

from *Inside A Prune*

Hello again, and a warm welcome to issue three which we hope you will find enjoyable and stimulating.

We are delighted to continue with a mixture of new and established writers, and hope that the feedback to this issue will be as plentiful as the last.

You will be used, by now, to me prompting in every editorial for contributions and feedback so this time I will... well, actually, I'll do so again! Please, this enterprise is both for and *by* you. Send your articles and letters - or take the easier route and persuade others to do the same - to: editor@judasmagazine.com or to the postal address on the facing page.

Paula Radice wrote to me to say that by concentrating on one aspect of John Gibben's book *The Nightingale's Code* Alan Davis's article may have inadvertently given people the impression she found the book 'uninteresting', whereas, in her own words, she is of the opinion that it is '*an intelligent, beautifully written and thought-provoking piece of work*'. Alan's article was purely a response to a specific aspect of John's essay in *Judas!* issue one, and he apologises for any unintended implication that Paula was uninterested in or dismissive of John's ideas.

Speaking of books, I may have to set up a book review policy on the hoof, as it were, as the next six months is going to bring a flood of Dylan titles: An anthology of academics' articles', *Do You Mr. Jones? Bob Dylan with the Poets and Professors*, ed. Neil Corcoran, John Hinchley's *Like a Complete Unknown: The Poetry of Bob Dylan's Songs, 1961-1969*, Olof Björner's *Olof's Files: A Bob Dylan Performance Guide*, Stephen Scobie's *Alias Revisited*, Professor Ricks's book, working title *A Vision of Sin*, and, you never know, perhaps my own *Troubadour*, if there is room on such a crowded shelf. I haven't even mentioned 'possible' releases such as a completed, cheeky and cheerful tour diary called *Red, White and Blue Shoestrings*. On a whole other level to all these is the mooted December release of Dylan's own book, volume one of *Chronicles*. If there is not room in the magazine itself to cover all these publications, we will do so on our website.

In issue one I wrote '*we hope to create a special, interactive on-line Judas! readers' community too*'. We are now putting this in place. If you visit www.judasmagazine.com you will find the first of the new sections.

Thanks to all who passed on their congratulations, best wishes and advice to *Judas!* at the 'John Green Day'. We trust we'll keep providing you with the magazine you want. On that note, all of you loved the photographs in issue two, so we'll persuade Duncan Hume to offer us more for issue four. Here's number three with special thanks to Jim Callahan.

Andrew Muir

Contributors

Jim Brady has been a friend to your beloved editor since the mid 1970s, when he introduced me to his collection of *Great White Wonders* and other musical delights. Disillusion with Dylan began to set in for Jim as early as the 1978 Earl's Court concerts, despite acknowledging that '*he did look pretty charismatic close-up on the third night*'. Subsequent years turned disillusion to scorn. I still chip away trying to re-convert this lost soul, with occasional signs of success.

Alan Davis having devoted a couple of decades to researching the work of John Ruskin and J.M.W. Turner, recognised only a few years ago that Bob Dylan is an artist of comparable stature to both these gentlemen. He is now making up for lost time. He has been a frequent contributor to *Isis* during the last two years and has contributed an article to the recent *Isis* book.

Robert Forryan is well known for his contributions to Dylan fanzines in the past decade, having appeared in *Homer*, *the slut*, *Dignity* and *Freewheelin' Quarterly*. In his spare time Robert is writing a personal history of Nuneaton Borough Football Club.

Richard Jobes having written 'Po' Boy Dressed In Black' as the dissertation for his English degree, Richard is now looking forward to starting an American Studies MA at Nottingham so he can indulge his passion for country, blues, folk, jazz and rock 'n' roll.

Markus Prieur is a native German who moved to Cork, Ireland in September 1999. He only misses Germany when he hears that Dylan has performed another 'Every Grain of Sand' over there. Since leaving the mainland he has not been back, only seeing three concerts on the Emerald Isle; and, twice, eight in Britain, all of which he has reviewed online. Since June 2000 he has maintained his own website, 'Not Dark Yet', which focuses on some of the songs performed occasionally in recent years (<http://notdarkyet.tripod.com>). This article is his first printed contribution about Dylan.

Toby Richards-Carpenter is a little boy lost, 21 and fresh out of University with no idea what to do next. His ambition is that his breathless, repetitive shouts of 'Yes Bobby Yes!' at Cardiff 2000 become legendary and one day form the title of a Dylan fanzine. He has contributed to *Dignity*.

Paul Williams founded *Crawdaddy*, the first serious American rock magazine, preceding both *Rolling Stone* and *Creem*. He is the author of numerous well-known books on a wide range of artists and subjects, but is best known to Dylan fans as the author of the *Performing Artist* books. He is currently writing *Mind Out Of Time*, the latest volume(s). For details on how to lend your essential support to this project, and details of what you receive in return and how to get your hands on the books as fast as possible, please email him at paul@cdaddy.com.

Thanks to our contributors and all who helped with this issue.

Contents

**Number
Three**

- 4** **More Mercy For Judas!**

by Paul Williams

- 18** **Can't Let Go No More**

by Markus Prieur

- 25** **The Dancing Child Speaks**

by Alan Davis

- 29** **'Po' Boy Dressed In Black'**

by Richards Jobes

- 47** **Letters**

to The Editor

- 57** **Struck By The Sounds**

by Jim Brady

- 63** **1962: Bob Dylan & The Coo-Coo Bird**

by Robert Forryan

- 72** **Lies That Life Is Black And White**

by Toby Richards-Carpenter

Photo Credits:

Front cover John Hume, Gijon 1993; Back cover Duncan Hume, Newport 2002; Inside back cover Duncan Hume, Augusta 2002.

More Mercy For Judas!

[This second part concludes our extract from Paul Williams' work-in-progress, Mind Out Of Time]

‘The songs on this specific record are not so much songs but rather exercises in tonal breath control,’ Dylan wrote in the liner notes to his 1965 album *Highway 61 Revisited*. So now we know what ‘Most of the Time’ and ‘Queen Jane Approximately’ have in common, apart from being the opening song on the second side (and sixth track) of a Bob Dylan album. In both performances, tonal breath control and judicious use of rhyme allow the singer/writer to vary the lengths of verse-lines erratically while conveying a very pleasing sense of regular, graceful meter and song structure. As a result, the flow of language in both is quite engaging, almost intoxicating. In ‘Most of the Time’, this flow of performed language is a humorous and elegant exploration-in-depth of the personality of the speaker, a fictional character who boasts of his ability to ‘hold (his) own’ and ‘deal with the situation’ at the same time that he denies that there is a situation (*‘I don’t even think about her’*) and insists unconvincingly that he’s ‘halfways content’ and that he doesn’t ‘hide from the feelings that are buried inside,’ whatever they might be. He is a person who has been through a loss as difficult as the one suffered by the narrator of ‘Man in the Long Black Coat’, and at times it seems he’d like to see himself as being as humble as that other narrator on this album who can ask, ‘What good am I?’ - even though he is in fact being used here by the songwriter and vocalist as an example of the perils of the disease of conceit (*‘I can handle whatever I stumble upon/I don’t even notice she’s gone’*). In the first verse he sounds like a drunk bragging of his ability to hold his liquor (*‘Most of the time/I’m clear focused all around’*). Hilariously, he boasts, ‘I can keep both feet on the ground/I can follow the path,’ not realizing that the first assertion makes the second impossible. But that’s okay, because most of the time his head is on straight. And he’s not afraid of confusion, no matter how thick.

