolen anything.

When the final verse opens we are back in fairy tale land, mirroring the 'once upon a time' beginning of the song and providing an image of what life must have been like before Miss Lonely fulfilled the prophesy, 'You're bound to fall.'

*Princess on the steeple and all the
pretty people
They're drinkin', thinkin' that they got
it made
Exchanging all kinds of precious gifts
and things
But you'd better lift your diamond
ring, you'd better pawn it babe
(Lyrics 168)*

It seems that the speaker has caught Miss Lonely day dreaming here, or at least telling her not to live in her fairy tale world again. 'It's time to wake up from that fairy tale that's going on in your head right now,' the speaker knowingly hints, which finally leads to some advice on the part of the speaker: 'Pawn that diamond ring!' By pawning that diamond ring she would not only be reducing the importance of material things, but also giving up that fairy tale world. Of course, this also implicates the 'bound to fall' future she had, which is implied by the fact that she is going to need the money that the ring could get her. This is followed by the reminder that 'You used to be so amused/ At Napoleon in rags and the language that he used/ Go to him now, he calls you, you can't refuse' (*Lyrics* 168). The third and final figure that the subject deals with directly in the song, Napoleon in rags, is a mirror image of Miss Lonely in her current state. He is a combination of the two characters mentioned before. His rags indicate the mystery tramp. The diplomat with his chrome horse and Siamese cat is indicated by the fact that it is, in fact, Napoleon, a diplomat, in rags. It would seem that this Napoleon in rags has something for the subject, some sort of advice. Perhaps the speaker is pawning her off on him, telling her to go to him. Now we get to the two lines of the song that present the subject and us with a choice. They are the final words of wisdom the speaker has to offer before leaving Miss Lonely with a final prompt to take a good look at herself. There is a kind of leap of faith called for in these two lines. After all, 'When you got nothing, you got nothing to lose,' the

speaker reminds Miss Lonely. It is a chance to take a bold step. It is a choice on how we handle a freedom that is at once exhilarating and perhaps also damning. He tells her, 'You're invisible now, you got no secrets to conceal' (*Lyrics* 168). On the one hand she is free from everything that led to her down fall, free to start over and find her way home. On the other hand she could use this freedom as a get out of jail free card and dodge all responsibility for her actions. Of course, in the right context it can also just be one hell of a put down.

What to do with this freedom is what we must ask ourselves when we get to the end of 'Like a Rolling Stone.' To write the song off as merely a put down would do it a great injustice. There is a bigger picture that addresses the essential human impulses. In America, any question of freedom hits home hard. It is, after all, the 'land of the free,' but that freedom can be abused as well as embraced. With the final lines of the songs last verse there is a definite liberation. Greil Marcus discusses this aspect,

The key line is, 'You've got no secrets to conceal.' Everything has been stripped away. You're on your own, you're free now. You've gone through all these levels of experience – you fell, someone you believed in robbed you blind, took everything he could steal, and finally it's all been taken away. You're so helpless, and now, you've got nothing left. And you're invisible – you've got no secrets – that's so liberating. You've nothing to fear anymore. It's useless to hide any of that shit. You're a free man. (Like a Rolling Stone 88-89)

Yes, there is liberation. What we do with that liberation is what is really at stake. This freedom is a line we all walk on. Dylan has mentioned Cash's 'I Walk the Line' as great song on more than one occasion. Yes, it is a love song, but it is also about walking any type of line. It works on many levels. Dylan always puts the listener on that line between faithfulness and destruction. We either take responsibility for our actions or act like we have none. If we embrace the freedom of having nothing to conceal, 'no secrets to conceal,' are we prepared to live the life of a rolling stone? Do we even want to?

'You're invisible now, you got no secrets to conceal' is not obvious, it is confusing. Confused – and justified, exultant, free from history with a world to win – is exactly where the song means to leave you (*Like a Rolling Stone* 128). Marcus is right to call this line confusing. It is an ambiguous line that leaves it up to us to decide how to read it. Here again we are faced with the impulse to revert back to the original American myth, as if the rolling stone is a new Adam, ready to claim and name the new world, free from the history of the real world, and therefore, responsibility for its history. However, there is the omnipresence of the real world that destroys this fantasy world with every vituperative line that Dylan has sung prior to these lines. It seems that when things get toughest, we revert back to the fairytale of a better life, free from responsibility, but the speaker of the song is not going to let us forget where it is really at even if the ruins of the myth still exist. Even though the speaker is knocking down the

American myth here, its remnants in the American Dream can be found throughout the album.

Almost every song on the album hints toward the dream, but in a way that displays how it can become grotesquely corrupt. An excellent example of this can be found in 'Ballad of a Thin Man,' a portrait of a subject, Mr. Jones, that could be considered thin since he lacks any true nourishment. He gets off on spectating and what seems to be a blind belief in the American Dream. This is hinted at by the mention of F. Scott Fitzgerald, the author of perhaps the greatest example of the American Dream in literature, *The Great Gatsby*. The speaker of the song sings in an accusatory tone, 'You've been through all of/ F. Scott Fitzgerald's books/ You're very well read/ It's well known' (*Lyrics* 175). This line works as a colossal put down on three levels: 1) Mr. Jones likes to appear smarter than he really is by making it 'well known' that he has read Fitzgerald. 2) The fact that it is Fitzgerald, and only Fitzgerald, that he is known for reading would seem to indicate that Mr. Jones is *Gatsby* times ten, a huge fake. 3) He may have read all of Fitzgerald's books, but it seems more like a comically diminutive attribute considering Fitzgerald really did not write all that much. Perhaps, like Miss Lonely, Mr. Jones is stuck in a fairy tale world just as Jay Gatsby creates and his belief in 'the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us' (Fitzgerald 189). Now his accuser is making him face the real world, where 'we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past,' (Fitzgerald 189) 'Because

something is happening here/ But you don't know what it is/ Do you, Mister Jones?' However, 'Ballad of a Thin Man' lacks the true revelatory moment of 'Like a Rolling Stone.' Mr. Jones will never get to the point that Miss Lonely does, where 'You're invisible now, you got no secrets to conceal.' He will never be given a chance for a redemptive freedom. He will just keep digging a hole for himself in a nightmarishly Freudian world. His sins are irredeemable. At least Miss Lonely has a chance.

So where do we go from 'Like a Rolling Stone'? If it is advice, or more potently, a warning that starts off the album then what follows is perhaps a journey of penance. If we find ourselves as the subject of 'Like a Rolling Stone' then we have something to pay for. We, along with Miss Lonely, are duly warned about what lies ahead if we don't open our eyes. It seems then that this journey is an eye-opening journey through the ills of American society and the American Dream grotesquely morphed. We have begun our journey down the lost highway, emerging from the lost woods onto the main byway of Dylan's Invisible Republic, the 'Lost Highway.' It is a place where Harry Smith's headlines take form and Dylan explores the heart of the American experience. And, as Dylan hints at the beginning of the second track, 'Tombstone Blues,' fairy tale playtime is over,

*The sweet pretty things are in bed now
of course
The city fathers they're trying to
endorse*

*The reincarnation of Paul Revere's
horse*

*But the town has no need to be
nervous (Lyrics 169)*

'It's time to get down in dirty,' the first line suggests. Nothing is going to be dressed up or overlooked for some sideshow amusement. Childish things are put away, and innocence takes a nap. Now we get to see behind the scenes. We get to see how the powers that be keep that false sense of innocence and the belief in the American Dream going. The city fathers are racking their brains to increase patriotism. Their plan? They try to hearken back to a time where America achieves its own identity. It is almost a wish for what America used to be. Ironically, now that all 'the sweet pretty things are in bed' a séance is taking place in order to bring back a figure almost mythologized by American history, Paul Revere and his horse. We learn about his famous ride, the lanterns, and the declaration, 'The British are coming! The British are coming!' as soon as we learn how to read. But wait, it's not even Paul Revere that is up for reincarnation, but his horse. We must remember that 'Tombstone Blues' is more of a dark comedy than anything else, so it merely seems comical that it is only the horse that the city fathers are interested in. After all, the horse was the one that did all the work right? On a more serious note, the fact that it is only the horse, and not Paul Revere that they hope to reincarnate suggests that they only want the part of the story that they will be able to control. Who knows what Paul Revere would have said if he was

reincarnated in the mid-sixties! I highly doubt it would have been, 'The Commies are coming! The Commies are coming!'

What is also amusing about the suggestion of reincarnating Paul Revere's horse is the promise that follows, 'the town has no need to be nervous.' This makes it clear that they are only interested in the symbol of the horse and not what is behind it. There is no need to be nervous because the British will not be coming. What *is* coming is a jumbled history of mankind that finds its way into American culture, making it clear that America is as much a result of the past as any other place in the world. In the next verse we can see three histories alluded to as what makes this city's image.

*The ghost of Belle Starr she hands
down her wits
To Jezebel the nun she violently knits
A bald wig for Jack the Ripper who sits
At the head of the chamber of
commerce (Lyrics 169)*

In this verse American, Biblical, and British history are cited and connected together. Each figure that represents these histories is also quite contradictory. The ghost of Belle Starr, probably the most famous woman outlaw of the west, represents American history and perhaps its innate drive westward. What is contradictory about her is that when most people think of western outlaws they usually think about men like Jesse James or Billy the Kid. Belle Starr hands down her wits to Jezebel, presumably the biblical Jezebel as well as the common phrase that marks a harlot or a woman that is just no good. Of course, the contradiction here is that of a

whore posing as a nun who is receiving Belle Starr's wits as she knits a bald wig for the third historical figure, Jack the Ripper. In this last figure we get an image that invokes British history. (I guess they were coming after all.) Jack the Ripper, a famous British outlaw, poses in a bald wig, which represents some sort of an authority figure, as he sits at the head of the chamber of commerce. What does the chamber of commerce do? It is responsible for preserving the image of a city. What kind of city would want three outlaws as part of their chamber of commerce, especially with a sadistic murderer as its head? No city would, knowingly of course. Remember though, things may not look like this while all those "sweet pretty things" are up and about. These are the archetypal figures behind reality. All one might see is the nun costume or bald wig. It appears that everyone is blind to the truth or they are just too busy trying to live, which is the case when the chorus comes around.

*Mama's in the fact'ry
She ain't got no shoes
Daddy's in the alley
He's lookin' for the fuse
I'm in the streets
With the tombstone blues (Lyrics 169)*

Mother is working. Daddy is looking for the fuse, possibly symbolizing prosperity, although it is in the alley, which might suggest that the only way to get ahead in this world is back alley dealing. Then there is the speaker who sees what is really going on in the streets. Due to the absurdity of the scene and the fact that he

has 'tombstone blues' suggests that there is no hope in rectifying this farce.

The song continues in this fashion melding history into a demented and confusing portrait of American culture. What becomes clear is the presence of biblical tales told through modern circumstances, where authority figures and societal juggernauts distort them to their own accord. We see John the Baptist answering to the Commander-in-Chief and the story of Samson and Delilah made into a motion picture. This may remind us of Dylan's comments that this world was 'not run by God, but it wasn't run by the devil either.' It is a world run by humans and their institutions. Where 'the National Bank at a profit sells road maps for the soul/ To the old folks home and the college' (*Lyrics* 170). Young or old, as soon as you are an adult your life is run by money and the sick part is that it is someone else making a profit on that fact. The words 'profit,' (prophet also) 'road,' and 'soul' are some of the core images of the song and the album as a whole, especially in regard to the title track, which also utilizes a similar use of mock-biblical language. This is also apparent in the final song on the album, 'Desolation Row.'

As Stephen Scobie notes, these three songs provide the dramatic and topical structure of the album.

The backbone of Highway 61 Revisited is compromised of three mutant talking blues – 'Tombstone Blues,' 'Highway 61 Revisited,' and 'Desolation Row.' ... presenting the action as a succession of discrete dramatic episodes. The result is

an updated version of the King and Duke sections of Huckleberry Finn, with the Mississippi River replaced by the highway that runs its length as an image of despoiled freedom. (109)

With 'Like a Rolling Stone' as the prequel or prelude to the world of *Highway 61 Revisited*, as noted earlier, these songs are pictures of what we see as we ramble down Highway 61. They are also a vision of the mishandling of the freedom that is up for grabs at the end of 'Like a Rolling Stone.' We may remember Woody's words, 'my eyes has been my camera taking pictures of the world.' Dylan's camera captures the essence behind the picture. It is fitting that Scobie would describe the album in terms of Twain's fictional world. Guthrie's autobiography often reads as though it was written by Twain and his songs carry the same sense. The King and Duke sections are certainly reminiscent of Dylan's vision of Woody's world 'of paupers and peasants and princes and kings.' We may, in this light, draw a very apt comparison between Twain and Dylan's vision of America, since Dylan was so influenced by Woody. Scobie continues, 'In Dylan's vision, like Twain's, America is a place where everyone sacrifices their own lives to a fear of God that is really a worship of the devil, a denial of death and the terrible nakedness of their own lives' (Scobie 109). There is a feigned innocence that is noticeable in both visions, an innocence in the writing that suggests that the characters are aware of much more than they let on, even much more than we are aware of. There is a definite denial of

the terrible nakedness of their own lives. It is put very bluntly in 'Ballad of a Thin Man,' 'You walk into the room/ With your pencil in your hand/ You see somebody naked/ And you say, "Who is that man?"' (Lyrics 174) Of course that man is himself, but he just cannot accept that. He cannot accept that 'intolerable inwardness' that Robert Penn Warren endlessly ruminates on. All the characters on Highway 61, not just Miss Lonely, have to face that moment of nakedness 'when you got nothing, you got nothing to lose/ you're invisible now, you got no secrets to conceal.' There is the denial of death everywhere on the album as can be seen by the parade of historical characters and their preoccupation with their past greatness or petty squabbles. 'Desolation Row' has the most examples of this denial. What could be more a denial of death than two literary figures engaged in a fight on a sinking ship? It is however, the sacrifice of life to a fear of God that is really a worship of the devil that seems to perpetuate the songs on the album. This does not suggest that God or the devil run this world. What runs it is the fear and denial of the characters, their belief in myths and fairy tales. This is a lost highway where God and the devil merely wait for its inhabitant to make a choice. What is clear is the fact that most of these characters are already at the crossroads shaking hands with the devil.

It does seem that it is a fear of God that leads these characters to a life of sin. At least it seems that way in 'Highway 61 Revisited.'

Oh God said to Abraham, 'Kill me a son'
Abe says, 'Man, you must be puttin' me on'
God say, 'No.' Abe say, 'What?'
God say, 'You can do what you want Abe, but
The next time you see me comin' you better run'
Well Abe says, 'Where you want this killin' done?'
God says, 'Out on Highway 61'
 (Lyrics 178)

Aside from the hilarious comedy of the mock-biblical tone here there is also a precedent that is set for the rest of the song and a feeling that is present throughout the album. When God says, 'Next time you see me comin' you better run,' it would only seem natural to be afraid. What is also comical about this opening verse is the way God squelches any free will whatsoever in this version of the Old Testament story. Abe hints that he may make a choice not to obey God and God, being the nice guy that he is, says, 'Ok that's fine you're entitled to your opinion, free will and all, but I just want you to know that you're going to pay big time for this.' As God walks away with a final, 'Have a nice day Abe,' Abe does not even have to blink, 'Where do you want this killin' done?' It is quite clear that the fear of God will dictate the characters' decisions from now on. So, we are on Highway 61 where Abe has apparently gone to kill his son and now a portrait of human folly, entrepreneurship, possible incest, and diplomacy flies through our ears. The cast of characters

that follow God's threat and Abe's frightened adherence continue to come back to Highway 61 as a solution to their problems, as if it were a sanctified place that carries with it the approval of God for any action. After all, it is where God tells Abe to carry out his wishes. The actions and thoughts of Georgia Sam and poor Howard, Mack the Finger and Louie the King, the numerological family involved in a Shakespearean comedy of incest, and the roving gambler and promoter are all validated on Highway 61 it would seem. All the while the fear of God is nipping at their heels and pushing them forward in a driving blues beat with the hint of modern authority provided by the police whistle that Dylan blows at whim.