Throughout this song, Dylan uses his unique way of breathing to bring this character to life (the different stresses he puts, and doesn't put, on the recurring title phrase; the emphatic pause for breath after 'think' in '*I don't even think about her*'). The song turns on (and probably originated from) its author's perception that this familiar phrase, '*most of the time*', can have contradictory meanings. At the start of each verse it means 'usually' or 'more often than not'. But the way he sings it at the end of each verse it means 'but not always' ('*Don't even remember what her lips felt like on mine...most of the time.*'). Dylan is not necessarily speaking for himself in this song, but like any novelist or short story writer or actor, he is drawing partly on his own personal experience to get inside the skin of a fictional character. Mose Allison, a singer quite gifted at the sort of ironic delivery Dylan achieves in this performance, once said, '*Many of my songs suggest a character who is often described as "laid-back", "cool", or "philosophic". I am not that character, although I certainly understand and sympathize with him.*' This last sentence, I believe, is what Dylan would or could say about the characters portrayed in 'Most of the Time' and many of his other inventions.

'Most of the Time' is a 'big song', a major work, the sort of listening experience that brings people back to an album again and again. This is also true of 'Ring Them Bells' and 'Man in the Long Black Coat', and in each case the song's appeal is as much based in its music as in its words. Songs are music and words working

together, and it's a mistake to assume that the words come first and to think of the music as accompaniment and support for the lyrics. Songwriters report that very often the words and the music come to them simultaneously, or as a germ of an idea that is both melodic and lyrical and that then gets completed in a process of music suggesting and asking for certain words, and vice versa.

In fact, 'Most of the Time' is an example of a very pleasing musical and melodic effect being heightened and fleshed out by the words of a song, specifically the repetition of the title phrase 'most of the time'. These four words, repeated three times in each verse – except the bridging fourth verse, where they only appear twice – are a riff in themselves, as central to the song's musical impact as the teasing melodic riff (played on the bass guitar) that runs through the whole performance. The sound of the lyrics is also an important part of the satisfying musical crescendo that occurs in the second half of the last verse and is then repeated in the fulfilling instrumental passage that ends the song. The lyrics I'm referring to here are the five 'I don't's' (*'I don't cheat on myself,' etc.*), a mirror for the five 'I can's' of the first verse (*'I can make it all match up,' etc.*), and the way Dylan breathes the phrases and words that follow these 'I don'ts'. The song reaches an emotional climax at this point, one that is located more in the music than in the words – very likeable music that seems to circle back on itself, and to become richer and more meaningful every time it returns, every time the guitars (Dylan and

Lanois on guitars, Tony Hall on bass) and percussive instruments (Willie Green on drums, Cyril Neville on ‘percussion’, with some contributions from Malcolm Burn on keyboards) complete another musical loop.

What you as a listener feel when you listen to the 52-second instrumental passage at the end of ‘Most of the Time’ is the true ‘meaning’ of this song, and the effectiveness of the track’s musical expression is what calls us back to it again and again, as was true of ‘Queen Jane Approximately’ and ‘Just Like a Woman’ and so many of Dylan’s earlier recorded treasures. Of course, the singer’s vocal performances are very much a part of the musical pleasure of all these recordings. All the more reason why it may be the words that we remember most clearly. But it is often the song’s music that penetrates us most deeply, and certainly the quality of the musical experience, as much as the quality of the lyrics and the verbal content, is what makes ‘Ring Them Bells’ and ‘Most of the Time’ and ‘Man in the Long Black Coat’ great songs and, on *Oh Mercy*, great and memorable performances.

Each of the songs on this album is strikingly different in form and sound and essential character from all the others, as though part of the songwriter’s and performer’s intent is to demonstrate his versatility and, more significantly, to put together a sonic and narrative collage that truly stands for who he is - what he feels and is interested in and attracted by and committed to - at this moment of performance and invention and creative expression. ‘What Good Am I?’ immediately and

very effectively creates an atmosphere as different from the soundscapes and vocal personas of ‘Most of the Time’ and ‘Man in the Long Black Coat’ as those tracks are from each other.

The listener’s first reaction to this song is likely to be surprise at how naked the speaker is willing to be, not just with me the person listening, but also with himself, the person he’s clearly directing these hard questions to. *‘What good am I if I know and don’t do? If I see and don’t say, if I look right through you?’* ‘You’ in this context is not himself, although the form of the song is soliloquy. Rather, the ‘you’ he’s thinking of is any of the lowly, the powerless, the suffering of this Earth - *‘the luckless, the abandoned and forsaken’* of ‘Chimes of Freedom.’ He wants to speak of and for these persons again, and of his and every man’s relationship with them. To do so, he turns ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’ inside out, so instead of the third person of *‘How many times must a man look up, before he can see the sky? How many ears must one man have, before he can hear people cry?’* he asks, *‘What good am I if I know and don’t do? If I see and don’t say, if I look right through you? If I turn a deaf ear to the thunderin’ sky?’* In effect, by making an example of himself, Dylan challenges the listener, any human, to ask himself or herself these questions. It’s a powerful device - and a riveting performance. Again, compare *‘Yes, ’n’ how many times can a man turn his head, pretending he just doesn’t see?’* to *‘What good am I if I’m like all the rest? If I just turn away when I see how you’re dressed [i.e., in poverty]? If I shut myself off, so I can’t hear you cry, what good am I?’* It’s

the sort of song, and performance, that may speak more resonantly for and to a mass audience a hundred years from now than at its time of release.

'Disease of Conceit', the eighth track on *Oh Mercy*, is another riveting vocal performance. In this case, there can be no question that the person singing is speaking - again, quite courageously and nakedly - from his own personal experience. In 1979, Dylan wrote, on the same topic, in the clearly autobiographical 'Trouble in Mind': '*Here comes Satan, prince of the power of the air, he's gonna make you a law unto yourself, build a bird's nest in your hair. He's gonna deaden your conscience till you worship the work of your own hands, you'll be serving strangers in a strange, forsaken land.*' In March 1991, he told Elliott Mintz - in response to Mintz's comment that some people might come away from hearing this radio interview saying, '*Gosh, I don't know why he isn't more proud of what he's done, what he's written*' - '*Pride? No, pride goes before a big downfall, you've heard that, we've all heard that. What is there to be proud about?*'

'Disease of Conceit', like 1985's 'Trust Yourself', is a straightforward slice of Bob Dylan's personal philosophy, not taken from the Bible (though it certainly resonates with Ecclesiastes' '*Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity*') but from his own life experience. Notice, in this album that keeps returning to the theme of compassion, that the song starts, '*There's a whole lot of people suffering tonight*'. Dylan's interest in the 'disease of conceit' is not to condemn anyone, but to bemoan the pain caused by this affliction that '*comes right out*

of nowhere', '*comes right down the highway*', '*steps into your room*'. The clear implication is that although '*the doctors got no cure*', the singer believes awareness is the medicine that can help (as in, '*ring them bells so the people will know*') and that he as a singer of broadsides has a responsibility to spread the word. The song is gracefully structured with the chorus at the start of each verse, the chorus being: '*There's a whole lot of people [hearts' in verse two] gerund tonight/From the disease of conceit,*' arranged so that in the next line, the first of each verse proper, a second gerund rhymes (internal rhyme) with the first ('*breaking/shaking*', '*dying'/'crying*', '*in trouble'/'seeing double*'). As is often the case in skillful songwriting, the exceptions to this form only contribute to its elegance: '*in trouble*' not being a gerund, '*suffering'/'struggling*' not quite rhyming in the first verse, and of course the fourth of the five verses being a bridge, four lines instead of eight, with no '*whole lot of...*' chorus at the start but instead the tagline inverted: '*Conceit is a disease*'. This structural elegance makes it easy for the singer to tear into each line the way the disease '*rips into your senses*'. He is fierce, eloquent, obviously sincere (you can hear it in his piano playing as well as in his voice) in his testifying, his empathy, and his regret. Songs like this are his way of ringing them bells.

'What Was It You Wanted?', the next track, presents a different mood, a different sound, another different aspect of this same relaxed and confident and intimate voice, another side of the *Oh Mercy* Bob Dylan, the Dylan of this particular inspired moment.

It's a very special song. In 1965, Dylan wrote, '*I am about t sketch You a picture of what goes on around here sometimes.*' In 'What Was It You Wanted?' he (again) does exactly that. The narrative of the song (the lyrics, brilliantly supported by the music and the vocal performance) is a three- (and four-) dimensional expansion of two lines from his 1973 song 'Nobody 'Cept You': '*Everybody wants my attention/Everybody's got something to sell*'. It's true. I've seen this, when I've been backstage with Dylan (in 1966 and 1980), and so has anyone who's watched *Don't Look Back* or *Renaldo and Clara*; and I've been approached by many friends and strangers who imagine that because I write books about Dylan, I have some kind of access to the man and can convey their requests to him or 'his people'. It has been Bob Dylan's fate to receive more such entreaties than most celebrities, even presidents of the United States. There's always someone who wants something from him more complicated and urgent than an autograph, so a normal scene in his life is him trying to be polite and attentive, or kind and dismissive, without committing himself, to a new face in a seemingly endless succession of faces, as hilariously portrayed in this five-minute sketch. '*Are you the same person that was here before?*' How would he know? It becomes a blur of supplicants, as described in this song and in poet Anne Waldman's account of being in Dylan's hotel room in 1978:

'Supplicants moaned and scratched at the door. Wild and hungry beasts, the "fans" were always out there. Then suddenly the knocking and motion would subside, only to start up again a few intervals later, girls

calling softly and seductively to the beloved. Messages were slipped under the door at an alarming rate. Flowers, baskets of food, excellent champagne were delivered at frequent intervals. Delivery boys were busy and tipped generously, hopping in and out of the elevators with trained alacrity. The phone kept ringing with invitations and further seductions. It seemed to amuse and annoy him by turns. ...I leafed through a pile of works and the accompanying notes and cards. Take me into your world they were all saying. I am young. I am talented. I am good.'

The music is perfect, exhilarating. Again, those who imagine Daniel Lanois has somehow superimposed his 'sound' onto this Dylan album should take note of the fact that the cornerstone of this track's wonderful soundscape is Dylan's own harmonica playing, perfectly and intuitively complemented by Lanois's guitar, Malcom Burn's bass, Mason Ruffner's third guitar (Dylan is playing one, too) and Willie Green's drums and Cyril Neville's percussion. Lanois deserves a lot of credit for his own playing and his very successful supervision of the sessions, but this is because in both cases he is doing such a good job of supporting and following the lead of bandleader/maestro Dylan, who expresses exactly what it was he wanted to say in the words and music of this song, and how he wanted it to sound, in every harmonica note he blows herein.

As for the way the singer breathes, his vocal timing here is every bit as expressive and full of sly humor and poignancy as his harp playing. Back in chapter 5 I brought

up the subject of how in the Arab world it is said a good singer is one who creates an environment of enchantment with his or her vocal performance. In Arabic music, there are a number of recognized tools for accomplishing this, and among them are *ghunna* (nasality) and *bahha* (hoarseness). An attentive observer will find excellent examples of Dylan's use of hoarseness to create an emotional and musical environment, and thus cast a spell on his listeners, in the opening lines of 'What Was It You Wanted?' and throughout the performance. Few American singers breathe like this.

Earlier in this book - again, chapter 5 - I quoted Bob Dylan on the subject of how some of his songs have come through him:

'Then of course, there are times you just pick up an instrument-something will come, like a tune or some kind of wild line will just come into your head and you'll develop that... Whatever it brings out in the voice, you'll write those words down. And they might not mean anything to you at all, and you just go on, and that will be what happens.'

When I quoted this 1968 interview earlier, I didn't tell you what he said next: '*Now I don't do that anymore. If I do it, I just keep it for myself. So I have a big lineup of songs which I'll never use.*' The fact that some of the versions of the *Oh Mercy* songs recorded before the officially released album versions have leaked out (to circulate in the community of Dylan fans and students) gives us a rare chance to watch this songmaker at work, and to hear a rough draft of 'Shooting Star' which

Dylan probably would have kept for himself and never used (or used in different form a year later, as in the case of 'God Knows' and 'Born in Time') if the song had not suddenly taken on new life (probably at the April overdub sessions) for its author/performer, bringing out something quite different in the voice and some lively new words to be sung and written down, arising from the same wild line which at the earlier recording sessions, or perhaps at a still earlier writing session, had developed into the disappointing narrative dead ends heard in these early recordings (there are two, and they're almost identical lyrically, suggesting these are words he wrote before entering the Studio on the Move, although there are times in these early takes when Dylan definitely sounds like he's trying to improvise lyrics and not quite getting a flow of words going).

The early lyrics:

*Seen a shooting star tonight
And I thought of you.
There was something reaching out to me
Something coming through
[mumble]
Something I thought I'd do
Seen a shooting star tonight
And I thought of you.*

*Seen a shooting star tonight
Against the grain
Up in the hot rod sky
Across the prairies and plains
I's looking up and dreaming
Like I sometimes do
Seen a shooting star tonight
And I thought of you.*

The third verse, the bridge, is lyrically the same as the album version ('*Listen to the engine...*') and is followed by this last verse:

*Seen a shooting star tonight
Across the flatland roads.
I's a thousand miles away
From where the end of time explodes.
I was looking up and wondering
If the dawn was breaking through...
I seen a shooting star tonight
And I thought of you.*

Listening to these performances, and even just reading these words on paper, it's fairly obvious that the singer/author isn't actually thinking of someone. But listening to the album version of 'Shooting Star,' one can't help but feel the presence of a very real 'you' whom the speaker is remembering and thinking of at this moment. This gives the song most of its power.

As for watching the songmaker at work... '*Many of these songs were written in some kind of stream-of-consciousness kind of mood,*' Dylan has said of '*Love And Theft*', '*and I don't sit and linger, meditate on every line afterwards. My approach is just to let it happen and then reject the things that don't work.*' In the early drafts of 'Shooting Star', we see and hear some things that didn't work and were rejected to make room for a more successful stream of associative writing to begin flowing from the same starting point.

But since the bridging verse in the early version did offer a nice flow of language, and presumably because no new bridging verse arose as easily and magically as the new second verse arose from

the new first, the original bridging verse was retained - awkwardly since it's not about the 'you' and 'me' who are now central to the other verses, and because Dylan seems to sing it a little overaggressively to compensate for his own uncertainty about how this apocalyptic outburst (change of pace is appropriate in a bridge) fits with the now sweetly meditative verses where the speaker thinks of the two halves of a lost relationship... a friendship interrupted by death or a marriage broken by divorce. My own guess is that after unsuccessfully inviting the song to be about prairies and plains and looking up and wondering, it suddenly occurred to him that a shooting star is a symbol of impermanence and therefore loss, and that this prompted him to try making '*I thought of you*' be about his ex-wife. The lines '*You were trying to break into another world/A world I never knew*' evoke for me the lines '*This time I'm asking for freedom/Freedom from a world which you deny*' from 'When the Night Comes Falling from the Sky' (*Empire Burlesque*), which has an 'ex-wife' flavor because of the line '*when you were gambling for support.*' In any case, one can argue that the '*last fire truck*' and the '*last time you might hear*' and the other three '*lasts*' in the 'Shooting Star' bridge are also about impermanence as expressions of awareness that 'you' and 'I' may not be here much longer. Which awareness, whether the song is addressed to someone who died or to a relationship that died, can be heard in the powerful last lines (before the chorus) of the song's last verse: '*Guess it's too late to say the things to you/That you needed to hear me say.*'

Certainly, as most commentators have mentioned, it's a wonderful last song for an album. This is evident from the very soothing opening notes of the track, seeming to reach out to every feeling aroused in the course of the nine preceding songs, and the fulfilling sweetness of the '*and I thought of you*'/*and I thought of me*' vocal phrases in the first verses. The '*tomorrow will be another day*' cliché in the last verse is a nice bookend for the memorable '*roses are red*' of '*Where Teardrops Fall*' and also an interesting contradiction of the '*last radio*' and '*last time you might hear*' in the preceding verse. Best of all, anyway, is the harmonica solo that ends the song and the album and certainly manages to summarize and acknowledge any feeling that may have arisen in any listener while listening to this song or to all ten of these performances.