According to poor Howard, who is curiously toting a gun, Georgia Sam can only find charity on Highway 61, not from the Welfare department. Charity would seem to be a positive activity taking place on the highway, but Howard is pointing with his gun, a sign that Georgia Sam should get moving down that highway as quick as he can. As Georgia Sam goes looking for clothes Mack the Finger is looking to unload 'forty red white and blue shoestrings/ and a thousand telephones that don't ring' (*Lyrics* 178). Louie the King knows exactly where Mack can con people into buying phones that do not ring and patriotic foot attire, Highway 61, of course. The juxtaposition of these two commercial products provides a rather dim view of patriotism. Not only is it commercialized, but it is also something that someone needs to be conned into. However, like charity, patriotism is for the

common good of the country so it takes place on Highway 61 with approval from the authority. Louie the King represents the same authority as Howard's gun and God's warning. Fear continues to drive us down the highway until we run into a peculiar scene. The Shakespearean comedy seems a bit out of place in this context, but we may notice that it is also in mock-biblical tone where a seemingly endless list of lineage is related to us. This comedy is hilarious because the confusing list jumbles up exactly who is related to whom. We know what the fifth daughter and first father are doing, but just what the second mother and seventh son are doing out on Highway 61 is left up to the imagination, but one can be sure that it is not whole hearted fun. If we have not yet figured out that Highway 61 is a place where bad things take place under the guise of the greater good the last verse makes it utterly clear. The roving gambler is dead set on starting a world war and like any person intent on orchestrating an event of this magnitude he seeks the help of a promoter. After all, what good is a war if no one knows about it? The promoter seems shocked by the proposal at first since he's 'never engaged in this kind of thing before,' but the shock is most likely from the magnitude and genius of the idea. There is a lot of money to be made in the war. In the end, 'yes I think it can be very easily done/ we'll just put some bleachers out in the sun/ and have it on Highway 61' (*Lyrics* 178).

If 'Like a Rolling Stone' serves as a prequel then the songs that follow it are the stories of the road by and about

drifters like Hank Williams' rolling stone of 'Lost Highway,' except these stories are not as human as his. They represent a condensation of the ills that are inherent in the people who become what the rolling stone is. In this way, Dylan is not only perpetuating the advice of the rolling stone, but also painting a clear picture of the sins that led to his downfall. These stories then serve as a microcosm of American culture, much like Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*. They are stories that can be considered on both an individual and national level. When we leave the title track of the album we find ourselves in a kind of interlude before a very disturbing epilogue to the album. We find ourselves once again in fairy tale land. In 'Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues' we are south of the border with the speaker, trying to live outside of reality, just like Miss Lonely. However, now that there has been many miles spent on Highway 61 the fairy tale is tainted with the knowledge of what really goes on outside of it. The speaker leaves America in order to escape any responsibility for what is happening on Highway 61, but apparently things are not so great in Juarez either. At first it seems like a paradise, but in reality it is just another way to dodge reality for a little while. Soon, things catch up with the speaker and he must leave this fairy tale gone nightmare to face reality.

*I started out on burgundy
But soon hit the harder stuff
Everybody said they'd stand behind me
When the game got rough
But the joke was on me*

*There was nobody even there to call
my bluff
I'm going back to New York City
I do believe I've had enough
(Lyrics 180)*

When the speaker says, 'I do believe I've had enough' it is almost as if there is finally some admission of guilt, some acceptance that it is time to pay the piper and perhaps a hope that things will get better. With this, a process of redemption is possible as we find ourselves residing in 'Desolation Row'.

Desolation Row is a purgatory that seems to have no escape. It is not the purgatory of Dante because it is man made. It lacks the divinity of Dante's comedy. It is more a purgatory of T.S. Eliot, a cultural wasteland where the land must be set in order. In fact, it is quite apparent that *The Wasteland* served as a template for the song. Eliot is even mentioned. Of course, we do not want to discount Dante entirely since his influence on Eliot was so pronounced. The song's presentation of various characters calls to mind Dante's journey through Purgatory. It also calls to mind the way Dylan has used characters throughout the album. It should also not be forgotten how this structure resembles Smith's anthology. Overall, the point is that Dylan utilized many influences in constructing his Invisible Republic, especially in this song. While the title 'Desolation Row' sounds like a direct reference to *The Wasteland* it could also be referencing John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*, which similarly portrays its characters. In the end, it is Dylan's vision that comes

through, rich with a literary history. In the same way, the world of Desolation Row is rich with the history of America and the history of everything else that made it possible for America to exist. As has been noted, Dylan was aware of the importance of the past on the present and future.

Ultimately, 'Desolation Row' is the culmination of Dylan's 'pictures' of America during the mid-sixties. It is an even further condensed vision of America than Smith's anthology that had its beginning in 'Gates of Eden,' from *Bringing It All Back Home*. The surrealistic, foreboding, and decadent 'Gates of Eden' gave a glimpse of what the sixties counterculture would come to at the end of the decade. Somehow Dylan must have had a sense of what the future held in store.

[O]f all the songs about sixties self-consciousness and generation-bound identity, none forecasts the lost innocence of an entire generation better than 'Gates of Eden.'...the bloated utopianism of Woodstock, the riot at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, and the Cain and Abel tragedy of Altamont (Riley 106).

One would be hard pressed not to see the parallels of the decadence and deluded idealism of the late sixties in the lines:

*With a time-rusted compass blade
Aladdin and his lamp
Sits with Utopian hermit monks
Sidesaddle on the Golden Calf
And on their promises of paradise
You will not hear a laugh
All except inside the Gates of Eden
(Lyrics 154)*

As Andy Gill suggests, 'Desolation Row' 'could serve as Dylan's alternative State of The Nation Address, an increasingly surreal update of the America depicted in "Gates of Eden"' (Gill 89). 'Gates of Eden' depicts a decayed paradise, a man made paradise. After being expelled from Eden we have attempted to build our own, which is what Dylan depicts here. In 'Desolation Row' there is nothing but a frozen moment that some would suggest resembles Dante's *Inferno* and the eternal punishment each sinner must go through. While this is valid, I would suggest that the frozen moment is recognition of the decay for the characters, not a building upon it, which is why the language is much less absurd than in 'Gates of Eden.' The music tempo seems to swim in dusky gray waters as compared to the rest of the songs on *Highway 61 Revisited* with their blues tempos. There is a resignation in the music. It is not the driving attack of 'Like a Rolling Stone.' It is a frozen moment of thought. I call it a frozen moment knowing full well that there is action in the each situation depicted in the verses, but it seems that they are stuck in that action waiting to move forward. However, that moment never comes. Cinderella will continue to sweep, Ophelia will forever be a twenty-two year old maid, and Pound and Eliot will continue to fight in the captain's tower of a sinking ship. So while the bloated utopianism of America seems to have come to a standstill it appears that it can never get back to its innocence, if it ever had any. This brings into question Dylan's belief in the degradation of civilization, which will be discussed in regard to "Love and Theft".

For now, it can be noted that the lost highway we were warned not to travel down by the rolling stone has claimed even more victims and there is no way to escape it. The end of the line is “Desolation Row” and its frozen moment of thought. I would like to think that there is some hope for the future when the album comes to a close, but acceptance of the past is needed before that is possible. For the speaker of “Desolation Row” this process is just beginning. It is not possible for him to face anything outside Desolation Row, which means he cannot think of the present or future. This can be seen in the final verse,

*Yes, I received your letter yesterday
 (About the time the doorknob broke)
 When you asked how I was doing
 Was that some kind of joke?
 All these people that you mention
 Yes, I know them, they're quite lame
 I had to rearrange their faces
 And give them all another name
 Right now I can't read too good
 Don't send me no more letters no
 Not unless you mail them
 From Desolation Row (Lyrics 183)*

The speaker can only read, and talk, about the past, ‘about the time the door-knob broke,’ but when it comes to asking how he is doing at the present he asks if it is a joke since he can only relive the past in Desolation Row. All of his prior acquaintances, who are all ‘lame’ perhaps due to their own sins, are all given new faces and names, as if he cannot fully deal with his past yet. Even the characters that appear possibly as disguised acquaintances disguise themselves again, such as Einstein

disguised as Robin Hood, and The Phantom of the Opera as a priest. With the brief reply of the speaker comes the request not to send any more letters because he ‘can’t read too good,’ which suggests that anything other than the past he cannot read about. This is further made clear as he closes with the stipulation, ‘Not unless you mail them/ From Desolation Row.’ If the letter comes from Desolation Row then it could only be about the past and that is something that the speaker can begin to think about. And underneath all of this is the warning for all of us who are spectating, ‘Take my advice or you’ll curse the day you started rolling down this lost highway.’

At the close of *Highway 61 Revisited*, after Dylan tells of travels on this stretch of highway, we are left with many voices ringing in our heads. There are those of the many characters and those of the influences and traditions that are pulling strings behind the scene. One such voice that perhaps expresses the experience of traveling through America quite similarly to *Highway 61 Revisited* is Sal Paradise from *On the Road*. He comes to a realization after looking at snapshots that Dean Moriarty has in his wallet. They are pictures that represent a myth.

*I realized these were all the snapshots
 which our children would look at
 someday with wonder, thinking their
 parents had lived smooth, well-ordered,
 stabilized-within-the-photo lives and
 got up in the morning to walk proudly
 to the sidewalks of life, never dreaming
 the raggedy madness and riot of our*

actual lives, our actual night, the hell of it, the senseless emptiness. Pitiful forms of ignorance. (On the Road 208)

As we have seen, *Highway 61 Revisited* similarly makes us aware that the reality behind the American myth is nothing like the fairy tale or perfect images that we learn as kids and cling on to through life. The album seeks to present us with a vision of ‘the raggedy madness and riot of our actual lives, our actual night, the hell of it, the senseless emptiness.’ Of course, this is extremely apparent in ‘Like a Rolling Stone’. The speaker makes sure that Miss Lonely is quite aware of this. When we get to the end of this section of highway and we find ourselves in ‘Desolation Row’, the pictures that at one time seemed perfect are now distorted or, more aptly, made more realistic. In Dylan’s early vision of America we are waking from a dream.

Greil Marcus describes Harry Smith’s anthology, or as he refers to it, *Smithville*, in a way that sums up Dylan’s odyssey through America on Highway 61 which also calls to mind the opening quote of this book from Dylan’s *Chronicles*. Marcus writes,

God reigns here, but his rule can be refused. His gaze cannot be escaped; his hand, maybe. You can bet: you can stake a probably real exile on a probably real homecoming. Or you can take yourself out of the game, and wait for a

death God will ignore; then you, like so many others, already dead but still speaking, will take your place in the bend of a note in ‘The Coo Coo Bird.’ It’s limbo, but it’s not bad; on the fourth day of July you get to holler (Invisible Republic 125-26).

And while this description almost describes the album to a ‘T’, we can look ahead 36 years to Dylan’s 2001 studio album “*Love and Theft*”, where the story of the Invisible Republic, or our travels down Dylan’s Lost Highway is told from creation to revelation. Death looms large over the republic in this album and what is shocking about the fictional world of “*Love and Theft*” is that it is not so fictional when we realize that Dylan has done plenty of hard traveling in our land of Nod and is now making us look in a mirror that shows us our past as well as present and future. When we enter into the world of “*Love and Theft*”, where the dazzling steam-heat of Highway 61 has risen and clouded the eyes of the weary traveler who finds himself mingling with death in the moonlight in one instance and drowning in high water at another, a quote from Robert Penn Warren once again seems apt: ‘God have mercy on the mariner.’ (*All the King’s Men* 2) Or, to more aptly quote Robert Johnson, ‘I’m standin’ at the crossroads I believe I’m sinkin’ down’ (‘Crossroad Blues’).

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The Judas! Interview

Mike Marqusee interviewed

by Andrew Muir

I was fortunate enough to interview Mike Marqusee earlier in the year at the home of David and Marie Bristow. An engaging conversationalist, Mike discussed all manner of Dylan topics at length and this is an edited version of what went down that morning. We hope to bring you further extracts in later issues.

AM We are going to be talking about your book, *Wicked Messenger*, but it should be noted firstly that this grew out of an earlier publication, *Chimes Of Freedom* which was a hardback only release. And that came out, if my memory serves well, at a time when we were flooded with Dylan books.

MM The Christopher Ricks book in particular.

AM And the Christopher Ricks' book was covered everywhere and there was little scope to review all the others. Despite being impressed by *Wicked Messenger* I ended up pulling my review and merely recommending it in the editorial for the *Judas!* issue of the time. I presume all this was galling for you?

MM Well these things happen in publishing and it was just a bit of bad luck the book actually came out 6 weeks after Christopher Ricks's which was the

absolutely worst time, because if it had come out at the same time then it might have got picked up in the reviews but, as I say, these things happen.

It was probably because of that that the publisher, Seven Stories Press, wanted to re-package and re-design, because they felt it hadn't happened properly and I agreed with them that it had not reached its maximum potential audience. Also, in the meantime, *Chronicles* had come out and *Masked And Anonymous* and both of those raised so many questions that were pertinent to everything I had written in the earlier version that it seemed ridiculous not to go back and do it again. So, the publishers asked me to go back and expand the book. I took advantage of that opportunity to make a few corrections which Dylan fans had kindly pointed out to me, as they are wont to do, and also to refine a few of the observations and to add material in response to some of the comments I had from the earlier edition, and then to re-title.

I love the old title but I think this is better because 'wicked messenger' is a little more expressive of what the book is about and of the tone of the book. It is about the tensions within Dylan's work and within the movement, the social movement, and how they interacted.

Anyway the new material of the book deals with *Masked And Anonymous* and *Chronicles* someways, but also, one thing that quite a few Dylan fans took me up on from the first book was that, I was very dismissive of *Nashville Skyline* and I wanted to respond to that. I have to say, I still think it's a pretty mediocre album. Although there are some extremely well written songs on it, this guy could produce a slickly written song in almost any genre at almost any time of his life and I looked to Bob Dylan for more than that. Other than that, *Nashville Skyline* is weak also because it is only 27 minutes long and I can assure you that in 1969 if you were going to spend that much money on an album for that much time, it was a rip off. In *Chronicles* he describes it as 'tame and house-broken' version of country music but I also felt that that wonderful relationship between Dylan and country tradition was kind of slanted in the first version so I went back and talked a bit more about Hank Williams' and Johnny Cash's influence on him. I love country music but I actually like the raw and difficult country music, whereas in *Nashville Skyline* Dylan is producing something more slick than the tradition which is most interesting to me.

Another couple of things added in *Wicked Messenger* are in the whole section that dealt with the late 60's. This was definitely always the most difficult to address and I think you said that and when you wrote about that I was fascinated. I realised that its essence is partly the subject matter and I had not quite found my way through that so I went back and revised some of

that. So, see what you think of the new bits. Also, I added some things to it, not only stuff about country music, but a bit about Frank Zappa because I was interested in particular in what you might call the 'counter-counter-cultural expressions of 1968'; those people who are clearly inside the movement of rebellion against conventional society – Dylan and Frank Zappa and the Band – but who had become pretty scathingly irritated by this counter-culture and many of its indulgences which I completely understand. I am a big fan of *We Are Only In It For The Money*; it's a spectacular album and of course it's produced by Tom Wilson so there is definitely a connection with Dylan there. And it's something I wanted to juxtapose to *John Wesley Harding* as responses that were very ambivalent and very profound to a deep social crisis; *incomplete* but that's okay with me.

AM You make the connection very strongly in the book between Dylan and Zappa. Zappa's quotes had me laughing; they brought back a number of memories, I expect?

Hey punk, where you going with those beads around your neck?

I'm goin' to the shrink so he can help me be a nervous wreck.'

*I'll buy some beads
some feathers and bells and a book of
Indian lore*

*I will ask the chamber of commerce
how to get to Haight Street and smoke
an awful lot of dope.*

I will dance around barefoot

*I will love everyone,
I will love the police as they kick the
shit out of me on the street*

MM I had not listened to that in quite a while. Actually, when it came out, I listened to it non-stop. As a kid, it was my bible. I went to a school where that was exactly that kind of high school that he dropped out of, so I could relate. I mean, just putting beads around your neck and smoking dope doesn't make you any better than your daddy. 'Daddy is a fascist but you're a hippy fascist', that was challenging, really challenging.

AM And he even covers the hair thing, singing that it doesn't matter if you've got long hair or short hair, which seemed such a great divide at the time but in the long term has proved so irrelevant as to be risible.

*Who cares if hair is long or short or
sprayed or partly gray
We know that hair ain't where it's at*

MM That is the same stylistic polarization which I think is what made Dylan extremely uneasy in the late 60's and rightly so. I think the conclusions he drew from it were wrong in some ways. But I think the fault of our movement especially in the States, less so here, was that it became an 'us' and 'them' movement, and you were either 'hip' or 'straight', you were either radical or reactionary. The reality is that the times were complicated – the point I am trying to make in the book is that all kinds of people were moving out of their fixed positions but at different rates, with different emphasis, and we didn't

exactly make the move welcoming to them at all times. I mean, Dylan was right to be irritated with us.