'Dignity,' a song recorded during the March-April 1989 *Oh Mercy* sessions but not officially released until late 1994 (when the 1989 vocal performance was included on the album *Greatest Hits Volume 3* with a partially rerecorded backing track), is another example of the very fine results sometimes produced by Dylan's songwriting approach of '*just letting it happen*' (this time he didn't '*reject the things that don't work*' because there weren't any, even if he did keep the song for himself for five years). When the flow of language is this inspired and the impact on the listener of subtle choices of words and images as brilliant and unexpected and deeply intelligent as this, it is natural to think of Dylan's songwriting here as '*meticulously assembled*' and '*beautifully*

thought-out' and '*thrillingly well-crafted*'. These quotes are from Michael Gray's comments on 'Dignity' in *Song & Dance Man III*, and I certainly agree with the spirit of what Gray is saying in his enthusiastic assessment of the song (and I appreciate many of the specific insights Gray shares in his essay on 'Dignity' - for example, the ramifications of and impact on the listener of the choice of 'Prince Philip' as the name of the character who met the narrator at the home of the blues and '*said he wanted money up front, said he was abused, by dignity*'). But the particular thing I'm pointing to here is process, the mysterious matter of how the songs come into existence. Particularly after contemplating '*Love And Theft*', I believe that when Dylan says, '*I don't sit and linger, meditate on every line*', he is sincerely reporting that in his experience his songs are not thought out or carefully assembled, or crafted in the usual sense of the word; mostly they just flow out of him and then he wonders where that came from, and lets himself be guided by what just came out towards what might come next (thus, '*stream-of-consciousness songs*').

Gray in his essay notices and acknowledges the flowing stream of 'Dignity's narrative and language. The full paragraph containing the phrases quoted above is:

'What is so liberating and invigorating about "Dignity" is that while it is free-spirited and ineffably relaxed, fluid as mercury and malleable as clay on the wheel, it is at the same time meticulously assembled, as beautifully thought-out and thrillingly well-crafted as a major tap-es-tree.'

Quite right. But in the interests of clarity about the great songwriter's surprising process, I want to modify this to read '*it at the same time appears meticulously assembled...*'. My point is that, as he tells us in various interviews, he doesn't think these things out while he's writing, instead he lets himself get into a mind-state where the language and narrative flow, where he's guided... and the fact that the result can seem so well-crafted and deliberate is a tribute to the skillfulness of Dylan's unconscious mind and a credit to his performer's discipline of following his Muse and just letting the music and language happen (not allowing his conscious mind to intervene, not thinking it out, but just trusting in the guidance of some higher power, and reserving the right to edit later - in the case of song-writing and recording; on stage, where Dylan and his voice feel most at home, there is no chance to edit later).

It is possible, for example, that when Dylan began writing this song, his only notion was to describe various people ('*fat man, thin man*', '*wise man, young man*') looking for dignity in various places - '*a blade of steel*' in the first line and, happy but probably unplanned echo (performer's instincts), '*a blade of grass*' at the start of verse two - and then only as he reached for a bridging effect (break the pattern) in the third verse and heard the lines that poured forth ('*Somebody got murdered on New Year's Eve/Somebody said dignity was the first to leave*') did it occur to him (prompted forcefully and irresistibly by his unconscious mind) that the song could also be a murder mystery,

with 'dignity' the name of a person, the prime suspect, and thus the narrator a sort of detective tracking down the culprit (searching for Dignity as the fat man and wise man had been looking for his lower case, more abstract and less dastardly counterpart - another happy echo, again possibly quite spontaneous, in which case the craft of the author was primarily his agility at following the clues provided by his unconscious or Muse or intuition).

Gray in his book reports that '*Nigel Hinton [another U.K. Dylan scholar] declares "Dignity" to be his favourite of all the "big" songs of the last twenty years: more loved than "Brownsville Girl", "Angelina" or even "Blind Willie McTell"*'. Hinton wrote, in a letter Gray quotes:

'What I particularly like about it is the consistency of its conceit: Bob Dylan as Sam Spade, or any one of those hard-bitten, cynical L.A.-based private dicks, conducting his B-movie, film noir hunt through the corrupt world in search of the missing character, Dignity. I like the array of characters - all those sons of darkness and sons of light - typical of the wonderful supporting actors who people those films... And I love the little familiar scenes from those movies - the murder at the New Year's Eve party, the wedding of Mary Lou... and the continual echo of films - the drinking man in a crowded room full of covered-up mirrors could come straight from Citizen Kane... The song even ends in the kind of despairing, enigmatic way that the best films noirs do - standing at the edge of the lake, knowing that everywhere leads to dead ends and that the case won't get solved. It's a black and white masterpiece.'

Since we know Dylan to be familiar with and fond of this sort of movie, and since we ourselves are familiar with his gift for language and his sense of humor and his storytelling skills and his performer's sense of and appreciation for song structure and timing and cadence, it is not such a mystery how this song could flow out of him once its narrative and structural premises presented themselves, once the floodgates were open, and instantly become a rich, complex, deeply satisfying invention that seems meticulously assembled and beautifully thought-out, even though probably all he was doing was trying to write it down fast enough.

When good songs come to Dylan, they do seem to come in batches, as in the case of the *Infidels* songs and outtakes in 1983 and the *Shot of Love* songs and outtakes in 1981. So it's interesting to speculate on how they encourage and influence each other and can be seen as extensions of the same creative moment, expressions of the same set of favorable conditions for songwriting. 'Dignity' probably didn't but easily could have originated as a discarded line from 'Political World', a song in which abstract nouns and human virtues often are spoken of as though they were persons: 'Wisdom is thrown into jail, it rots in a cell' 'Mercy walks the plank' 'Peace is... turned away from the door to wander some more.' Similarly, in the 1989 version of 'Born in Time,' the second bridge climaxes with the declaration, 'I'm broken.' - so one wonders if this could have been the origin of 'Everything Is Broken', which in its early 'Broken Days' version is unambiguously a song about a man-woman relationship.

'Born in Time' is the only out-and-out love song among the *Oh Mercy* batch. The title phrase ('*When we were born in time*' on the 1989 take; '*Where we were born in time*' when it was rerecorded a year later for *under the red sky*) means whatever the listener can make of it (of course). I hear it as a reference to the moment when (or place where) you and I became 'we' - lovers, an item, a romantic union. There's an evocation of this moment in the first bridge, '*Oh babe, now it's time to raise the curtain*'. The melody is quite pretty, full of affection and a sort of love-intoxication; Dylan breathes it with a lot of feeling. In the second bridge, he offers a wry yet seemingly heartfelt variant on 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder': '*You were snow, you were rain/You were striped, you were plain/Oh, babe, truer words have not been spoken.*' This would sound like nonsense to me were it not for LSD trips I took many years ago, and love-intoxication moments I've experienced since then.

'Series of Dreams' was recorded on March 23rd, 1989, according to the booklet in *The Bootleg Series, Volumes 1-3 [Rare and Unreleased] 1961-1991*. It was remixed and some guitar and keyboard overdubs were added and some vocal edits made (splicing together two vocal takes with differing lyrics, one probably from the April '89 sessions) in January 1991, thus justifying the album's title date (the other 57 selections on the compilation were recorded between 1961 and 1985). So the extended moment of invention and performance that is expressed in the *Oh Mercy* batch of songs (ten on the album and four known outtakes) was extended

still further, with two ‘big’ songs, ‘Dignity’ and ‘Series of Dreams’, completed and officially released in 1994 and 1991 (‘God Knows’ and ‘Born in Time’ were recorded again and released on *under the red sky* in 1990).