AM Yes, and his comments in *Chronicles* leave no doubt as to how irritated. One thing is important to point out for the readers who already have *Chimes Of Freedom* and who were wondering about whether to buy the updated version. And that is, you also do now have *Chronicles* quotes throughout and I find those made a huge difference. Actually, I was thinking I was going to be buying the same book with a couple of extra chapters but the *Chronicles* quotes on the way through are just a goldmine as they support the ongoing arguments.

MM I kept reading *Chronicles* and it was irresistible not to type them back in and I think in some ways they are more considered than anything else he has said. Which doesn't of course, mean they are true but rather what he wants people to see as the authorized version, so they carry weight. And there are a few other things I added too, which are things I picked up subsequently.

Like the famous gig in Greenwood, Mississippi from where there was that one clip in *Dont Look Back* when he sings 'Only a Pawn in Their Game' at Silas Magee's farm. This is something that turns up in lots of Dylan books, it's a farm just outside of Greenwood. Who was this guy? Well the late Stokeley Carmichael has published an autobiography in which he describes the Magee family at great length. He stayed with them, he wasn't there the week that Dylan was there, but he was there. I put it

in the book, just briefly. This was a black family who owned their own land which was unusual and that gave them autonomy from the white system and these guys never went anywhere without shotguns because they had to defend themselves. Carmichael describes them as the most 'stand up' black people he had ever met in the South. It is only a few sentences but for me it enriched the picture.

The other thing that I hadn't read before I wrote the first edition and I have now referred to it, is Ed Cray's biography of Woody Guthrie which I highly recommend. It is much better than the Joe Klein one. It's not well written, but it is much better researched and it comes up with a great line about Woody that I couldn't resist that, it sums up my feelings anyway. The Ed Cray book is great.

AM My next question is going to be about what I think is possibly the core message of the book. It's from page 51 of the book and I think it is the central feature, this is what you wrote:

The freedom songs, more even than the example of Guthrie, inspired Dylan to adapt traditional material to new ends, specifically the ends of political intervention. It was the great participatory drama of the civil rights movement that infused Dylan, and others, with the desire, confidence, and capacity to make the old traditions anew, as Alan Lomax had demanded. It also stirred deeper longings. 'Singing voiced as studying the basic position of the movement, of taking action on your life,' said protests, Johnson Reagan. That

mingling of the movement, the songs and the lure of self-fulfilment unleashed the creative energies of the folk revival and its major artist.

MM That is what I wanted to say about, as it were, Dylan's first, topical, period. I don't think it exhausts what happens from 64, 65 on other elements come into it. That sums what I want to say about what makes Dylan, how Dylan became such a great author of protest songs.

AM It's almost unfashionable nowadays to read about Dylan as a political songwriter, partly because the things he has said, such as his 'Masters of War' comments, claiming it was not anti-war...

MM I feel that people are too willing to accept, in particular in quality Dylan biographies... people want to be as hip as they think Dylan was in 65 & 66 – and no one can be more hip than Dylan was then – and to that end they take for granted his sneering repudiation of his previous incarnation.

I don't blame him for that, that was his strategy for survival and he had to pursue but at this stage the argument between the political and the anti (or less) political Dylan or the protest Dylan is completely redundant. All of these things brought out of different facets, essential facets, of a really great artist and I wouldn't want to do without any of it. I think he was an incredibly great writer of political song. And the proof of that is that he wrote, for example, 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll' which might be the best of all. It is something that anyone that hears that is immediately struck and moved by. I have

watched young people listen to that for the first time and they are completely bound up with the story and it's message about institutionalized race and class injustice. You can go to a park here in Harringay and you will see some of the same stuff going down and it was that ability to find in the particular something that was universal that made him a great artist at that time. But even though there is definitely a change between the classic protest Dylan, which is really all of 20 months of his life, and what comes after, I also think there is continuity that underlines compulsions and concerns and I try to talk about that in the book.

AM One of the main things in the book is the way you move from the 'protest period' to *Another Side of Bob Dylan* and the classic mid-sixties trilogy and point out that the song title your book originally was named after, 'Chimes of Freedom' was a protest song.

MM Well for me it's a great protest song that gets angrier about a sick society and it is a sweeping indictment. 'Desolation Row' is as well. The point I try to make in the book is that he doesn't make his peace with society when he breaks with explicitly topical or protest song. It's the opposite he goes to war on a much deeper level. And this does reflect where the movement was going which was trying to understand that the problem was not just segregation or bad nuclear weapons policy. Rather there is something deeper in society as a whole and Dylan was one of a very large number of young people that was trying to figure this out. He took it in his own direction

and as an artist that is what I feel is the key to those three masterpieces of the mid 60's. As much as I love lots of other Dylan I don't think it gets better than that and I think that now we are past the end of the 20th century, you've got to put stuff like 'Desolation Row' up with 'The Wasteland' or any other number of great expressions of the horrors of the 20th century. So, he gets more deeply political, but also he becomes explicitly anti-political, and he also does in 'My Back Pages', where he really has a go at the movement.

Now I am a movement person, have been for the whole of my life and I keep coming back to 'My Back Pages' and 'Chimes of Freedom', because I think they are full of truth. They are not the only truth, but he held the mirror up to the movement for his own reasons but as always he, by being true to his own reasons which were the usual messy motivations of all human beings, somehow was able to grapple with what we were all grappling with, at a deeper level, artistically. What he does, and I think it is pretty unique, is that he makes politics itself a category that he won't take for granted anymore. And the assumptions of the movement, which can easily become self-righteous, he questions them. 'Are we better than the people that we set ourselves up against?' There's that incredible line in 'My Back Pages', 'I become my enemy in the instance that I preach' – that's got to be one of the greatest pieces of poetry of any time. It's a warning about the authoritarianism that can be inside even the most sincere and important movement for human liberation and freedom. Who would have thought the

20th century would prove that that's a pretty powerful aphorism? And I can tell you that my many decades of political experience I have seen it proved again and again.

AM That's why you liked the song so much?

MM Almost all the political activists I know love that song, they love 'Chimes of Freedom' too, they love the other songs as well, but you know they hear a truth that we need to hear in those songs.

AM Your book, both versions, is subtitled 'Bob Dylan in the 1960's' and I am presuming that there is a tremendous cross-pollination between your Dylan book and the one on Muhammad Ali which also concentrated on the 1960s.

MM The Muhammad Ali book was an attempt to re-situate Ali in his times in order to recover his radical edge which I felt in the 1990's (and frankly even more so now as he has just been a guest of Bush's Whitehouse) had become very sanitized. This consensual Ali was far remote from the definitive and very challenging figure I remembered from when I was growing up. I thought there were a lot of questions in that. In that book I drew a comparison between Ali and Dylan, who are the same age and actually there are quite a few things they have in common, as well as pretty profound things that separate them. I felt that having written that, that I had begun to exhaust this topic of Dylan in the 60's (which I had grown up with so to some extent it was a kind of given for me); but I wanted the chance to go back reconsider it. So, a lot of the research I did for

this book, for *Wicked Messenger* was, obviously, just listening endlessly to the music and aside from that, going back reading and re-reading a lot of sources about the movement in the US and elsewhere in the '60s. What *Wicked Messenger* tries to do is to tell two intertwining stories, one is about the grassroots social movements – anti-racist, anti-war, counter-cultural – of the 60's and they are fascinating and inspiring but also paradoxical in some pretty wayward developments.

The second story is the story of Dylan in the 60's; a young artist with a sort of intransigently individual approach to his art and his life who had an umbilical connection to his times. Which doesn't mean he was a mouthpiece for them, as he made clear many times, but he did respond to them creatively and, I think, inspirationally at times – so I wanted to tell the two stories together because I thought each story was incomplete without the other and that each story would give insight into and reflect on the other.

With Ali I thought it was very easy for him to become institutionalized and sanitized and just to become another American icon, invited to the Whitehouse. It would be a tragedy if such a thing were to happen to Dylan, because I think his music, when it is listened to properly, is still shocking, shocking in the best sense in that it challenges our complacency and I didn't want this to become another member of the 'rock & roll hall of fame', as it were. So, the book was probably about trying to excavate the tension that created this amazing music and recapture what was so radical

and challenging about Dylan's music throughout the 60's.

AM In this 'post Scorsese' period that we are in, with the 'Gaslight Café' coming out in Starbucks, the *No Direction Home* documentary and the 'Bootleg Series' release etc. Do you feel that there is case to be argued that the recent concentration of the 60's is unfair to Dylan as a later artist and keeps giving support to the public stereotype which sees Dylan as, well almost as, if he had died at the same time as Hendrix?

MM Well the thing is, that if you look back to 1967 and wondered then: 'Which rock artist would be alive in the 21st century?', No-one would have backed Dylan, so he turned out to be a remarkable survivor.

I could be in some danger of that, however. As I say, I think Dylan is an amazing artist, there is lots of room for looking at Dylan across his whole career. My particular interest is in Dylan and the 60's because I think the quite unique connection between his artistry in those days and the social turbulence of the times. This does not mean that songs that don't display that link aren't great songs, or aren't worth talking about, but they raise other subjects. I think the real danger isn't that we'll freeze Dylan into the 60's rather it is that we'll freeze the 60's into a cliché. I have to say what is refreshing about Scorsese's film is that he didn't lean on the usual library footage of kids burning draft cards, Woodstock, 'Apocalypse Now' images of helicopters... He actually came up with some fresh stuff.

The 60's was an incredibly complex and contradictory time. I feel as a veteran of that movement that in most ways we did not achieve our aims and we need to think why, because I think those aims are still worth struggling for.

So, I am mainly worried about the way that the 60's just becomes a commodity, a series of images and icons and a kind of muzak that we can appropriate into our lives without really thinking what it meant and that's where we are now. The US and now the UK at war with a third world country and the world is in great crisis. I think the last few years probably more so than ever before in my lifetime and so the messages and the experiences of an earlier social crisis are important to understand but not to simplify and not to turn into a kind of badge and Dylan himself was most aware of that.

AM Yet everything is packaged like that now, isn't it? So the 60's has become a kind of fast-food version of history. How many times have we seen those images you mentioned?

MM It's amazing to me you that you can use this stuff and sell coffee, hamburgers, clothing or whatever else. This is a key point of *Wicked Messenger*, probably in fact where the title comes from, even in the 60's Dylan was more acutely aware of that danger that the culture of protest could become commodified and therefore sort of neutered more than any other artist of the times. I think that's a safe comment, and it is part of his tormented relationship with his own fans which I think produces incredibly great art but was not much fun

for him. He is intensely aware from at least late 1963 that it is too easy for the movement to become just another part of consumer society and he is always running, trying to chase the 60's this ever receding horizon of authenticity and truth telling. Every time you say something it goes from becoming an original challenging insight to being a slogan and then to being something that is just part of the wallpaper of the time. For Dylan this was an impossible situation and I think this inspired the most brilliant art because he kept having to stay one step ahead of himself but it obviously drove him mad.

'Absolutely Sweet Marie' is one of my all time favourite songs and there's all kinds of things in that song but there is that great aphorism: 'to live outside the law you must be honest' – which to me is probably the signpost for the whole of Dylan's work in the 60's – but the next line is the one that is the most Dylanesque because he then says 'and I know you always say that you agree' and that is pure Dylan. That is where he's roped you in and made you feel like your one of the in group and then pulled the rug out from under you its saying its just another posture or has the danger of being so.

I did a talk on Dylan at Liverpool University to a group of anti-globalization activists and I was talking about this and it made the most amazing discussion. They were all young people and asking things like: 'but can we buy Nike trainers', 'if I buy coffee at this particular thing have I sold out'. It was a very earnest and heated debate to which there is no easy answer

and my heart went out to these young people and what they were trying to deal with.

Dylan was aware of this; I mean, what do you do if you live inside a society which is corrupt and artificial and has corruption and injustice in all sorts of ways? And, inevitably we are all complicit in it and I think this is one of the great messages from Dylan.

The point about Davy Moore is not just this terrible thing that happened to this boxer who died, but that everyone who watched it and heard about it in some way took part in the system that created it. That then becomes, that's a political insight that then becomes much deeper as the decade goes on and I think in the end its kind of the core of *John Wesley Harding*. 'I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine': 'I was one of those who put him out to death' – even he destroys his own vocation and it is a very pessimistic conclusion and I personally don't buy the pessimism but I think it is a powerful works of art and admonishment to the rest of us.

AM I mentioned Victoria Secrets; your book obviously is about Bob Dylan in the 60's and it paints a political portrait of him that's kind of been forgotten about in recent years. So, to jump to later Dylan, there's a number of things Dylan has done: like Victoria's Secrets, like 'The Times They Are A Changin' being authorized for a bank's TV advert (even though he didn't appear or sing in it himself), playing a private gig for Japanese businessmen for a million dollars, playing Woodstock 2 after all he said about the

original Woodstock. Do these developments depress you?

MM It doesn't depress me anymore; because I didn't start expecting Dylan to be consistent about anything, back in 1965. Although there are things he has done that have distressed me. Would I like Dylan to speak out against the war in Iraq and multi-nationalism capitalism? I'd like everyone to do that. I don't condemn Dylan for not doing it, but of course I'd prefer he enlightened us because it would be a good thing for the world. But I don't think he is obliged to do that for the sake of his art. The one thing I don't think is fair is to hold up 60's Dylan in music as compared to post 60's Dylan, you can see in *Chronicles* how utterly fed up he is with that, and it *is* unreal.

I also feel his contribution through the music to all the struggles I believe in is so huge that whatever bad judgement he displays in these other things, I regret it, but it is not a big deal.

I am a big Steve Earle fan. I think, in particular Steve Earle, since he came back from prison and drugs and all that, he had a high point writing the best American songs since Dylan in his heyday. I think its great the way Steve speaks out and campaigns and all but I don't want one person to be another. It's absolutely futile to want Dylan to be like somebody else, it's the rough with the smooth. What you get with Dylan is an inconsistent and rough edged package that he is always doing his best to make less clear and you have to take the whole thing, or you can't have the genius inspiration.

AM Okay, so you are not beating him over the head for these, what shall we call them 'mild transgressions'. They are his songs and he can do what he likes with them, but you do beat him over the head about Vietnam...

MM I changed that as I felt I hadn't got it right, but its so complicated, I stand with this formulation that's in here, whereas I felt the first one was too sweeping, but yes, as a public figure and private citizen, Dylan failed to address Vietnam and that's a serious omission.

AM What do you think Dylan himself would think of such comments? You are making a test of them and saying Dylan has failed this test, but I don't think Dylan would even acknowledge there was a test.

MM Subsequently he's made it pretty clear that everyone knows that Vietnam was a grotesque nightmare especially for the Vietnamese and also for Americans and the fact that he added the verse to 'With God on Our Side' in the late 80's – not a very strong verse¹ but nonetheless one which incorporated Vietnam into the whole kind of national culture narrative that he presented. Plus there are references in *Chronicles* and *Masked And Anonymous*.

Vietnam had a huge impact on him like it did on everyone else in the USA but he chose not only not to support the anti-war movement but to criticize the anti-war movement, (not from within, but from outside it), and I thought that was a mistake. His failure wasn't that he didn't write lots of protest songs about Vietnam, I didn't expect him to do that. The greatest protest song about Vietnam is probably

'All Along the Watchtower' albeit without a single reference to Vietnam in it. But, in the context of the time, that is how most people saw it, without a doubt, and I think it clearly stems from the sense of social crisis and apocalyptic anxiety about where society was going and what was happening because of Vietnam. So, I'm not saying this about what he did as a citizen but as a public figure. Public figures have more access to the media than the rest of us and in times of great moral crisis, I guess I do think they should use that. It doesn't mean he's a bad person, he's no worse than most Americans; most Americans didn't speak out against Vietnam, and of course the people who are currently running the country thought it was a really good thing, the war over there. Though they were never prepared to fight themselves as we know.

Vietnam was an incredible atrocity that was being committed in full view of all Americans by the American government for a period of at least 8 years – which is the period we are talking about here – '64 to '73. I think those who didn't speak out against it made a terrible error; it doesn't make them bad people, doesn't make those who spoke out about it better people. It just means on this particular issue there is a right and wrong. Over 2 million people were killed by American action in Vietnam, its one of the great Holocausts of the century and I feel strongly about it. I was hugely affected by that experience as a kid. It's not that I'm disappointed in Dylan, its that I just think the record has to be clear about it. It's not to damn him; but to pretend that he did not consciously and deliberately stand

aside from that challenge is just historically inaccurate.

AM It's interesting what you say about how *John Wesley Harding* was taken. I think you were quite hard on it, it's one of my favourite albums,

MM I think it's a great album, I see it as a kind of almost necessary sequel to his whole line of development. I think it's a tragic album because Dylan is locked into a place that he can't get out of; in a society where language and communication is all polluted or corrupted how can you be a truth teller? And he doesn't know the answer to it, it's not an easy question, he's kind of locked into that contradiction and to some extent most of the album is about that. Obviously, 'Wicked Messenger' is about this crisis of the truth teller or the prophet or the singer-songwriter in that era, it doesn't resolve the crisis but it plays it out incredibly powerfully. I have problems with 'As I Went Out One Morning' because I can't figure out what the hell it is about but that may just be me.

AM I think that's a difficulty with the whole album, I mean, I love 'The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest', but I couldn't actually say what it means exactly. I feel I know what it means when I am listening to it, but to attempt to paraphrase it would be very difficult.

The connection you mention that astounded me – and its probably because I was too young at the time – but I still can't get my head around it, is when you mention the death of Che Guevara in connection with 'I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine'.

MM Right: ‘no martyr is among ye now’. That line, as far as we can tell, he writes in November 67 and then goes and records it and it is an extraordinary thing to say because this was the time when the newspapers were filled with martyrs or these people who were being presented as martyr. Che Guevara had been murdered by American supported agents in South America, just a few months before and this was front page news everywhere. It was huge, this was before he became a t-shirt, he was a revolutionary and he had become a household name, so you had a huge martyr figure. Malcolm X had died, Medgar Evers had been killed and Dylan himself had written a great song about it. This is the guy whose very first foray into some sort of serious topical song was about Emmett Till, who is a martyr. And now all these years later coming to some understanding about what actually happened in that incident. So, the world seemed to be full of martyrs plus in the year that followed *John Wesley Harding*’s release we had a lot more. So it seemed an amazing assertion to make, that martyrs were not among us when it seemed so clear that they were, and it was challenging. And I think what he is saying is that a martyr is something with moral clarity and exemplary quality and saying that this society is so corrupt and so is our use of language. Therefore even the word,

‘martyr’ is so self-serving that we cannot sustain anything as morally clear as martyrdom. Here’s a guy who had sung about martyrdom who had used those ideas powerfully in ‘The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll’ and other songs like ‘Chimes of Freedom’. Yet here is the voice of that decade singing that ‘no martyrs are among you’. It is profoundly paradoxical and a great line. The moment I heard it I thought it was an amazing line, but it is a line of despair. Public life has become such a charade and even those people that are offered to us as martyrs are just another way to get us to watch more TV and buy more products. That’s what I think he is basically getting at there, and that he is part of the problem. That’s what ‘I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine’ and the whole album said. He feels he is not the solution, he’s part of the problem, the truth teller cannot tell the truth and therefore becomes part of a society built on dishonesty.

With special thanks to David and, especially, Marie Bristow

1. The verse was written by the Neville Brothers and appeared on their Lanois produced album, *Yellow Moon*, that Dylan expressed much admiration for. So, although he did add this verse to his performance, in a customary Dylanesque twist they are still not his words on the Vietnam conflict – Ed.

'The Locusts Sang Off in the Distance':

A Semester of Bob Dylan as Literature

by John P. McCombe

Introduction

Clearly I'm no John Wesley Harding. In the fall of 2005 I made a foolish move – professionally speaking, that is. As an untenured faculty member, I taught a course at the University of Dayton called 'Bob Dylan as Literature.' Why would I teach such a course? Perhaps that will become clear in the pages to follow. Who would take such a course? During our first meeting I determined that the students fell into three categories: 1) 'repeat offenders' – those whose names have appeared on my roster too often for their own good; 2) budding Bob-o-philes – those interested enough in Dylan to be able to debate the relative merits of *Shot of Love* and *Infidels*; and 3) 'the contrarians' – kids whose parents hate Dylan, thus convincing their offspring that Dylan probably should be their hero. After students introduced themselves and their reasons for taking the course, here are a few ground rules I established for the weeks ahead:

Bob Dylan is not a poet (even though this is a literature course).

If you don't like Dylan's singing voice, you can only say so once during the semester without a significant point deduction (not because I don't respect this aesthetic judgment, but because it's usually irrelevant to the kind of analysis we'll be doing).

Despite accepting a couple of honorary degrees, Dylan is suspicious, at best, of universities (and people like me who teach in them), and he would probably conclude that the course is a bad idea.

I tend to think the course is a bad idea.

Content aside, the timing of the course was perfect, as it was completely synchronous with a boom time in the global Bob Dylan media empire. There were announcements that Dylan would be hosting his own XM satellite radio program and that Sony had partnered with Starbucks in order to release *Live at The Gaslight 1962* (the latter prompting a vigorous discussion about whether multinational corporations and rock 'n' roll were really such strange bedfellows). In terms of other media, we were able to read excerpts from the just-published *Chronicles: Volume One*, and I was able to schedule an out-of-class screening of Martin Scorsese's *No Direction Home* that fifteen of twenty four students attended (sure, there was pizza as an enticement, but I was still impressed that so many turned out on a late Friday afternoon). As it turned out, the pizza made the hostility in Scorsese's film so much more palatable. Aside from the sense of humor displayed by Joan Baez and Liam Clancy, what students were most struck by in *No Direction Home* was the mutual antipathy between artist and audience during the 1966 UK. tour. And the next few weeks of the course could attempt to answer the very question that structures Scorsese's film: how *did* Dylan transform himself from the darling of the left in America and Britain – a man who trod the same boards at the March on Washington as Martin Luther King Jr. – to a folk music Judas? The only other question that so preoccupied the class: why does the professor (i.e., me) have such ambivalence about the class in which we debated the 'Dylan as Judas' question?

Before I begin to answer the ambivalence question, I need to establish that I love Bob Dylan. I have since I spent my lawn mowing money on *Slow Train Coming* rather than *Cheap Trick At Budokan* at age fourteen. Admittedly, I was a bit puzzled that the 'Voice of a Generation' was so preoccupied with salvation. But I soon learned that Dylan had many other non-Biblical preoccupations: the Cold War, female vanity, and his family, to name a few. But Dylan's one obsession that unified them all was an obvious love of language. The extent to which Dylan was immersed in language and literature is documented in Michael Gray's *Song & Dance Man: The Art of Bob Dylan*, the first book that I read that wasn't about either the stars of the National Football League or the exploits of boy detective, Encyclopedia Brown.¹ I'm naturally skeptical about 'books that changed my life' (so I won't make that claim), but I borrowed that book so often during the late 1970s from the Sewickley Public Library in suburban Pittsburgh that, if I had any kind of civic responsibility, I'd donate a copy of Gray's greatly expanded third edition so that some other juvenile music obsessive could change the course of his life (I guess I did just make that claim). Because I grew up in a home where canonical English literature never once surfaced in conversation, Gray's book was my first exposure to Milton, Donne, Blake, and Eliot. And this was the kind of work that I wanted to do: thinking seriously about the music I loved, especially since I had no discernable musical talent.

English 380: Bob Dylan as Literature
(3 credits)

Fast-forward twenty-five years. I finally figured it out: how to reconcile my love for rock music and my day job as an English professor who specializes in British literature (something that students very rarely enjoy – Austen-lovers, excepted). Last fall I reinvented myself as Ohio's answer to Michael Gray. While the course was far from the first university course of its kind, it may be *my* last. Here's why.

When my students and I discuss Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* as a revolutionary attempt to democratize English poetry, none of my students enjoy the reading (except when we discuss Coleridge's addiction to laudanum). But I certainly don't take it personally when course evaluations routinely conclude that students enjoyed the instructor but HATED the readings. Most twenty year old Americans aren't predisposed to a fascination with what they encounter in my classes: Will Clarissa Dalloway's party succeed? Will Stephen Dedalus regret his decision to choose poetry and exile over family and church? Did T.S. Eliot use laudanum while writing *The Waste Land*?

But Dylan is different – I want them to like this course, and they should, too. First of all, he's American (and from the Midwest, too). In addition, he's alive, he's a skeptic, he looks cool in that suede jacket on the cover of *Blonde on Blonde*, not to mention the fact that he's got something to say to every single one of my students. If I fail to make him relevant in this college

course, there are a few potential consequences for the professor:

I can't hide behind the 'canon' – unlike Chaucer, Shakespeare, or the Bronte sisters, universities haven't spent the better part of a century claiming that young adults should experience Bob Dylan. This is my choice of subject, and its potential failure is mine alone.

I risk the scorn of several of my senior colleagues, particularly ones like, let's call him Adam. Adam is an Ivy Leaguer, a Miltonian, a Bach-lover, and Anglican, and he is as close to the living incarnation of T.S. Eliot as anyone who drinks from the same English Department coffee pot as I do. (Incidentally, I mean the T.S. Eliot of *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture* rather than *Cats*). Adam has also been using the word 'fluff' quite a bit lately in department meetings, and he may now be referring to me (and not just the guy who teaches the seminar on vampire films).

And there's this: I still get excited when a new Bob book is published or when a CD-r of a Bob show arrives in the mail (which happened the very day I wrote this sentence). I don't have that kind of emotional attachment to Virginia Woolf (intellectual, yes – emotional, no). What I'm looking at is the potential disappointment in two phases of my life: personal *and* professional.

In addition to the fear that students will hate what I thought was important enough to devote an entire course to, there is another persistent doubt that I have: the crushing irony that, if we do our interpretive work properly, we will have uncovered

this recurrent theme: the very kind of exercise in which we are engaged (i.e., intellectualizing Dylan's songs) is a dead end. A waste of time, indeed, contrary to the experience of actually living life. One of the times this irony became most obvious was during 'Dylan in Academia,' two sessions in which we covered two forms of Dylan's connection to higher education. The first included Dylan's very brief university career and subsequent comments on my chosen profession, feelings best encapsulated in Dylan's remarks to Nat Hentoff in 1966: 'Colleges are like old-age homes; except for the fact that more people die in college...'² Cue the students' laughter, and not the polite kind I often get. But the laughter was nothing compared to what followed during part two of 'Dylan in Academia.' During this conversation we listened to the songs that conveyed this very same mistrust of intellectuals, but in a more serious fashion. The first was 'Day of the Locusts,' in which Dylan links one of the plagues of Egypt – no less than crop-devouring locusts – to his 1970 visit to Princeton. How disconcerted was Dylan by the experience? Keep in mind that it was the *locusts* that sang in the distance, and not one of the lesser plagues: say frogs or gnats or even flies. Following the plagues, we next discussed the song that established the unofficial course theme, 'Ballad of a Thin Man.'

As someone who often struggles to get students to say *anything* (intelligent or otherwise) about poetry, 'Thin Man' was a kind of godsend – at least temporarily. The imagery is so provocative that students fell

over themselves in order to catalogue the sexual imagery (pencils in hand, bones, sword swallowers). Of course, silence set in once we had to think of how this connects to the issue of people, like Mr. Jones, who just don't know what's going on. This is where I needed to steer the conversation a bit: maybe the pencil isn't exclusively phallic (and thus symbolic) but literal, too. Mr. Jones may write about life rather than live it. He may be thin because his life's work doesn't nourish him (and he's certainly emasculated in the process, too). Remind you of anyone? Silence. Silence. More silence.

'IT'S ME,' I shouted at them. 'I'M MR. JONES – DON'T YOU GET IT? THIS SONG IS ABOUT ME – JOHN P. McCOMBE.'

A moment of speechless confusion followed by belly-rumbling laughter followed by more speechlessness when I added in a softer voice:

But so are you – *you're* Mr. Jones.

All of this occurred at the start of a brand new course, one I spent three months of my summer break preparing. Three months of comparative readings of various Dylan bios and obtaining journal articles from inter-library loan (more than a few of the latter were terrible, by the way). Three months of initiation into the Dylan bootleg community so that I could actually play them 'Ain't No Man Righteous' and the New York version of 'Idiot Wind.' Three months of obsession and yet, the doubts set in after only two weeks of the actual class. Had I been the kind of man who donates books to public libraries, I would have packed it in and

followed the course that Dylan describes in 'My Life in a Stolen Moment': 'driftin' an' learnin' new lessons' and riding 'freight trains for kicks' and getting 'busted for looking like I do.'³ But I didn't. I chose tenure and pencils and staying (metaphorically) thin for the next thirteen weeks. We listened to songs (I learned that as much as most 20-year olds hate the sound of Dylan's voice, the Byrds' harmonies on 'All I Really Want to Do' sound even stranger to them). We read essays by fellow members of the Jones clan (one conclusion: Christopher Ricks sure pays attention to the details). Most of all we dabbled in academic disciplines we had no business dabbling in. And all of these activities centered on a man who isn't a poet, but rather a self-proclaimed 'trapeze artist.' For this, you can earn three credits?

This issue of crossing disciplinary boundaries is perhaps the prime reason why the course might have been a bad idea. If you look at the list of discussion topics pursued, you'll no doubt agree that, by rights, the course should have been team-taught by the following: a philosopher, historian, theologian (who are particularly plentiful at the University of Dayton – a Catholic university), musicologist, sociologist, and women's studies scholar. Even though I learned a lot, my students probably deserved better. And maybe English professors are always guilty of this kind of intellectual over-reaching, but this seems like an especially severe case. Just look at what we spent the next three months thinking about:

Discussion Topics

Bob-in-Blackface. O.K., not literally, although we did discuss the curious *white-face* during the Rolling Thunder Review and its debt to Baptiste, the lovelorn mime in Marcel Carné's 1945 film *Les Enfants du Paradis*. But, in addition, Dylan has clearly been fascinated by African-American culture in general, and blackface minstrelsy, in particular, from the self-proclaimed desire in his high school yearbook to 'join Little Richard' until he borrowed the title of his most recent studio album from Eric Lott's academic study *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993).⁴ As a way of *hearing* how Dylan performs in a sort of blackface, my class listened to two versions of 'See That My Grave is Kept Clean': the recording by Blind Lemon Jefferson on Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*, and Dylan's own version on his Columbia debut. As Barry Shank writes in "'That Wild Mercury Sound": Bob Dylan and American "Culture," Dylan sings "Grave" a full octave higher than Jefferson, and this "upward tonal shift characterizes the historical performance of blackface minstrelsy" and "is common in white appropriations of black musical forms and styles."⁵ Fortunately, Shank provides another example of this same type of musical transformation in a more accessible language: citing Anthony Scaduto's biography, in which the young Robert Zimmerman claims that Little Richard's records could be even better had the rock 'n' roll legend not 'played down too low'

on the single ‘Jenny, Jenny.’⁶ The point that I was trying to draw from Shank’s essay is that ‘blackface’ is a complicated gesture, one marked by ‘love and theft,’ but also by something else: a constant attempt to also assert a difference (and distance) from African-American culture (and African Americans). In other words, Dylan has an obvious love for the blues, but his own performances sound distinct as well: namely, in a higher tone. This tonal shift is one way that Shank defines ‘that wild mercury sound,’ a phrase that may have puzzled my students had they first encountered it Dylan’s 1978 *Playboy* interview. And when I mentioned that I hear that same upward tonal shift in the sound of Eminem (another artist who owes an obvious debt to African-American culture), I think that a few more recognized how blackface works: love, theft, *and* difference.