‘Series of Dreams’ is a major Dylan song and an important statement. Like ‘Dignity’, it’s two statements at once, charmingly playing hide-and-seek with each other. In ‘Dignity’, of course, the two are ‘life is just a Sam Spade movie’ (a picture of what goes on around here sometimes) and an expression of ‘*the heartfelt yearning for a more dignified world*’ (in Michael Gray’s words). In ‘Series of Dreams’, as in most Dylan songs, it’s entirely up to the listener or community of listeners to decide for himself or themselves what the statements are. Again quoting Gray, he says of ‘Dignity’, ‘*As with so much of Dylan’s finest writing, its credible possibilities are open and the opposite of limiting.*’

One of the statements ‘Series of Dreams’ makes, certainly, is ‘life is like thinking of (remembering, contemplating) a series of dreams’ (another picture of what goes on around here sometimes). John Burns, in a 1998 essay in the Dylan magazine *The Bridge*, has this to say about the song’s other major statement: ‘*Listening to “Series of Dreams”, one cannot fail to be struck by the way in which it seems to offer something like an artistic credo, and by the way in which its central metaphor opens up our understanding of Dylan’s achievement.*’ He then quotes the second halves of verses two and three:

*Wasn’t making any great connection
Wasn’t falling for any intricate scheme
Nothing that would pass inspection
Just thinking of a series of dreams*

*Wasn’t looking for any special assistance
Not going to any great extremes
I’d already gone the distance
Just thinking of a series of dreams*

Burns goes on to say: ‘*Of course we all know how dangerous it is to accept at face value any of Dylan’s pronouncements on his art, because he is so obviously unwilling to let himself be analysed or categorised, even by himself. Yet it also seems to me that if we are to get some kind of grip on Dylan’s music, then seeing it as a “series of dreams” is a very good place to start.*’

Wow. I don’t agree that ‘one cannot fail to be struck’ because I’m not sure I noticed this until Burns opened my eyes (as I went years not noticing that ‘Chimes of Freedom’ is a description of being caught in a thunderstorm). But I’m inclined to agree with and endorse the rest of what he says here. And I would add that this aspect of the song’s ‘message’ might well be the result of Dylan’s summer 1987 reconnection with his own earlier work as a result of conversations with Jerry Garcia and other members of the Grateful Dead. ‘*I can’t remember what it means - is it just a bunch of words?*’ Pre-sumably sometime that summer he found relief in the realization that in ‘Desolation Row’ and ‘Just Like Tom Thumb’s Blues’ and ‘Mr. Tambourine Man’, he’d been ‘just thinking of a series of dreams’.

And then when this song started coming out of him, with at first just the

message of, ‘I want to tell you what it feels like to recognize my and our everyday reality experience in the distorted time sense and juxtapositions of dream-consciousness,’ he helped the flow of words come by acknowledging a double assignment: find language for a song-picture of dream-consciousness, and simultaneously take a stab at answering those familiar questions about ‘What do your 1960s songs mean? What were you trying to do?’ As he often does in interviews, he answers with a list of negatives, trying to clear up misunderstandings (e.g., ‘*I don't sit and linger, meditate on every line afterwards*’):

*Wasn't thinking of anything specific...
Wasn't making any great connection/
Wasn't falling for any intricate scheme
Wasn't going to any great trouble
In believing it's whatever it seems.
Nothing too heavy, to burst a bubble
Just thinking of a series of dreams.*

These last four lines are from one of the circulating takes of ‘Series of Dreams’ from the March-April 1989 sessions, the one that has almost entirely different lyrics for the second verse. Here Dylan says, twenty-four years past 1965, that he wasn’t trying to burst anyone’s bubble, he was just describing what he observed – ‘*believing it’s whatever it seems*’. Or, as he said it back then:

*'And if my thought-dreams could be
seen/They'd probably put my head in a
guillotine
But it's alright, Ma, it's life, and life
only'*

After *Oh Mercy* came out, producer Lanois told an interviewer: ‘We had four or

*six songs that we recorded and didn't use. One track, “Series of Dreams”, was a fantastic turbulent track that I felt should have been on the record but... he had the last word.’ Some biographers and commentators have suggested Dylan held back ‘strong’ songs like ‘Dignity’ and ‘Series of Dreams’ from *Oh Mercy* because, after having some difficulty writing new songs in 1985-87, he wanted to have a few excellent ones available for whenever they might be needed. Others have taken the opposite view that he kept these songs off the album because he didn’t realize how good they were. But because *Oh Mercy* seems to me to hang together so well as an album and as a dignified and inspired series of dream-performances itself, I tend to believe Dylan avoided including these two power-houses here because his ears and intuition told him they would unbalance the record and distract the listener from other new songs that worked together, in the sequence he was finding himself guided to, very well indeed.*

Another strong possibility, suggested by Dylan’s past actions regarding songs he knew to be powerful but didn’t release right away, is that the sound he had in mind for ‘Series of Dreams’ was very important to him, and while he and Lanois and the players were able to approach it in the 1989 recordings, Dylan wasn’t satisfied until he heard the results of the January 1991 remixing and overdub sessions. Bob Dylan’s great successes as an artist, in the recording studio and on stage, have often resulted from pursuing a musical vision, a sound he heard in the

back of his mind and wanted to realize in his work, as well as a lyrical vision. This again is an expression of performer's instincts, always regarding songs as music and words working together. When this is successful, a phrase in a song's narrative (*'In one [dream] I was running, and in another all I seemed to be doing was climb'*) may be expressed as powerfully in the overall sound and feeling of the music as in the lyrics. The listener receives and feels the entire package at once.

Ironically, the superb and powerful final version of 'Series of Dreams' released on Dylan's box set *The Bootleg Series* in 1991 suggests that what Dylan aspired to and dreamed of when working on this song as a writer and recording artist was the grandiose sound and feeling achieved by producer Phil Spector in his early 1960s work, but specifically as updated and realized very successfully by Dylan's producer Daniel Lanois and his partner Brian Eno in the wonderful (and very commercially successful) 1987 U2 hit records 'With or Without You' and 'Where the Streets Have No Name'. Dylan aspired to something he thought Lanois might be able to give him and that certainly would have been very appropriate to this song (the insistence and claustrophobic tension of the backing track of the finished 'Series of Dreams' would have been overwhelming on 'Political World', I suspect, and might have made it an unpleasant listening experience instead of the delight I think it is, but these - as finally realized in the 1991 remix - are perfect for the twin messages of 'Series of Dreams' and all of its imagery and language). So Dylan was strong

enough to hold to his musical vision even at the price of frustrating Lanois, who felt the track as recorded 'should have been' on *Oh Mercy*. The final song when released as a single in 1991 was not the international hit record Dylan may have dreamed of, but it is a remarkable achievement that can stand with his better recordings. The performed line '*Like in a dream, when someone wakes up and screams*' might someday stand beside Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream* (which could have been a conscious or unconscious influence on Dylan here) as an evocation of the experience of the individual human being in our modern era. Similarly, the pace of the music and imagery in 'Series of Dreams' evokes for me Charlie Chaplin's great 1936 film *Modern Times*. And, neatly enough, one of the subtexts of the song seems to be its author's relationship with modern times via his work and how he did and didn't arrive at his essential oeuvre ('*Wasn't making any great connection/Wasn't falling for any intricate scheme/Nothing that would pass inspection* [i.e, close critical analysis]...').

Echoes of other songs that arose from Dylan at this same creative moment can be heard in the bridging lines '*And the cards are no good that you're holding/Unless they're from another world*' (versus 'Shooting Star's '*You were trying to break into another world*') and the line '*In another [dream], I witnessed a crime,*' which resonates with '*men commit crimes*' in 'Political World' and '*somebody got murdered*' in 'Dignity'. But the strongest correlation I hear is that 'What Was It You

Wanted?', like 'Series of Dreams' but less overtly, is another in Dylan's long series of attempts to find narrative language that will break through conventional time perceptions and capture the timeless quality of actual experience. In 'Series', which of course attempts to describe the out-of-time feeling of events perceived and participated in in a dream, this is partly accomplished by the narrator primarily speaking in the past tense ('*I was thinking of... Wasn't making... Wasn't falling*', etc., while other statements are in the present tense: '*nothing comes up*', '*everything stays down*', '*someone wakes up*', '*there's no exit*', '*the umbrella is folding*', '*the cards are...*'.