Formalism and Historicism. This kind of topic is where my professional bread is buttered: literary criticism. No need to rely on musicologists like Barry Shank here: I can confuse students on my own, thank you very much. Admittedly, as much as these sessions focused on one of the Dylan songs that deserves inclusion in anthologies of twentieth-century American Literature – ‘The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll’ – a good portion of our conversation related to an issue that has divided literary scholars for decades: how should English professors actually be teaching literature? If the subject is poetry, ‘formalists’ tend to stick to the ‘form’ of the poem: its *shape* (the construction of stanzas, for example), its meter and rhyme

and many other issues related to how the poem *sounds*. If you’ve ever studied Shakespeare and recall the phrase ‘iambic pentameter,’ then you’ve been exposed to something called scansion, one of the cornerstones of formalist analysis. In his sometimes maddening (e.g., five pages of explication for the two-line ‘All the Tired Horses’???) and sometimes revelatory *Dylan’s Visions of Sin*, Christopher Ricks performs an insightful formalist analysis of ‘Hattie Carroll.’ My students initially rolled their eyes when learning from Ricks that Zanzinger’s name includes, in sequence, the letters of the word for his particular (and ‘deadly’) sin: a-n-g-e-r. But, wait, it does get better. We followed Ricks in his scansion of the song, observing the ‘feminine’ line endings (a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable) that dominate the song’s line endings (Cárroll/táble/lével/gável etc.), but which are broken only at a key dramatic moment for Ricks: ‘when he [Zanzinger] fells her. “Got killed by a blow, lay slain by a cane” – not “Got killed by a blow, lay slain by a trúncheon.”’⁷ In a Catholic University, most students recognize the Biblical resonance of the wordplay on cane/Cain, but they might otherwise miss how dramatic a disrupted cadence can be. Poetry is the language at its best, and this is why, in ‘Neutral Tones,’ when Thomas Hardy finds that nature mirrors his somber and colorless mood, the sun is white, the sod is starving, and the tree he spies is...an *ash*. That single word choice is perfect: it conjures up something lifeless, burned out and grayish, but then Hardy’s a poet. And while he’s no poet – I must

keep insisting this – Dylan is similarly careful with language. Most of my own professors, however, possessed a disdain for just this type of formalist analysis, instead preferring to focus on what the literary work suggests about the world in which it was created. Well, in the interest of fair and balanced criticism, my class then viewed the same song through the lens of historicism. In *Chimes of Freedom*, Mike Marqusee documents how Dylan composed ‘Hattie Carroll’ in the weeks following the death of four young girls in a 1963 Birmingham, Alabama church bombing. Rather than focus on stressed and unstressed syllables, this discussion places Dylan in a context of other protests against this horrific event: in prose (James Baldwin), poetry (Langston Hughes) and song (Nina Simone, John Coltrane). Marqusee reminds us that, at times, Dylan’s omissions (never mentioning Carroll’s race, for example) may have little to do with any sort of formalist literary technique and everything to do with the journalistic immediacy of the song: ‘Dylan doesn’t even bother to tell us that Carroll is black and Zantinger is white. It wasn’t necessary – not in the America of 1963.’⁸

Blood on the Tracks, ‘Sara,’ and **Confessional Poetry**. One of the few other topics in which a literature professor could feel at home. I think I actually scheduled this session at the proper time. Following the cryptic and allusive wonder that is ‘Desolation Row,’ ‘It’s Alright, Ma’ and others (perfect examples of Dylan’s links to that most ‘difficult’ of literary style periods: modernism), Dylan’s mid-70s output can come as a shock. Discussing

‘You’re Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go’ can be interesting, but not because we strain after meaning. The title alone takes care of that, but what is worth discussing is Dylan’s vulnerability. After all, since when does Bob Dylan get left behind? Even in the Suze Rotolo-inspired ‘Boots of Spanish Leather,’ an ostensible song of disappointment and heartbreak, Dylan provides such a terrific ‘punch line’ – the gift of those leather boots suggests that *he’s* moving on as well (so don’t think twice, Suze, Bob’s alright). But *Blood on the Tracks*, and especially ‘Sara’ (from *Desire*) are true confessional works. ‘You’re a Big Girl Now’ and ‘Idiot Wind’ are probably better songs (perhaps because they seem less tethered to specific people and thus more universal), but ‘Sara’ is Bob’s confessional poem *par excellence*. Listened to in the context of mid-century American poets such as W.D. Snodgrass, Robert Lowell, and Anne Sexton, Dylan is working exactly the same territory: marital discord, a mind racing in a distraught state, and feared estrangement from his children. In ‘Home After Three Months Away,’ Lowell’s daughter ‘holds her levee in the tub’ during bath time while Dad laments the three months of his hospitalization and separation from her; in ‘The Double Image,’ Sexton’s four-year old watches ‘the yellow leaves go queer,/ flapping in the winter rain’ as the poet regrets the time mother and daughter spent apart. In ‘Sara,’ Dylan’s desperate appeal (‘Don’t ever leave me, don’t ever go’) is also a plea to stay connected to his children, children who, in the best confessional tradition, ‘...run to the water their

buckets to fill.' If mid-60s Dylan could be dense, experimental, and *avant garde* in the way that Ezra Pound advocated (modernism was supposed to 'make it new'), mid-70s Dylan could be something else entirely. Rather than the 'escape from emotion' and 'extinction of personality' that T.S. Eliot advocates in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (and, admittedly, we don't learn much about Dylan the man in these mid-60s songs), Dylan could be raw and direct and emphasize his personal pain in a way that wasn't obscure.⁹ Very often, students have a tough time with poetic personas: the idea that the 'I' in the poem isn't always equivalent to the person who has written the poem. But in the case of the 'confessional' Bob, sometimes the 'I' is Bob Dylan. And the whiteface during Rolling Thunder wasn't fooling anyone.

The Ethics of Bootlegging. I think I needed a philosopher on this day. Or perhaps a priest. We began with the important distinction between 'bootlegs' and 'pirated' recordings, and concluded that there can be little justification for the latter, since these recordings are, for the most part, otherwise commercially available. So far, so good. (Of course, I didn't mention that my only recording of 'George Jackson' exists on a CD-r of a pirate CD compilation.) But then we got to the sticky issue of bootlegs, and in a class where the syllabus includes recordings (both audio and visual) liberally drawn from them – so my moral position was at least implicitly clear. But I couldn't really articulate why I've included them, other than this less-than-intellectual position: 'But just listen to how good this stuff

is...' I don't think anyone felt guilty that we'd listened to 'Blind Willie McTell,' which, at one time, was a very 'unofficial' bootleg (and obviously a song worthy of release), or that we also heard the fragment of 'Yonder Comes Sin' that, sadly, remains in the vaults. There's also the issue that Columbia records has done a little exploitation of their own via the bootleg concept in their 'official' bootleg series – the marketing of these Columbia releases, after all, depends on this shadow Dylan industry. But does this make bootlegging right, or is Dylan's label merely trying to gain a minute percentage of the profits from bootlegs that are rightfully theirs? Also, is there a distinction to be made between studio bootlegs and live recordings? Is a performance the same kind of intellectual property as a *Blood on the Tracks* or *Infidels* outtake? Probably yes, although it would be easier for me if it weren't, since I love to play Dylan's live 'revisions' of his catalogue. In the discussion that followed, we ended up establishing the competing rights which need to be weighed against each other: the artist's versus the audience's. While Dylan would not exist as a recording artist without his fans – fans who may, in some cases, spend more money on Dylan recordings because of bootlegs – Dylan also has a right as an artist to control the distribution of his copyrighted material.

At the time I was leading this discussion, I had no idea how to bring it to some resolution, because I couldn't establish that, for me, there's one set of competing rights that ultimately wins. Fortunately, James Klagge can make a case, and does so

in ‘The Morality of Bootlegging Bob.’¹⁰ But then he’s a philosopher, and they specialize in resolving moral quandaries (unlike literature professors, who specialize in asking questions about ambiguous and allusive poems). Unfortunately, Klagge’s essay appears in a collection that was published after my course concluded: *Bob Dylan and Philosophy*. I won’t outline the details of the case he makes in favor of live bootlegs, but suffice to say, I’m absolved of any wrongdoing related to those concert performances where Dylan continually brings new life to his songs. But this means that ‘Yonder Comes Sin’ and ‘George Jackson’ have to go if Klagge’s essay appears on a future edition of the syllabus. Or, better yet, maybe I’ll pretend I never saw it.

If Plato had heard ‘Joey,’ would Dylan have been banished from the Republic? While the topic of bootlegs confirmed that I’m no philosopher, the issue of Dylan and poetic ‘truth’ was a MUCH easier question. Of course Dylan would be excluded from the Republic. And who makes the best argument for why? Lester Bangs. That’s right – the guy played by Philip Seymour Hoffman in *Almost Famous*. The Hunter S. Thompson of rock journalism. Speed freak. Only known lover of Lou Reed’s *Metal Machine Music*. O.K., so most of those cultural references are lost on the typical 20-year old, but what isn’t lost is that this was a class where I juxtaposed one of the pillars of western philosophy, the author of the *Apology* and *Symposium*, with a guy who wrote a lot for *Creem* magazine in the 70s. If nothing else, that

makes a class more interesting than a run-of-the-mill genetics lecture. So maybe my last foray into ethics via bootlegging was a bust, but I was on *terra firma* with this hierarchy: there’s the Platonic ‘ideal’ Joey Gallo, and the flesh and blood one gunned down in Little Italy’s Umberto’s Clam Bar, and then Dylan’s dubious celebration of him in song. And Bangs (who was no school board member himself) establishes what a true sociopath our mobster was: an organized crime figure who was also a wife beater *and* jailhouse rapist. And Dylan actually has to ask, ‘What made them want to come and blow you away?’ Bangs knows the answer, and his objection to ‘Joey’ is an extreme example of the reasons why Plato distrusted all poets and excludes them from the Republic: they produce imitations of imitations of the ideal. In other words, they’re liars. Let’s put it this way: Plato wouldn’t admit Homer, and he actually liked Homer’s work so, as far as admission to the Republic, Dylan wouldn’t even rate an interview.

Dylan and Christianity. Maybe I should have concluded with the triumph of Plato and ‘Joey’ What an edgy mix of high and low culture. And imagine the intellectual certainty with which I sent Dylan into exile with all of the others who, in Plato’s view, were either unjust or intemperate (or else guilty of poetry – of course, this by no means suggests Dylan’s a poet). But I didn’t end there. I ended with two other disciplines that are not my own: religion and women’s studies. I’ll spare you a lengthy description of our discussions of Dylan and Christianity, other than to say that we concluded that

Slow Train Coming isn't exactly brimming with Christian charity (except perhaps towards his 'Precious Angel'), but that 'Every Grain of Sand' conveys how difficult faith can be, which is why a God-fearing – but very much lapsed – Catholic like myself relates to it. But there weren't a lot of dialogic fireworks: how 'edgy' can it be to compare Dylan to the Old Testament prophets like Jeremiah?¹¹ And who can actually read The Book of Jeremiah without a box of chocolates and a pot of strong coffee?

Dylan and Women: The Case for Misogyny. A non-Dylan student named Laura recently asked me if I were a feminist. I thought it was some kind of a trick question, since the first paper she wrote in my class was a stipulative definition. So I turned Socratic on her, and asked her to define 'feminist.' (Rule #1 of teaching: when you can't answer the question, ask one of your own.) But Laura wouldn't take the bait, and asked me again: 'Are you a feminist?' If she had been a Dylan student, I would have broken the tension by claiming, 'No, I consider myself more a song and dance man.' But that would have only produced a puzzled stare, so I answered 'No.' And I did so because I don't define myself in that way, professionally speaking. And this despite the fact that exploring the representation of women's lives in literature and film is a big part of what I do in my classes. But, to me, 'feminists' are those colleagues who publish books and essays possessing a feminist theoretical framework. I may not be a feminist in that way, but the work of feminist scholars nevertheless informs my teaching every day.

But this wasn't the right definition, and mine wasn't the right answer. (I also later learned that one of Laura's best friends *was* a student in my Dylan class, and at the precise moment when we were debating Dylan's purported misogyny.) I mention this incident because I want to convey just how much I was squirming at this time. One semester of teaching Shakespeare aside, I had never previously taught a course limited to a single male author. And, in the case of Shakespeare, we're dealing with a guy whose views on gender were pretty progressive (check out Sonnet 130 if you want evidence of a man uncomfortable with the notion of objectifying women – and 400 years ago!).

And then there's Bob. A 'progressive view of gender' and 'Bob Dylan' are rarely mentioned in the same breath. So 'Bob Dylan as Literature' was a class focusing on a male writer in which nearly all of the secondary readings were by also by men. On the first day of class, I wanted to establish why this was so to a room of students, exactly half of whom were women. I was tempted to play 'Sweetheart Like You' or 'Is Your Love in Vain?' to provide the obvious answer, but I wanted to save some of those key lines for our actual discussion. Not that there was much of a discussion when we actually did hear Bob sing, 'Can you cook and sew, make flowers grow/ Do you understand my pain?' What could we do with this, intellectually speaking (and please don't play the 'But maybe the "I" isn't Bob Dylan' card)? Leaving aside the cooking and sewing for a moment, what about asking someone to understand your pain? Is that *ever* a good aesthetic move?

Sure, artists do it all the time...BUT NOT IN THOSE ACTUAL WORDS!

But I digress. Again. Actually, I digressed a lot during these sessions, because I wasn't sure that we really had all that much to talk about. So we ended up focusing on a few particulars, including the precise inflection of 'Babe' in 'It Ain't Me, Babe' – is it affectionate, neutral, or vindictive? We noticed that the speaker in songs like 'Don't Think Twice' and 'Ballad in Plain D' always wants the relationship on *his* terms. The predictable discussion that followed: male students argued that this is simply human nature, while a few female students – who'd clearly enrolled in women's studies courses – used words like 'agency,' 'dominance' and 'oppression,' and argued that this was an all-too-familiar story in male/female power dynamics. Sure, I tried to take the conversation in a new direction by introducing the conversation with the waitress in 1997's 'Highlands,' in which the speaker is asked 'You don't read women authors, do you?' and he can only stall a bit before coming up with the not-exactly-fashionable Erica Jong. It's a funny scene and, to his credit, Dylan knows it. In the words of Pamela Thurschwell (one of the precious few women on my syllabus), after all these years, Dylan is still 'fascinated by the mystery of the feminine.'¹² That's a nice way of putting it, and I let Thurschwell have the last word, because I didn't have a last word of my own, other than that, after all these years, *I'm* still fascinated by Dylan's fascination with the mystery of

the feminine. And that's a lame conclusion, because my honest (and unspoken) feeling is that I admire this artist greatly, despite the fact that the speakers in his songs try to control women so much. And I can't reconcile this particular frustration with my admiration.

Conclusion

I wanted to love this course more than I did, because I wanted it to be better than it was. Because how often does a professor possess the complete freedom to construct a new course, especially covering material that he's never studied formally? All of us perform research and have written a thesis or dissertation on topics of our own choosing but, to some extent, this kind of work arises from our own college course work, and the courses we teach that arise from them, more often than not, are a response to what we were all taught once long ago. No professor has ever commented on my writings about Bob Dylan, and no classroom instructor has ever challenged my thinking about Dylan, calling on me for a comment when I was daydreaming about a girl I'd just met in the laundry room. All I have is Michael Gray and a copy of *Song & Dance Man* that was miraculously purchased by my hometown (population: 3902) public library in the early 1970s, and a few other writers who have followed in his wake.

I'm pretty certain, however, that we did learn something from just about every significant commentator on Dylan who's written in the last thirty years and, as a

result, we covered some pretty interesting ground in the course. And everybody got to listen to a lot of Dylan's music. But there's so much we didn't do, too. As I write this, I'm reminded that we never listened to 'All Along the Watchtower.' And despite my students' very obvious interest, we never watched the stoned encounter between Dylan and John Lennon in the back of that limo in *Eat The Document* (when we discuss Coleridge's laudanum addiction, I can at least inform them that it derived from a prescription for rheumatoid arthritis – no such excuse for the chemicals ingested by those two rock legends). And I never got to make a case for how under-rated *Street-Legal* is – I really love that record. And it later occurred to me that I should have begun our first session by showing the recent interview on *60 Minutes* with Ed Bradley. Not only does it provide a concise biographical sketch, but it shows Dylan at his uncomfortable and taciturn best – and all with the intention of promoting his memoir!