In 'What Was It You Wanted?' Dylan paints a subjective picture of a world (presumably his normal backstage or on-tour reality) where strangers and himself are constantly appearing, disappearing, reappearing, as if in some complicated folk dance sequence ('*Could you say it again?*' '*I'll be back in a minute*' '*You can tell me, I'm back*' '*Would you remind me again?*' '*Was there somebody looking, when you gave me that kiss?*'...accompanied by mind-bending references to the fact that he's both speaking to the person and singing on a record (which in turn might be the music being danced to): '*Has the record been breaking? Did the needle just skip?*' '*We can start it all over, get it back on the track*' '*Is the scenery changing? Am I getting it wrong?*' '*Is the whole thing going backwards? Are they playing our song?*' I find this hilarious, and quite consistent with the perceived reality of '*dreams where the time and the tempo fly/And there's no*

exit in any direction/'Cept the one you can't see with your eyes' and '*Dreams where the umbrella is folded/Into the path you are hurled.*' '*Are you the same person that was here before?*' Indeed. And am I? '*Wasn't looking for any special assistance...*'

Dylan's breathing, particularly his emphatic pauses for breath, are again very central to how he gets (and gets us) inside and behind the sentiment of 'Series of Dreams'. He sings, '*Into [pause] the path you are hurled/And the cards are [pause] no good that you're holding/Unless they're [pause] from another world.*' '*In one [pause], the surface was frozen/In another [pause], I witnessed a crime/In one [pause], I was running, and in another/All I seemed to be doing [pause] was climb.*' This is very engaging, and the effect is built upon in the next three lines, with breaths after 'looking' 'going' and 'already' until we're hanging on the narrator's every phrase, as surely as in 'Pretty Boy Floyd'.

So Dylan was rebuffed in his effort to join the Grateful Dead. But that certainly gave him great impetus to go forth and reinvent Bob Dylan (singer/ songwriter/performer) once again. With considerable flair.

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Can't Let Go No More

by Markus Prieur

On April 5th 2002, in Stockholm, Bob Dylan chose to perform his first ‘Solid Rock’ since November 21st 1981. About five weeks later, fifteen European audiences had been presented with this rocking gem. In May my wife Catina and I had the pleasure to cross the Irish Sea in order to attend all the eight British concerts at the end of this fine European tour, thus seeing Dylan perform ‘Solid Rock’ three times, in Cardiff, in Newcastle, and in London; and solid rock indeed it was, every time. In August ‘Solid Rock’ was performed twice, once in the US, and once in Canada. Some probably have asked themselves: Why does Dylan sing a song like this, with a fervour reminiscent of his early Gospel tours where this bold confession had its original setting? Why does Dylan in 2002 pull out these lyrics from 1979 about a lasting relationship with Jesus Christ, saying that for him this Jesus had been chastised, hated, and rejected? Why does he tell us that he won’t let go no more of this ‘Solid Rock’ he keeps hanging on to?

Some might be quick to answer that he is not serious at all in doing so. He might be faking it, detached from his own lyrics; maybe even being a hypocrite, pretending to be someone he is not. Some might say that he is just singing the song for the fun of it, not at all intending to convey any biblical truth, let alone to share any information about his abiding faith. Well, I don’t think so!

Having followed Dylan’s set lists very closely for some time now, as well as the content of the lyrics presented on stage, it was a bit surprising to see this particular choice after all these years, because Dylan decided to use the words of one of his own songs to communicate the state of his personal belief to his audience. But Dylan has conveyed messages of this sort to his audiences throughout recent years, and it is my contention that he does this intentionally, both with his choice of particular songs on some nights and with several juxtapositions of certain thought-provoking songs.

When commenting on a specific part of Dylan’s recent performance repertoire, it is also possible to read a lot between the lines of numerous lyrics. Those lyrics would be very well compatible with the biblical viewpoints clearly conveyed in those performances I would like to spotlight, as I focus on the more unambiguous lyrics of certain cover songs and certain Dylan songs performed from February 1999 to September 2002.

Winston Watson told me in June 1996, during a very nice chat outside the Old Opera House in Frankfurt, that he would love to play 'Gotta Serve Somebody' while a part of Dylan's band. Sadly he never got to play it, as that summer tour was his last one as Dylan's drummer. But even before Dylan reintroduced 'Gotta Serve Somebody' into his set in June 1998, occasional performances of 'I Believe in You' (two of which my wife and I had witnessed in Germany, in Cologne 1994 and Dortmund 1995), of 'In the Garden', and of 'Every Grain of Sand' gave us reason to believe that Dylan had not renounced the faith he embraced during that time period in which he wrote these songs, and in which I started to listen to his music.

But Dylan did, after almost seven years, reintroduce 'Gotta Serve Somebody' into his set, and before he began opening his concerts with an acoustic set in April 1999, he would start more than another fifty shows within nine months with this extremely challenging song. Often he would make up new lyrics for the verses, something he had already done before. The rather general yet challenging statement of the chorus was however the most obvious Christian Dylan lyric recurring on stage. In November 1998 'I Believe in You' (a very personal song, if understood to be addressed to God) had one rare appearance, which would be the only one between 1996 and 2002. 'In the Garden' (which clearly speaks about Jesus Christ, including his resurrection) had not been performed since 1996 as well, and would not show up until spring 2001 (once only) and spring 2002 (also once).

However, in February 1999 Dylan chose to sing two very old hymns, in

versions resembling the ones recorded by the Stanley Brothers. The first was 'Rock of Ages', which was performed once that month, two more times the following November, and seven times in spring 2000. The other hymn, 'Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior' was performed twice that month and three more times as well in spring 2000. This song appeared since during several sound checks, both in July 2000 and April 2001, and even as late as August 2002, indicating Dylan's continuing consideration of its inclusion in the set.

'While I draw this fleeting breath, when my eyes shall close in death, when I rise to worlds unknown, and behold Thee on Thy throne, Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee'

'Let me at Thy throne of mercy find a sweet relief, kneeling there in deep contrition, help my unbelief. Savior, Savior, hear my humble cry, while on others Thou art calling, do not pass me by'

Given the personal history of his relationship with this 'Rock of Ages' and 'Gentle Savior', Dylan would probably not have sung lyrics like these, especially in the passionate way he did, if he had totally disentangled himself from the meaning of them. Listening to his humble cry in the words written by a blind lady poet from the nineteenth century, I heard the most vulnerable Dylan since 'When He Returns' and 'What Can I Do For You?' decades earlier. And it sure sounded like this 'Solid Rock' he sang about back then remained both his major place of refuge while he draws this fleeting breath, and the place he is 'ready to go' to when his eyes shall close in death.

1999 also saw the introduction of three new openers, which Dylan probably would not have kept on using if the lyrics did not have a very personal meaning to him. As of September 2002, 30 shows have started with 'Somebody Touched Me', 38 concerts began with 'Hallelujah, I'm Ready To Go', and 59 times Dylan has walked on stage and opened with 'I Am The Man Thomas'.

'Somebody Touched Me' my wife and I witnessed twice on consecutive Sundays in September 2000, in Glasgow and at the first Portsmouth show. The Portsmouth version, which is as good as it gets, later appeared as the opening track on the officially released Japanese album *Bob Dylan Live 1961-2000 - Thirty-nine years of great concert performances*, which also was sold in European record stores.

'Glory, glory, glory, somebody touched me. Must've been the hand of the Lord. While I was praying, somebody touched me. Must've been the hand of the Lord. It was on a Sunday, somebody touched me. Must've been the hand of the Lord. Glory, glory, glory, somebody touched me. Must've been the hand of the Lord.'