Recently, at the University of Dayton, one-credit mini-courses have appeared that bear the title 'Academic Passions,' and they are a chance for professors to share, in a less formal classroom setting, a topic that really matters to their intellectual lives and well-being. Well, my Dylan course was born from such a passion, but it was a full three-credit course that drew a LOT of attention. For example, I had my first profile in *The Flyer News*, our undergraduate student paper. I also had an awkward in-class photo shoot (in which I attempted to look pensive while holding a

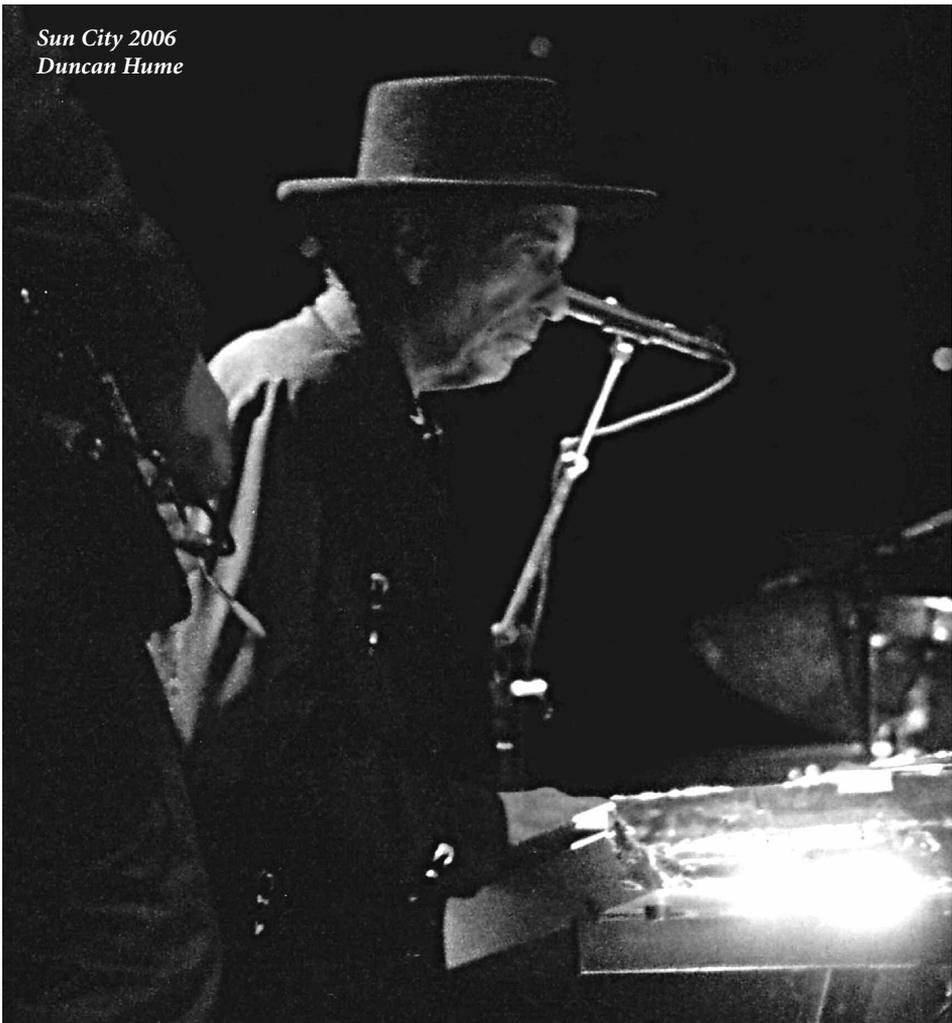
piece of chalk) to accompany yet another profile in the university's annual year-book. Then there was the employee from Human Resources (who was unable to secure a place on the roster) who sent me regular e-mails with links to every tidbit of news about Dylan, before I politely informed her that I was getting this same information through various listservs and discussion groups. Suddenly I was 'the Dylan guy,' and I was never sure if the attention was born of excitement that the university's curriculum was taking a bold, new direction, or if there was simply a bit of amusement that a student could earn three credits for studying that guy who, according to most people I know, sings like a cat in heat.

Regardless of the reason, people were suddenly curious about 'the Dylan guy.' Last night I attended the formal dinner for our graduating senior English majors, and I had barely sipped from my beer (my first stop being the open bar) when I was introduced to a former student's boyfriend who asked, 'So you're the person who taught the Dylan class?' The inevitable follow-up question: 'So are you going to teach it again?' I guess I am. There's no shortage of new works being published on Dylan, and maybe this time we'll invite the man, himself, for a visit. Not that I expect him to want to hear the locusts in Dayton, Ohio. But I would consider it a true accomplishment to get a formal rejection. And we could use it as a 'text' to confirm Dylan's mistrust of people like me.

Maybe he'd even address it to Mr. Jones

Notes

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2. Hentoff, Nat, 'The Playboy Interview: Bob Dylan' in McGregor, Craig, ed., *Bob Dylan: A Retrospective*, New York: William Morrow, 1972, 139.
3. Dylan's poem originally appeared in a program for his Town Hall concert in New York City on April 12, 1963. It is reprinted in Hedin, Benjamin, ed., *Studio A: The Bob Dylan Reader*, New York: Norton, 2004, 3-7.
4. Lott, Eric, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, New York: Oxford UP, 1993.
5. Shank, Barry, "'That Wild Mercury Sound": Bob Dylan and the Illusion of American Culture,' *Boundary 2* 29:1 (2002), 109.
6. Scaduto quoted in Shank, 105.
7. Ricks, Christopher, *Dylan's Visions of Sin*, New York: Ecco, 2004, 224.
8. Marqusee, Mike, *Chimes of Freedom: The Politics of Bob Dylan's Art*, London: The New Press, 2003, 81.
9. Eliot, T.S., 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' *The Longman Anthology of British Literature Volume 2*, 2nd Ed., Ed. David Damrosch, New York: Longman, 2003, 2376-2379.
10. Klagge, James, 'Great White Wonder: The Morality of Bootlegging Bob,' *Bob Dylan and Philosophy*, Eds. Peter Vernezze and Carl J. Porter, Chicago: Open Court, 2006, 40-52.
11. This discussion centered around selected readings drawn from Michael Gilmour's *Tangled Up in The Bible: Bob Dylan and Scripture*, New York: Continuum, 2004.
12. Thurschwell, Pamela, 'A Different Baby Blue,' *'Do You, Mr Jones?': Bob Dylan With the Poets and Professors*, London: Pimlico, 2003, 253-73.





Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan and the 1960s

(*Chimes of Freedom*, Revised and Expanded)

by Mike Marqusee
Seven Stories Press, 2005

A review by Gerry Barrett

Wicked Messenger is a revised and expanded version of a book published in 2003 under the title *Chimes of Freedom: The Politics of Bob Dylan*. Opening with the March for Jobs and Freedom in Washington on August 28 1963, the book follows Dylan's career up to the release of *Self Portrait* in 1970, a moment which marks for Marqusee (and for many others) the end of the myth of 'Dylan's artistic infallibility' (296). The final chapter leaps forward to consider Dylan's early 21st Century career, what we might term 'post-9/11 Dylan'.

Marqusee's book, which is divided into five longish chapters, aims to read Dylan's songs in their musical and political context, not as 'transparent reflections of the times but as expressive objects fashioned by an individual in response to those times' (3). On this level, it succeeds wonderfully; Marqusee is an acute and imaginative interpreter of Dylan's lyrics and even the most jaded Dylanologist will come away with new insights into the songs he discusses. Along with providing critical interpretations of individual songs, Marqusee examines the impact of a diverse range influences on Dylan's work. These include the usual gathering of musicians (Woody Guthrie and Robert Johnson), poets (Rimbaud, Sandburg and Ginsberg), folk purists (Alan Lomax and Pete Seeger), anthologists (Harry Smith), managers (John Hammond and Albert Grossman) and Greenwich Village gurus such as Dave Van Ronk. On this level, the extent to which the book succeeds will vary from reader to reader. Readers who are relatively new to Dylan's work will find it an excellent introduction; more seasoned veterans will find little to argue with but little that is particularly new either. The third important feature of Marqusee's book is the series of sections that are devoted to Dylan's contemporaries and rivals, from Curtis Mayfield, Phil Ochs and Frank Zappa in the Sixties, to Bruce Springsteen and Steve Earle in the present decade. This aspect of the book will also, I suspect, meet with a mixed response. Basically, there is too much on these artists for the reader who just wants a book on Dylan and too little to satisfy the reader who is primarily interested in reading a comparative study of Dylan's work.

In the first chapter, 'The Whole Wide World Is Watchin,' Marqusee examines Dylan's position as the darling of the Civil Rights movement in the early 1960s and charts his growing discomfort with this particular mantle. The heavyweight theorist, Theodore Adorno, is evoked to good effect in order to pinpoint one of the key issues around which controversy revolved – authenticity. Adorno was a Marxist critic who exposed what he regarded as 'the jargon of authenticity' in popular culture. As Marqusee comments:

'the jargon of authenticity' had been present in the first folk revival, but it was elevated to a higher and wider status during the second... for white, middle-class folksingers who had grown up in the fifties, and were singing the songs of the thirties and forties, the demand for authenticity was, from the beginning, a paradoxical one (40).

For Adorno, 'the jargon of authenticity was an illusory, self-indulgent, and futile attempt to evade the dissatisfactions of capitalist society' (41). Although Marqusee does not go as far as arguing that Dylan himself was consciously aware of this paradox, it provides an interesting vista on Dylan's musical transformation in 1965 and his gradual withdrawal from political activism.

In Chapter 2, 'Not Much Is Really Sacred,' Marqusee looks at Dylan's drunken speech at the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee's annual Bill of Rights dinner and his controversial identification with Lee Harvey Oswald:

Dylan's impromptu identification with Oswald was a blunt instrument enabling him to register a sense of alienation that had gone ay beyond disquiet over racism and nuclear arms (95).

Marqusee sees this as initiating Dylan's long dalliance with the outlaw conceit 'on which he was to perform increasingly complex variations in the songs he composed during the rest of the decade' (95). In his post-protest songs, Marqusee sees Dylan offering 'a critique of politics itself as a field of human endeavour' (111). The song, 'To Ramona,' 'comes into greater focus if one reads it as addressed to a youthful veteran of the civil rights movement – someone wounded in the battle, psychologically, and taking a rare respite from the front-line' (114). As Dylan turned his back on politics, other artists such as Curtis Mayfield embraced it. It is as though Dylan became deeply cynical about the possibility of change – as Marqusee points out, a song such as 'It's Alright Ma' is 'filled with a kind of Gramscian conviction that most insidious means of domination are those that secure the "spontaneous consent" of the dominated' (129).

In Chapter 3, 'Little Boy Lost,' Marqusee provides a refreshing re-appraisal of elements of the Dylan myth such as his electric set at the Newport Folk Festival in July 1965. All too often, this iconic moment is presented as a struggle between reactionary 'folkies' and progressive, avant-garde 'rockers.' The recent *No Direction Home* documentary film put

together by Martin Scorsese did little to dispel such myths, focussing on the well-known story that Pete Seeger wanted to hack through the electric cables with an axe. The traditional view has been that this was primarily an aesthetic controversy – the noise being created by the amplified instrumentation made it impossible to hear the words of Dylan’s songs. Marqusee, however, points out that there were genuine political considerations underpinning the outrage:

Given the history of the sixties, and its treatment in after-years, Lomax and his allies ought to be given credit for their prescient insight into how, in a society dominated by corporate media, the cultural expressions of dissent could be transmogrified into profitable, politically malleable commodities (154-55).

Also refreshing is Marqusee’s willingness to convict Dylan of sexism at this stage of his career: ‘Resentment and fear of women, as well as unexamined sexist assumptions, infuse Dylan’s music of the mid-sixties’ (190).

In the fourth chapter, ‘The Hour Is Getting Late,’ Marqusee draws attention to the irony that surrounded the production of the underground masterpiece, *The Basement Tapes*: ‘What Dylan and his friends were doing in the privacy of the basement, without purpose or plan, somehow reflected the needs and mood of a broader public mesmerized and discomfited by a series of titanic social clashes’ (227). It is as though the best means of political engagement at the time involved not direct confrontation in the form of

‘finger-pointin’ songs’ but in a strategic withdrawal to an underground space where one will create ground-breaking music that will then be withheld from the public. Of course, *The Basement Tapes* were gradually leaked out and finally released and the seven-year withholding of them is open to cynical interpretation in any case. One of the depressing aspects of Marqusee’s book is its awareness of how there is practically no way for an artist (particularly one whose work is commercially successful) to escape the commoditisation that is an inherent aspect of capitalism. In recent years, with his capitulation to Starbucks and the Bank of Montreal (I would like to think his capitulation to Victoria’s Secrets had somewhat purer motives) Dylan himself seems to have given up trying.

The fifth chapter, ‘Corruptible Seed,’ leap-frogs three decades to consider Dylan’s recent incarnations. However, much of this chapter is given over to a comparative analysis of Bruce Springsteen’s *The Rising* and Steve Earle’s *Jerusalem*, two albums that sought to make some kind of sense out of the trauma of 9/11. Earle emerges as the victor in this contest, delivering challenging work where Springsteen succumbs to patriotic platitudes. While there is little to argue with in Marqusee’s championing of Earle over Springsteen in this regard, one has to ask what any of this has to do with the subject of the book: Bob Dylan and the 1960s. Dylan himself is curiously absent here (perhaps this is the point?) and Marqusee seems relatively unimpressed with both *Masked and*

Anonymous ('The dialogue is stilted and portentous') and *Chronicles* ('Dylan can't seem to make up his mind whether nothing changes ever or whether, some time in the sixties, everything changed forever and nothing can be the same again'). Marqusee's conclusion is that, in his best work of the 1960s, Dylan expresses 'the abiding dilemma of life under consumer capitalism: how you can truly own yourself in a world where everything appears as a commodity for purchase' (334). But, although Dylan seeks to escape this dilemma, he never quite, in Marqusee's view, succeeds.

Despite the political pessimism of Marqusee's account of Dylan, there is something uplifting about his analysis of individual songs. His comment on 'The Times They Are A-Changin'' is worthy of Christopher Ricks on a good day: 'for all its brash self confidence, it is careful to say "please" to its elders' (91). One might also, however, mention the tone of weary exasperation in which the line ('Please get outta the new one if you can't lend your hand') is delivered. It is a tone that denotes patience running out and implies that the politeness underpinning the request is already under strain. The analysis of 'Clothes Line Saga', where 'America escapes behind a closed door, and responds to the madness and betrayals of public life by shutting them out, citing impotence and cultivating amnesia' (234-

36), is particularly illuminating. In contrasting this understated masterpiece with Bobbie Gentry's 'Ode to Billie Joe,' Marqusee gets to the core of what makes Dylan a great modernist (as opposed to realistic) artist.

However, Marqusee seems curiously unenthusiastic about what is one of the most compelling aspects of Dylan's songwriting, as he charges Dylan with 'needless convolution' (99) in 'Chimes of Freedom' and 'an indulgence in obscurity' (65) in 'Hard Rain.' 'Chimes of Freedom' emerges a key, transitional song in this regard, being simultaneously Dylan's 'last protest song' and 'the first of those songs comprised of a series of disconnected, enigmatic images that make up the heart of his sixties canon' (99). This ignores the fact that the equally disjunctive and gnomic 'Hard Rain' (acknowledged as such by Marqusee himself) had appeared two years previously and that songs such as 'Hurricane' (1976) were still to come. But, such quibbles aside, this is a very good book on Dylan, albeit one which takes quite a few detours from its professed subject. Perhaps, having issued this revised, expanded edition of *Chimes of Freedom*, there should be a third, contracted edition, one which cuts out all the stuff on Mayfield, Zappa, Springsteen and Earle. Because, however fascinating these artists are in their own right, they just ain't Dylan, are they?



Hi Andrew

As usual a very enjoyable read with *Judas* Number 17. The one comment I would like to make is that I was surprised that in Robert Forryan's wonderfully researched article on 'The Everly Brothers' (whom I share his same love for) he failed to mention the quote that Bob Dylan gave on the back cover of the autobiography by Roger White *The Everly Brothers: Walk Right Back*. It was the revised and updated edition of the soft covered book which was first published in London in 1998. That quote being 'We owe these guys everything. They started it all.' I think that says it all!

Mel Prussack
Old Bridge
New Jersey

Dear Andy

Your *Judas* # 17 article on the 2001 shows included some very interesting thoughts about Dylan's unjustifiable treatment of his 'dedicated fans', as you call them. While I agree with you on the obnoxiousness of the proceedings, I would like to specify that, to my knowledge, rather than trying to displace people forcefully, what Dylan's security did, at least during the Fall 2000 European Tour, was a bit more refined and perverse. While I did hear from fans who had been at shows in the US that Summer that they had been more or less politely asked to relinquish their places in the front row, I didn't see any of this that Fall. What happened was, in the UK they usually let people at the end of the queue enter the venue first through another door, a despicable and terribly unjust method, revived for the last three Brixton shows last year. In mainland Europe, on the other hand, at most shows *two* panic barriers had been set up in front of the stage, with some space in between, thus creating what to all effects was a 'VIP zone'. The first people in the venue were never allowed inside that space, and security handpicked latecomers, giving them plastic bracelets, and inviting them into that *sancta sanctorum*. This second mode of operation, directed in person by Dylan's then chief of security, a rather unpleasant black guy who carefully scrutinized the first in, to remember faces, mostly resulted in filling up the VIP area with blonde and busty girls and other assorted teenagers, plus 'straight' looking

people of all ages (a jacket was a guarantee of access, but no Dylan T-shirts were 'allowed', for instance). I saw fifteen shows at the time, and being usually among the first in line was very properly ostracized at most (except at Portsmouth, where by sheer luck the first night and a gamble that paid off on the second, I secured the front row both times, but this is another story).