These simple yet powerful lyrics convey an equally simple yet powerful truth, which many a struggling believer has experienced. It is not up to the believer, but up to God to bless and heal with the touch of His hand, which alone imparts lasting glory. After Dylan was 'Saved', he told us that '*by His hand I've been delivered*', and this hand still keeps and sustains the singer, who says that he '*can see the Master's hand in every leaf that trembles, in every grain of sand*'.

'Hallelujah, I'm Ready To Go' we saw three times in September 2000, in

Aberdeen, in Cardiff, and at the second Portsmouth show.

'Dark was the night, not a star was in sight, on a highway heading down below, I let my Savior in, and he saved my soul from sin, Hallelujah, I'm ready to go. Hallelujah, I'm ready, I can hear the voices singing soft and low, I'm ready, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, I'm ready to go. Sinner don't wait before it's too late. He's a wonderful Savior to know. Well, I fell on my knees, and he answered my pleas, Hallelujah, I'm ready to go.'

When opening a concert with these lyrics, Dylan chooses to point directly toward his wonderful Savior, telling his audience openly that his soul is 'saved', and that he is 'ready to go'. He seems certain there is not much time left for the sinner '*on the highway heading down below*'. But his Savior still answers the pleas and helps the unbelief of everyone kneeling in deep contrition at the throne of mercy. For Dylan it seems to be the only place where this sweet relief is to be found. And whoever has found it can truly say: '*I'm ready, Hallelujah!*'

'I Am The Man Thomas' we have seen six times so far; three times in September 2000, at first the European debut in Dublin, and then both in Birmingham and in Sheffield; and then again in May 2002, when we saw Dylan open three concerts with this challenging song, at first in Brighton, and then both London shows one week later.

'I am the Man Thomas, I am the Man. Look at these nail scars I carry in my hand. They drove me up the hill... They made me carry the cross... They crowned my head with thorns... They nailed me to the cross... They pierced me in the

side... I died on the cross... They buried me in the tomb... In three days I rose... I am the Man Thomas, I am the Man. Look at these nail scars I carry in my hand.'

This is the first song since 'Rise Again' (performed 12 times in 1980, and once in 1981), in which Dylan speaks in the first person as Jesus. Both songs are very overt statements about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If '*these nail scars*' didn't mean a lot to Dylan these days, he probably would not keep on opening so many concerts in 2002 with this song (25 times already from February to August), telling us the familiar story written down in the Gospel of John. Thomas believed after he had seen his risen Lord. Maybe Dylan intends to remind us that blessed are those (on stage or in the audience) who do not see and yet believe.

In August 2002 Dylan introduced the latest gospel cover song into his song repertoire, opening six North American shows with 'A Voice From On High', telling his audiences in very unambiguous words about his lasting relationship to his Lord who died on that old rugged cross.

'The Saviour has paid a great price for me. He died on the hill so that I should go free. And I'll follow his footsteps up the narrow way, and be ready to meet him when he calls on that day. I hear a voice calling, it must be our Lord. He's calling from heaven on high. I hear a voice calling, I've gained the reward, in the land where we never shall die. He died on the cross, that old rugged cross, so we should be saved in our sins and not lost. And I'll follow his footsteps up the narrow way, and be ready to meet him when he calls on that day.'

'This World Can't Stand Long', another challenging cover song, was also introduced in 1999, at the last show of the year, and it has been performed in 37 shows until September 2002, usually as the last song of the first acoustic set. In September 2000 my wife and I were among those lucky ones who witnessed the first and so far only European performance of this song, in Glasgow, Scotland.

'This world it can't stand long. Be ready, don't wait too late. We should know it can't stand long, for it is too full of hate... For a long time this world has stood, gets more wicked every day. The good maker, who created it, surely won't let it stand this way... This world has been destroyed before, 'cause it was too full of sin, for that very reason it's going to be destroyed again... If we only give our hearts to God, let him lead us by the hand, nothing in this world to fear, He'll lead you across the burning sand.'

Dylan also seems deeply convinced of the sombre message he tries to convey with this song about this world '*too full of sin*', which '*gets more wicked every day*', as he warns his listeners to '*be ready, don't wait too late*'. But he also seems confident that the same hand that led him through seas most severe will kindly assist him home.

From a Christian point of view, this hand of God, with which He would take the believer by the hand, and lead him beyond the burning sand, is the same nail-scarred hand Dylan is pointing out when performing 'I Am The Man Thomas'. It is the same hand that would ever keep on touching the trusting believer, prompting him to shout '*Glory, glory, glory*'.

Of course, all these interpretations of these lyrics only make sense assuming that

Dylan believes what he sings when covering these old songs, and that he intends to convey a message to his audiences with them. The last song mentioned, 'This World Can't Stand Long', has a very apocalyptic tone to it, which can also be found in both old and new Dylan songs. In recent performances of old songs like 'A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall' or 'Down in the Flood' I always hear this apocalyptic tone, as well as in those rare performances of 'God Knows' (with its blunt statement '*...gonna be no more water but fire next time*') or in those not so rare performances of two of his finest masterpieces, 'Tryin' To Get To Heaven' ('*...before they close the door*') and 'Not Dark Yet' ('*...but it's getting there*').

'Not Dark Yet' probably has several layers of meaning, but one of them clearly conveys an important part of Dylan's belief in the last line of each verse: '*It's not dark yet, but it's getting there.*' There will definitely be an end to this '*world full of lies*' and there is little time left until then, for already the '*shadows are falling*'. The two simple words '*not ... yet*' however indicate that '*saving grace*' is still available, and the cover songs mentioned above leave no doubt where the singer believes this grace to be found. Dylan recommends his audience to '*look at these nail scars*' of his '*wonderful Savior*' and to '*kneel in deep contrition*' '*at the throne of mercy*'.

'*Look up, look up, seek your Maker, fore Gabriel blows his horn*', the last line of the last verse from 'Sugar Baby', conveys the same message. It is also a perfect example of Dylan taking words from another song, which convey a biblical thought, and incorporating them into one of his own compositions. Lines like these, as well as

the very biblical messages of those cover songs examined above, have been part of many a concert in recent years, and I do believe Dylan includes them for a reason, intending to communicate something very important to him.

In addition to this some of his own Christian songs have been performed here and there; not only the already mentioned 'I Believe in You', 'In the Garden', and 'Every Grain of Sand', but also the rare 'Man of Peace' with its grave warning about the craftiness of the father of lies, performed three times on the East Coast of the United States in November 1999, as well as in Newcastle in September 2000, where my wife and I were a part of the audience, two days after I had seen the song already printed out on the cue sheet in Glasgow. The rocking gem 'Gotta Serve Somebody', which had opened so many shows in 1998 and 1999, also appears once in a while, in different positions in the set, and it shines every time, like the Portsmouth performance in 2000, which was the first one I had seen since 1991. In the summer of 2001 Dylan even chose to perform 'Gotta Serve Somebody' eleven times within two months.

All these songs mentioned, including the newly reintroduced 'Solid Rock' of spring 2002, clearly speak for themselves. But I would also like to spotlight a few examples of the numerous juxtapositions of certain songs, which I do not see as accidental, but as intentional, giving a valid indication about Dylan's biblical viewpoints. Some of those observations might seem pure speculation to some, while others might share my opinion that Dylan selects his set lists with just such things in mind.

Assuming that Dylan himself is the creator of his ever changing set lists, and that the songs are chosen not at random but deliberately, it is very interesting to see what kind of songs appear together on certain nights, and in what position within the set. For example, when I hear within consecutive songs, '*If you go down in the flood, it's gonna be your fault ... I'm trying, trying to get to heaven before they close the door*' (as we did in Birmingham 2000, in a show which had already started with '*I Am The Man Thomas*'), I wonder if Dylan did this on purpose. Another most thought-provoking juxtaposition presented several times in consecutive songs was: '*This world has been destroyed before, because it was too full of sin, for that very reason it's going to be destroyed again. ... Be ready don't wait too late ... If you go down in the flood it's gonna be your own fault ... It's gonna be the meanest flood that anybody's seen.*' Pure coincidence? I don't think so.