Mind you, I can understand Dylan being sick and tired of seeing the same faces in the first lines at every show, but this surely was no way to react, and the discriminatory measures adopted by his staff were, in my opinion, absolutely illegal. But go complain... Some fans did – in Germany, I think – and were told by the promoter that everything had been done on Dylan's request. That many of Dylan's 'dedicated followers' are in fact quite obnoxious – I quite liked your witty comment about their starting to depress you 'as an attendee' – and really ought 'to get a life' as the man famously said is surely not the issue, but it must be mentioned, as you do. In the front row, for every enthusiastic fan cheering Dylan and dancing to his performance there is at least another one who simply stands there, either conducting the show like some mad Von Karajan, or explicitly disapproving, by word or gesture, of what Dylan is doing on stage, or far worse, trying to call his attention to his or her twisted manifestations of love or whatever it is (the number of deranged fans appears to be increasing of late). I don't think Dylan's reaction to this sort of people can be described as hypocritical, only as excessive or overblown, revealing a man who has run out of patience.

The Summer of 2001, Dylan was clearly in an even worse temper, although no 'tricks' were played on the people queuing for the shows, at least that I know of. I was a witness to the Montreux incident, but standing five or six rows from the stage and slightly to the left, I didn't notice anything awkward in the Italian fan's behaviour. I *did* notice the antics of some stupid girl in the front row to the Italian's right, who danced all the time, and kept jumping up and down and wiggling her head trying to draw Dylan's attention. I found her most annoying, and thought at first she might have angered him, but there have been times, as we all know, when he has apparently appreciated that sort of behaviour. No, Dylan was already in a sombre mood when he stepped on stage. I would say that his professionalism deserted him on this occasion, more's the pity. An artist simply cannot choose his audience, so there really isn't much Dylan can do about it, except trying to ignore the freaks and concentrating instead on the music. Incidentally, I wonder if one of the reasons for his current position on stage, far to the left and sidewise to the audience, isn't precisely that of avoiding as much eye-contact with the crowd as humanly possible. A very interesting article, Andy. Keep them coming.

Keep on keeping on, etc.

Best wishes,

Antonio J. Iriarte

Madrid

Dear Andrew

It would be nice to take the credit, so kindly offered by Mr Iriarte, for being the first person to draw parallels between 'Victory' and 'Black Diamond Bay', but it would be unfair. To my knowledge, a Mr Richard Cook of Cambridge (address unknown), pointed this out to Elaine (Mrs Forryan to your readers) as long ago as 1987. Mr Cook was both a Dylan fan and a Conrad reader. In reality it seems likely that other people will have been aware of the connection long before me, but not everyone feels the need to go into print, do they?

I also thought I'd share with you some thoughts around the theme of *An Involuntary Disillusion*

I have been discussing my feelings about 21st century Dylan with a few friends lately. Mostly I get a negative reaction so I have been thinking about why mine is so different from theirs and I have concluded that it is mainly to do with where I started from. It may be of some interest to younger readers.

I bought the *Freewheelin* LP in Jan 1964. In the previous year or so I had discovered 'folk' – firstly I bought The Kingston Trio, then Peter, Paul & Mary, then I graduated to the hard stuff – Seeger, Houston, Elliott. It was the words that drew me though – the ideas in songs like 'Where Have All The Flowers Gone?' and 'Little Boxes' and, eventually, 'Blowin' In The Wind'. I had never been 'political' but this music made me that way. Then when I heard *Freewheelin* it was a transcendent experience. I had heard nothing as powerful as this. It was nigh on religious in the way it took me over. This was bigger than music or art – it seemed to be telling me how I should live my life. And over the next year I was equally overwhelmed by *Times They Are A-Changin'* and *Another Side* - and I didn't see the latter as any big change, what with 'Chimes of Freedom' and 'I Shall Be Free No 10' etc. Still don't, to be honest.

But when 'Like a Rolling Stone' came out I was hugely disappointed, I thought he had gone commercial and generally I turned back – in some disillusion – to rock music, eventually. Then in April '66 my mate said Dylan's coming to Leicester. We've hired a bus and got 40 tickets do you want one? It was that easy – no mad scramble the day the tickets go on sale like now. So I went – out of curiosity really. And I was dumbfounded by this little scrawny stick insect – I had always assumed Dylan must be big. And the music was weird in the first half and deafening in the second and there were all these people slow hand-clapping and shouting and rows of them got up and walked out. The weirdest theatre experience ever. And when I watch the film of 1966 now I think it is so wonderful and think how lucky I was to be there, but that isn't what I thought at the time. My memory of those who walked out at Leicester is not of short-haired speccies but of people looking like Peter, Paul & Mary. For me, I neither booed nor cheered – I just sat on my hands. But you had to have lived through Dylan in 1964 to understand why so many of us felt so betrayed. He had seemed to be way above just a rock'n'roll singer or any sort of mere

musician. He did seem to have the answer and it wasn't 42. How were we supposed to NOT be disappointed? You see even now there is a lingering bitter disillusion which shows how much he once meant.

The strange thing is I did like 'Rolling Stone' as a record and had it been by the Stones or the Animals or someone, I would have loved it. But I thought Bob Dylan was BETTER than that – that he did serious stuff not just rock. I expected so much more from him. That was the problem.

I should have pointed out that most of the people who went on the bus to see Dylan had never been into Dylan in '64 when I was. They had come to him purely because of 'Like a Rolling Stone' and maybe because of The Byrds. And they loved the second half. So there were certainly two factions even before the show began. It wasn't as if many people had an open mind to begin with. And I doubt if there were many – though Michael Gray and C.P. Lee claim to be among them perhaps – who had been on board in '64 and stayed on through 'Like a Rolling Stone' and 1966. It would be surprising if there were considering how different the two styles were. Easy now to be catholic of taste or truly eclectic when we have been exposed to so much. It wasn't like that then. The point is that it never was a homogeneous audience in '66

The other issue is that what you heard in the theatre was nothing like what I now hear on CD or on the video. I swear it was virtually impossible to hear the words above the noise, yet now it seems he articulates it all so well. It was the sheer LOUDness that did it. It overwhelmed your senses so that you couldn't know what you were hearing really. Again, it's about when things happen. I had been to other rock concerts at that same theatre – the De Montfort Hall – but none had been anywhere near as loud. I had seen those old-fashioned shows where you got Gerry & The Pacemakers, The Fourmost, Ben E King and Sounds Incorporated on one bill, but they were never so amplified.

So when I appear disillusioned today, it's not a new experience. The real wonder is that I ever came back to Dylan at all.

Robert Forryan

‘This ain’t no Radio show — It’s an epic’

by **Duncan Hume**

Being born in 1960 my media youth education was dominated by the arrival of colour TV and BBC2 which involved someone scrambling on my roof adding a new aerial. My earliest memories of radio are of my next door neighbour playing radio 2’s ‘Sing Something Simple’ on a summer evening on his car radio, while sponging down his precious Austin 1100, doors and windows open allowing the escape of the sickly music to pollute the street. But somehow, like my mother’s egg sandwiches and a rush to complete homework, it signalled the arrival of Sunday evening.

Later, radio became more important to me, specifically listening to ‘Little’ Nicky Horn on London’s Capital radio every weekday evening until late into the night when I fell asleep; this must have been between around ’75 through ’79.

Growing up in the 40’s and 50’s meant that radio was a far more essential and widely accepted form of entertainment. Dylan has often referred to lying at night, ear pressed against the radio, in search of far off stations; shows from Chicago and occasionally New Orleans if the atmospheric conditions were right. No flabby music, but blues and early rock and roll were his inspirations – first heard on these shows, as has been well documented.

Years ago over a beer, I laughed with John Bauldie who, tongue in cheek, suggested in his later years Bob would probably have a TV show featuring some of his musical heroes and followers; Peter Paul and Mary, wheeled on, old and grey, knocking out a ragged ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’. It all seemed so impossible. And then a few months ago we started to hear of some ‘deal’ with the widely listened to XFM Radio station in the USA. The deal involved Bob hosting six shows as essentially a DJ, playing his choices, interviewing people and answering fans’ emails. Oh come on.

Of course we now know this was indeed what was to happen; the speculation that this signalled the end of the irritatingly named Never Ending Tour was misplaced. The show rolls on.

So I got my hands on a pre-release copy from a friendly source (thanks, you know who you are) and I sat and waited. As a pre-release it sadly omits 'Didn't It Rain' by the wonderfully named Sister Rosetta Tharpe. The running order also appears different to the broadcast show. Still, it was His 'DJ'ness and I got most of the show.

All I knew of the first broadcast was it was about an hour long and featured or was based on songs about the weather, with subjects as diverse as mother, whisky and police being the theme for future shows.

With some trepidation I played what had been sent. Nothing...but wait. Rain. Thunder. Rolling thunder? A car honks. A boat? Lake Superior? A distant fog horn? Duluth? Hard Rain. A woman's smooth voice arrives over rainfall and passing traffic. 'It's night-time in the big city. Fog rolls in from the water front. A night nurse smokes her last cigarette in the pack. (Greystone Hospital suddenly came into focus in my mind). It's time for Theme Time Radio hour with your host Bob Dylan.' More rain, a car then... THE voice

'It's time for Theme Time Radio Hour, dreams, schemes and themes.' So the scene is set. I'm reminded of the opening of 'Hurricane'. Director's instruction. Pistol shots ring out...enter Patty Valentine.

So, for openers we get Muddy Waters, 'Blow Wind Blow' from 1969. Muddy Waters, the guy who took the Newport Folk Festival by storm in 1960, including a performance of a song called 'Rolling Stone'. He didn't perform 'Hoochie Coochie Man' in Newport, but then he and others have covered that since haven't they. In the song selected, 'Blow Wind Blow', Bob enjoys the rhyme of the word 'Blow' with Chica...go. The song includes the line 'Don't the sun look good sliding down behind the trees.' It takes a lot to laugh doesn't it?

Bob, ever with an eye for detail, informs us correctly that indeed the windiest City in the USA is not Chicago but Dodge City, Kansas. Chicago in fact, is only half way up the league table of windy US cities. There are other opinions of why Chicago is called the Windy City, look them up on the internet if you feel the need.

Next up, Jimmy Davies who wrote more than 400 songs and 50 albums including 'Nobody's Darlin' But Mine' and 'Alimony Blues', surprisingly not played on Bob's '78 tour (though his own



‘Repossession Blues’ did get an airing didn’t it?) Jimmy, Bob informs us, was Louisiana’s singing Governor. Another musical/political link, a common theme, Clinton playing Sax and Tony Blair, the frustrated guitar legend. Even Nixon used to play piano as a party piece on the campaign trail. (An amusing aside: on arrival in the newly independent Ghana in 1957, Nixon greeted the cheering crowds. Shaking a man firmly by the hand in the crowd he asked ‘How does it feel to be free at last?’ ‘I’ve no idea, I come from Alabama’, came the reply).

Joe Jones follows. Born in New Orleans in 1926, he broke into the top 100 with ‘California Sun’ which in 1964 was covered by Indiana who had a hit with it, reaching number 5 in the charts. The Ramones covered it later, our host informs us. Bob throws in an interesting comment before the song. He refers to way out west as ‘where I belong’.

Between amusing jingles designed to add some sepia to the show up comes Dean Martin with his 1950 version of ‘I Don’t Care if the Sun Don’t Shine’. Bob reminds us that Elvis later covered the song, 5 years later to be precise. How could Bob not mention Elvis at least once an hour.

For me the highlight follows. The Prisonaires (a group of convicts doing time) originally recorded on the Bear label before being signed up by Sun Records. A heartbreaking version of ‘Just Walking in the Rain’. Bob, clearly moved by the injustice dealt out to Johnny Bragg goes into some detail of the events surrounding the song. The song was originally recorded on June 1st 1953 and

released July 8th 1953. In his classic drawl, Bob informs his audience that it sold 250,000 copies, only later to be eclipsed by Johnny Ray’s version which sold more than 2 million. Johnny Ray was referred to in an interview with Bob once where Bob talked about Ray crying while performing a song. ‘The perfect tear drop’ is Bob’s comment. There’s a story about the Prisonaires one night being so well received by the audience, the audience tried to spring them from their guards. Warden James E. Edwards’s trust that the boys would return to the ‘lock up’ was well founded and they managed to return to jail, ignoring temptation.

Wasn’t some guy called Jack Fate freed from prison to play a show?

The Consolers ‘After the Clouds Roll Away’ on the Nashville label is next, preceded by Bob attempting to list every cloud formation he can recall. Quoting the lyrics of the song Bob adds his own dimension and warns no matter how sunny a day starts it can always end up cloudy. Sure can. But the opposite can be true too, can’t it?

Fats Domino with ‘Let the Four Winds Blow’ (I assume not around any old cabin door) is a typical Fats romp. It appears on *That’s Fats*. Fats, born Antoine Domino in 1928 suffered recently at the hands of the weather like so many. On the same album we find ‘Blue Monday’ used in the film *The Girl Can’t Help It* in 1957, ‘Blue Monday’, as we know, made a surprise appearance that Wednesday night back in November 2005 at the Brixton Academy. Bob in his way, acknowledging the pain Hurricane Katrina inflicted on so many thousands.

Link Wray gets a mention too, along the way, Bob realising he must have seen him opening for Buddy Holly and the Crickets on that ill-fated tour, shortly before the day music is supposed to have died in a pile of snow and mangle of aircraft metal. Link died, of course, on November 5th 2005, shortly before Bob's residency in Brixton, prompting the performance of his hit, 'Rumble', as an opener by Bob and his band on the opening night at the Academy. A connection going back to that night at the Duluth Armory that Bob has never forgotten.

James More, aka Slim Harpo, played harmonica in a rack in the 'swamp blues' tradition. Slim was born in 1924. Both parents died when Slim was 16 years old. He changed his name to Harmonica Slim in the 1940's and had a hit with 'Raining in My Heart' in 1961. The Rolling Stones covered his 'King Bee' and on the back of that success Slim planned a European Tour in 1970 but sadly died of a heart attack that year prior to the tour. In case we missed it, Bob reminds us again that Slim used a Harmonica 'in a rack' at the conclusion of the song.

Old Blues Eyes croons 'Summer Wind' from the 1966 *Strangers in the Night* album, with seemingly no effort. Thank you Mr Frank. The dust of rumour may cover you but your voice is without equal.

Next a quick little game. 'Here's a song by Jimmy'. Jimmy? Jimmy who? Rodgers. No, Hendrix. 'The Wind Cries Mary' from *Are You Experienced?*. From 1967 Jimmy says 'I love Dylan. I only met him once, about three years ago, back at the Kettle of

Fish on MacDougal Street. That was before I came to England. I think both of us were pretty drunk at the time, so he probably doesn't remember it. I think he does, Jimmy.

Judy Garland – 'Come Rain or Shine' from 1961. How could anyone not be captivated by Judy? Just follow the yellow brick road.

Irma Thomas, the Soul Queen of New Orleans. Born February 18th 1941 in Ponchatoula (great name, eh?) At 14 she got pregnant and released 'It's Raining' on the Minit label in her early 20's. The song was used in the Jim Jarmusch 1986 movie *Down by Law*.

As mentioned earlier in the show we get the Spaniels next with their 1958 song 'Stormy Weather', mentioned in places as the working title for *Time Out of Mind*, probably prompted by its use in 'Can't Wait'. The Spaniels also wrote a song called 'John Brown' in 1959. I think both songs lead by Pookie Hudson can be found on the Vee Jay label *Spaniels 40th Anniversary 1953-1993* compilation.

Lord Beginner's 'Jamaica Hurricane' is probably from *London is the Place for Me* subtitled *Trinidadian Calypso in London 1950-1956*, though he first recorded 'Calypso' in New York City in the 1930's. A 100 miles an hour is a hell of a Caribbean wind. One hell of a blow.

Stevie Wonder with his Italian version of 'A Place in the Sun' from *Rare and Unreleased* from 1970 is next. Bob relishing the challenge of repeating the lyric and at the songs conclusion adding 'bueno, Stevie, bueno'. Bob has long associations with Italy as we all know.

Suze leaving him for the country must still hold some painful memories. I found myself repeating what I've heard many times leaving a Bob show: 'I can't understand a word he said'.

The Staple singers with 'Uncloudy Day' from 1957 was a gospel hit on the Vee Jay Label. Interestingly Prince, who as we know is from Minn...es...ota, signed Mavis Staples to his Paisley Park label. In 1963 a Staples Singer album included 'Blowin' In the Wind'. The first African American group to record a Bob Dylan song.

Our now relaxed host reminds us time is running out and closes with who else but the Carter Family. Their 1928 version of 'Keep on The Sunny Side'. (Woody 'borrowed' the Carter Family tune from 'Darling Pal of Mine' for his song 'This Land is Your Land'. Theft, love? You decide.)

So the first in the series. Clearly not thrown together but crafted with the care and attention you'd expect from Bob Dylan. He's never faked anything. Let's look as what the producer of XFM, Lee Abrams had to say about the experience.

'What has impressed me most is how intensely Bob and his associates are taking this. This ain't no radio show. This is an epic. We first got copies of the song lists. For technical reasons we needed to make sure they're in our system. As deep as the XFM library is, we were stumped by a few'.

This, an epic Lee? Yes and no. It's Bob Dylan trying, in his way to acknowledge the debt he owes to all who have gone before, part a musical chain of which he is an essential link and playing the music that is his soul.

Someone once described *Time Out of Mind* as sounding like something on a juke box dug out of the ground, after lying undisturbed for years. I'd like to think that next to it lay an old wooden radio set. By some miracle all it contained was a show. A radio show of dreams, schemes and themes, hosted by a 'DJ' immersed in a musical heritage and acutely aware of his own crucial, unequalled and irreplaceable contribution.

With thanks to David Bristow.

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Philosophical Reflections

by Martin van Hees

Clothes Line Saga – Flourishing and Boredom

What are the ingredients of the good life? This is one of those philosophical questions that fascinate some and irritate others. But in either case the relevance of the question seems indisputable. So what can we say about it? *Can* we say something about it? The question has occupied philosophers for a long time but a definite answer still seems to be missing. Not that there are not enough proposals on the table. To name just a few of the candidates that have been defended as being essential for a good life: love, happiness, prosperity, wisdom, health, security, freedom, success, friendship, attachment. Given such a plethora of possibilities, it should come as no surprise that there is such a long history of thought on the subject. Discussions arise about the exact meaning of each of these terms, whether we can impose some sort of order of priority upon them, and how to obtain them.

One very influential tradition of thinking about the good life has origins which can be traced back to the ancient Greeks. In this view, a good life is a life in

which a person ‘flourishes’. The notion of human flourishing does not thereby form yet another ingredient; rather, it serves as an *explanation* as to why the above phenomena form part of the good life. The basic idea is that a life worth living, and worth striving for, is a life that lives up to its potential. People may differ in many respects, but we admire those persons who make the most out of their abilities, who do not squander their talents. The reward of such a life is not extrinsic; it is the good life itself. It *is* a life of happiness, of being attached to others (love, friendship), of wisdom, etcetera. Moreover, since man is a social animal, one can only fully realize one’s potential in interaction with others: we need others to get the best out of us. Life is not a tough competition at the end of which someone wins the prize at the expense of others; it is a joint enterprise from which we all gain. We form a community and our wellbeing is directly related to that of the community.

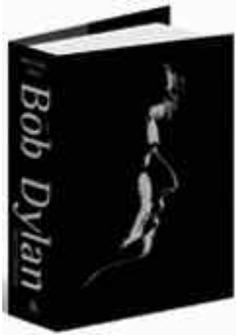
This is one answer to the problem of the good life, and as stated, it has been a fairly influential one. Perhaps we are not used to formulating it in terms of human flourishing, but the basic idea that we

should develop and use our talents as well as possible and, furthermore, that 'we are all in it together' has a familiar ring. It explains, for instance, our negative views of boredom. We don't like to be bored and we certainly do not like others around us being bored. We should be active, doing things, exploring the world - not lying around wasting our time. Since these imperatives are all so familiar, we also get somewhat irritated by them. It's fine for others to make the best of *their* abilities, and I may indeed admire them for doing so, but why should *I* do the same? The answer that I should do so because it helps others to do so will not serve. Not only because it is doubtful that my neighbour really needs me to get the best out of himself, but also because it comes down to saying that I should develop my talents so that I can admire others developing theirs. To say that success in life's mission forms its own reward may also fail to get me into gear. Why should I change things and engage in life's athletics if it does not seem that attractive to me *now*? After all, it is a rather tiring life - we should constantly strive to improve ourselves, do our best, be engaged with others. Can't I just sit on the bleachers, enjoy the sun, and be content with others doing their tiring exercises?

Here is where the 'Clothes Line Saga' may come in.¹ It does suggest an alternative, to wit, the ideal of *blissful boredom*. This alternative life is not a life of ambition, nor does it consist of the sort of inner retreat that sometimes accompanies complete passivity; rather, it is a self-content and self-contained way of quietly enjoying the mundane. It is a life in which

nothing spectacular happens but in which each day of non-events is worth noticing ('It was January the thirtieth'). This does not mean that it is a life ignorant of alternative ways of living. There is a world of ambitions and plans out there that one might want to discuss ('Have you heard the news?') but it is an outside world that has its risks ('The Vice-President's gone mad!'). It takes place nearby ('Where?' 'Downtown.' 'When?' 'Last night') but that does not make it any more (or less) interesting than the non-event of picking up the laundry ('Then she asked me if the clothes was still wet'). Despite its obvious differences, there are two similarities with the ideal of flourishing. First, the community also plays an important role in realizing this ideal. It is important, however, not because it enables one to go forward, but because kindred spirits helps us to accept the absence of any expectations ('He said, "Ya always help out around here with the chores?" I said, "Sometime, not all the time"'). A life of blissful boredom resembles the life of flourishing in a second respect, too: it is its own reward. The value of such a life is intrinsic; it has no further justification, although one can of course seek one if one feels the urge ('What do you care?' 'Well, just because'). But to conclude in line with the spirit of the song, if such an ideal doesn't work for you and you prefer to flourish, then that's fine too.

¹ For a rather different take on the song than the one given here, see Greil Marcus's *The Invisible Republic*.



The Bob Dylan Encyclopedia

by Michael Gray

Continuum International Publishing
Group Ltd. 2006

A review by Andrew Muir

First things first; there is a favourable entry under my own name in this book so you all must buy it and I also will, therefore, give it a glowing review, of course. Well, no, it will get the review it deserves which, as it happens, is one that cannot but end in a recommendation to you that it is indeed an essential addition to your collection.

The book is handsomely designed, black with silver embossed writing and a striking silhouette of a young Mr. Dylan on the cover. The one drawback is that to have the blurb, ISBN number and barcode, a less impressive back sticker has had to be utilised. This is designed to be peeled off to give the full effect of a work of magisterial authority (although I can't quite decide whether I want to do that or not). Where does this implied-by-the-packaging authority come from then?

Well, Michael Gray's position as leading critic on Dylan's work has long been secure, his pioneering study *Song and Dance Man: The Art of Bob Dylan* was first published in 1972 and then came out in a beautifully illustrated edition *The Art of Bob Dylan: Song and Dance Man*, in 1981. The study of Dylan's work as being something worthy of the scrutiny usually associated with poets from the Great Tradition(s) became

nothing less than a life's work that culminated in the massive publication entitled *Song & Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan* in 2000, which looks like remaining the Dylan book for the foreseeable future. One would have expected to think at least the same of Christopher Ricks's *A Vision of Sin*, given Mr Ricks's reputation and the outstanding critical work that is based upon. I do not believe that is how it turned out and, if you will allow me to digress somewhat, I will explain why.

Mr. Gray must have hoped, as a Dylan fan, for the best, yet simultaneously feared for his unchallenged authorial stature in the field, when Christopher Ricks's *Visions of Sin* came out. Despite being replete with insight, however, that overly pun-filled tome did not properly showcase the razor-sharp wit and insight of Mr. Ricks's magnificent talks on Dylan through the years, nor did it display the same intellectual rigour of the critic that wrote so creatively in a penetrative way on Tennyson, Keats and so on. That was the Ricks I first read, in my early student days. How I wish he had written his book on Dylan then rather than in the playful, eccentric, endlessly punning mode he assumed when, with his reputation unimpeachable, he finally turned to writing on our man. The lapse of taste in refusing a

gross pun when discussing ‘Lay Lady Lay’ seems hardly credible from such an intellect. Which is not to say that *A Vision Of Sin* does not have much to recommend it, Mr. Ricks is always worth reading on any subject come to that, just that it did not, for this reader, leap into top spot among books on Dylan.

So, the authority in the Dylan critical sphere remains with the author of *Song & Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan* and, getting back to the matter at hand, if Mr. Gray has already produced a work of such size, scope and depth – what is there left for him to say? In other words will this not just be the same book in a different format? Over and above the fact of the different format (and, given that one is critical study and the other an encyclopaedia, this alone makes an enormous difference) the answer is ‘yes and no’.

Yes, there is a great deal of repetition, inevitably. If you had just read the blues or nursery rhyme chapter in *Song & Dance Man III* you would probably not wish to rush to read the entries ‘blues lines smuggled into Dylan’s lyrics’ and ‘Nursery Rhyme on Under The Red Sky’ respectively here, unless you were looking for additional material that Mr. Gray may have come across in the interim.

No, there is much that is new, in addition to the tweaking of already published material. This falls into two main categories:

i) New Dylan material: Commentary on things that have come out since *Song & Dance Man III* – such as “*Love And Theft*”, *Chronicles*, *Masked And Anonymous*, *No Direction Home*.

ii) New information

i) New Dylan Material

Obviously I do not want to give away here everything that Mr. Gray says but I do want to say that I was delighted he feels as warmly toward “*Love And Theft*” as I do. He ends it by writing: ‘The turbulent whole is unquestionably a real Dylan album: one of the ten or 12 you’d have to rescue if God were determined to destroy all the rest.’ One of the fun things about this is trying to guess the nine definitely in front of it and then the ‘three to play with’ in the author’s mind. Readers of my own work may recall I put it at ‘hovering around the top ten’. For years I’ve been able to reel off my favourite five Dylan albums without hesitation and then I head toward number ten with increasing lack of certainty. I wonder if our lists would be the same? Mine goes like this: *Blood on The Tracks*, *Blonde on Blonde*, *Highway 61 Revisited*, *Bringing It All Back Home*, *John Wesley Harding*, *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, (OK now it starts getting tricky and to save a place I discount the *Basement Tapes* because of the way it was officially released, however it hovers over every choice), *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, *The Times They Are A-Changin’*... So there I am at 8 (or possibly 9 if the *Basement Tapes* are included) and challenging for the next few places are *Desire*, *Oh Mercy*, “*Love And Theft*”, *Planet Waves*... Mmm, maybe ‘one of the ten or 12’ is the best way to put it.

More to the point here, it is to be noted that there are a number of important releases since “*Love And Theft*” that Mr. Gray tackles with customary passion and scholarship.

ii) New Information

There are many entries that I have come across so far (I should point out that there is much I have not read, remember this book is gigantic) which contain new information. Sometimes musical, as in the case of the Bromberg sessions:

Dylan and Bromberg went into the studios from June 4 to June 21, and reportedly recorded 12-26 songs in that time... few that have circulated and they didn't emerge at all for more than a decade after their wording were the JIMMIE RODGERS song 'Miss the Mississippi and You', the traditional 'Polly Vaughn' (which Shirley Collins sang a good deal), the oddly spelt 'Kaatskill Serenade', which Bromberg had composed and which is on his 1977 double album How Late'll Ya Play Til?, and a blues called 'Sloppy Drunk', which bears no resemblance to the Jimmy Rodgers song and may be the old Walter Davis number but was certainly also on the Bromberg double album. The last of these Dylan tracks was a bit phlegm driven 1990s Bob on automatic but the others were wonderful, especially 'Polly Vaughn'. Unfortunately, they have circulated only in poor quality.

The rest of the recorded tracks, which all remain unheard, comprise: 'Hey Joe' 'Mobile Line' 'Just Because' 'Field of Stone (Would You Lay with Me)'; 'Annie's Song'; 'Jugband Song'; 'Rock Me Baby'; 'Send Me to the Lectric Chair'; 'Gotta Do My Time' 'Su Su's Got a Mohawk'; 'Northeast Texas Women' 'Sail On'; 'Can't Lose What

You Never Had' 'World of Fools'; 'Everybody's Crying Mercy'; 'Tennessee Blues'; 'Summer Wages'; 'Casey Jones'; 'Morning Blues' 'Young Westley'; 'The Lady Came from Baltimore', 'New Lee Highway Blues'; 'Rise Again'; 'Duncan and Brady'; 'The Main Street Moan'; and 'Nobody's Fault But Mine'.

It may be that 'Hey Joe' doesn't really exist, or if it does it's probably only a fragment, since this was merely a warm up; when Dylan first arrived at the studio, he sat straight down at the piano and started performing it without a word to anyone. The tape wasn't rolling till some time had passed. But Dylan had performed Hendrix's 'Dolly Dagger' in concert...

There are a lot of entries that fascinate regardless of their Dylan connections, on artists such as Ray Charles and Sam Cooke to pick just two of many examples. There is more information than I can remember coming across before on a whole host of people from the well known like Helena Springs to the near forgotten such as the Ribakoves and the likes of Gil Turner whose story ends with a heart warming note re his dog, 'Willie'. As my friend from New Orleans Raymond Landry – the first person I heard from who had bought the Encyclopedia (the title is spelt in American English) – wrote: '(it is) a fantastic reference book, a true encyclopedia'

The depth and acute insight of Mr. Gray's previous work are certainly in evidence, as befits an encyclopaedia, but thankfully Mr. Gray also brings passion and humour to the project, which aids

those of us who can't help ourselves reading it as though it were a book rather than a reference work.

Punches are not pulled in many of the entries – see the one for U2 for example which opens with:

Inexplicably successful Irish rock group formed in 1980, fronted by one of the world's most self-important and vain celebrities... And then just gets even better.

There is plenty of humour too, particularly of the wry variety, as can be seen in the ending of the entry for Sally Kirkland: 'Sally Kirkland remains an ordained minister in the Church of the Movement of Spiritual Inner Awareness. That'll be in California.'

One of the biggest reliefs of the encyclopedia is the even-handed way Mr. Gray refers to other writers from the Dylan scene. Resisting the temptation to settle scores over past battles in the (once?) notoriously bitchy Dylan world he balances any rebukes with much enthusiastic praise. Indeed, enthusiasm is evident throughout which makes it perhaps different from what you would expect in an encyclopaedia but, of course, it is all the more readable for that.

Are there things missing? Nothing has come to mind yet but I am sure there will be as it is impossible to be all encompassing without the book turning into the size of a house. Inevitable quibbles will arise but it is a laudable attempt to encom-

pass everything of import. It is also not possible to balance entries to everyone's satisfaction. Oliver Trager, for example, has an entry that is double the length of Stephen Scobie; then again given that Mr. Trager has also put together an encyclopaedia this is probably due to Mr. Gray attempting to be scrupulously fair. (I am afraid I cannot compare the two encyclopaedias as the first two entries I read in Mr. Trager contained factual errors, I may just have been unlucky but this destroyed my confidence in the book as a reference work and it went straight on the shelf. Please feel free to write in with any comparisons for the next issue.)

It is customary when writing a review to end by recommending (or not) the book to the public you are addressing. Suffice to say that it seems inconceivable to me that a reader of *Judas!* would not wish to have *The Bob Dylan Encyclopedia* in their collection. The book comes with a (tricky to detach!) CD-ROM which contains a searchable PDF file which also allows you to jump easily from entry to cross-references entry. I love the convenience of the PDF file but I also like the sheer physicality of holding the book, turning the freshly smelling pages and the touch of the cover. Then again, you may think such a love of the feel of books to be somewhat old-fashioned but, whichever, if you buy it I am sure you will not be disappointed especially as the price is low for a production of this size and quality.