I wonder how many of those few hundred lucky people who witnessed Dylan's fine performance in Horsens in May 2000 agreed with his message that night: '*Hallelujah, I'm ready to go, it's a hard rain's a-gonna fall, sooner or later we all gonna have to serve somebody, I'm trying to get to heaven before they close the door.*' When my wife and I saw Dylan at Vicar Street in September 2000, and almost five and a half years after his previous concert in the Republic of Ireland he pulled out '*Ring Them Bells*' in Dublin's fair city again (as he did in April 1995), singing the '*chosen few who will judge the many when the game is through*' verse twice again (as he did in April 1995), I had the strong impression that he probably still believes it.

Another connection of '*Tryin' to get to Heaven*' with '*Hallelujah, I'm ready to go*' struck me as well when I first noticed it. Both songs were performed within the same set several times, not only in Horsens. I wrote in my Cardiff review back in September 2000: '*The third verse started with "People at the station (sic), waiting for the train."* We all know that the train image is an important one for Dylan. I never saw last night's opener in connection with that, but in hindsight he sang "*Hallelujah*" like someone who just had been handed a vital train ticket, someone who is "*well dressed, waiting on the last train*", the slow train coming, which is picking up speed, as this world can't stand long. People get ready, there's a train a-coming. Hallelujah, I'm ready to go. - Powerful indeed. Today I might add: '*Some trains don't pull no gamblers.*' It is a serious subject Dylan sings about, and actually there might be not much time to gamble, so he keeps on warning: '*Be ready, don't wait too late.*'

When '*Gotta Serve Somebody*' appears in the same concert with one of the three gospel openers examined above (as in both its 2002 performances in Florida, and several others before that, for example in Portsmouth and in Horsens), I see this as a deliberate statement about his faith on a certain night. No believer is inclined to share his belief all the time, and on some nights Dylan simply stays silent on the subject (as he does in most interviews or press conferences). He alone, and no journalist or audience member, is the one who decides when to share something about his faith, or how much.

So, when during his latest European tour Dylan performs in consecutive shows

‘Every Grain of Sand’ and ‘In the Garden’ (‘Grain’ in Stuttgart and ‘Garden’ in Munich), or ‘Every Grain of Sand’ and ‘I Believe in You’ (‘Grain’ in Oberhausen and ‘Believe’ in Brussels), it is not a coincidence that he does this. When ‘In the Garden’ has its first appearance after almost twelve months, on the night after a concert that had featured ‘Hallelujah, I’m Ready To Go’, ‘Solid Rock’, and the first ‘Every Grain of Sand’ of the year, it is a very fitting surprise. And when the first show in London is the third concert within a month (after Berlin and Frankfurt) where Dylan performs both ‘I Am The Man Thomas’ and ‘Solid Rock’, thus presenting an audience with two songs about Jesus Christ (one about his death and resurrection, and one stating that for him this Jesus Christ was chastised, hated, and rejected by a world that He created) he probably does this on purpose.

The first ‘Solid Rock’ during the latest North American Tour was performed during the show in Omaha, which had started with ‘A Voice From On High’, so on this occasion Dylan again chose to sing two songs about Jesus. And the second ‘Solid Rock’ in Saskatoon was directly preceded by ‘This World Can’t Stand Long’, which I see as another deliberate juxtaposition: *‘This world it can’t stand long ... but I’m hanging on to a Solid Rock made before the foundation of the world.’*

I am convinced that Dylan believes what he sings in those songs, and that the biblical viewpoints conveyed on stage are his own. I assume, that Dylan has experienced, like countless other believers, his Lord and Saviour as the Good Shepherd, who cares for His sheep, and who is

looking out for them, even when they go astray in their own ways. Dylan did not initiate his relationship with Jesus; it was his Lord who began the good work in him. And it is not Dylan, but his Lord, who will be the one fulfilling his promise to be faithful and complete this good work.

Dylan keeps on *‘hanging in the balance of a perfect finished plan’*, just as he keeps on *‘hanging on to a solid rock’*. So when Dylan is singing certain songs in recent years, it not only tells me something about him and his never ending belief. It also tells me something about the one he keeps believing in, the one who in His never ending mercy keeps on touching Dylan, and who keeps on prompting him to confess this in concert. I am confident that Dylan’s risen Lord will keep on touching him with His nail-scarred hand, and will finally lead him *‘beyond the burning sand’*, for Dylan is *‘ready to meet him when he calls on that day’*. Jesus Christ, whom Dylan let in, and who saved his soul from sin, remains for Dylan *‘a wonderful Savior to know’*, a ‘Solid Rock’ he *‘can’t let go no more’*.

by Alan Davis

The Dancing Child Speaks

The first time I heard it, my wife and I were driving home from Carlisle on the M6, listening to a recording of Bob Dylan's performance at the State College, Pennsylvania (11th November 2001). We'd already enjoyed a lovely performance of 'Girl of the North Country' and a powerful rendition of 'Cry a While', but when Dylan began singing 'I Want You' the signs were not promising: he fluffed the first couple of lines, and the steel guitar (not my favourite instrument) seemed too whiningly prominent. In fact from the outset it had all the makings of a dud. But with Bob Dylan you never can tell, can you? During the following few minutes, despite yet more fluffed lines, I found myself drawn into the song by some wonderfully emotive singing and even found myself enjoying the steel guitar, mellifluously played by Larry Campbell with an acute sensitivity; but better, far better, was to come. With shivers running up and down my spine, I listened to Dylan finishing the song with an entirely astonishing piece of harmonica playing; and then, as the audience erupted in applause over its dying notes, I leaned forward and

switched off the cassette player. Daphne and I looked at each other. She'd felt it too, and there were no words.

There are those, I know, who are dismissive of much of Dylan's harmonica playing these days, making caustic reference to his 'two-note solos'. Michael Gray is among them. He draws attention to the overenthusiastic response of Dylan's audience - the '*overkill of applause*' that greets '*an alternating two-note harp twiddle in the right key*'. The effect of this, he believes, is '*pernicious*'; it threatens to '*damage the antennae on which any artist depends for his or her present-day art*'.¹ You can see what he means. Dylan is applauded every time he picks up the harmonica. If any old series of feeble squawks will be cheered, why should he try anything more ambitious?

But there seem to be two quite large assumptions here. First, that the members of the audience are uncritical: locked in the grip of their hero-worship, they will cheer anything Dylan does. Second, that Dylan's harmonica playing is not ambitious. This may be a true assessment of some members of the audience, and there

may be some shows where Dylan's harmonica-playing is uninspired, but I think there's more to the matter than this. There are members of the audience who become excited for a very good reason whenever Dylan reaches for the



harmonica. I know; I'm among them. And I don't believe you can judge the level of Dylan's ambition by counting the number of notes he twiddles. I want to suggest that there are two fundamentally different types of magnificence that Dylan can achieve (and that most Dylan enthusiasts seem to have a tendency to lean towards one or the other). There are those performances where Dylan displays complete mastery, singing and playing with consummate power and apparent ease. For examples of these in recent years, I'd point towards the two Wembley 2000 concerts. And then there are the performances that may be far from technically perfect, but which are infinitely precious because Dylan is trying something entirely new, risking everything on an instinct which may sometimes let him down. It's this second type that primarily interests me, and inspires me. It involves a high level of risk, and tends to leave clearly visible (or rather, audible) traces of a

struggle that was not certain of a successful outcome. The second type can be easily misunderstood, and I think it might help if we look for a parallel situation in another art form. In fact, in another artist, and indeed, in another time.

In 1821 Robert John Thornton published a new edition of *Virgil* which, among many other illustrations, contained a number of wood-engravings by William Blake. Thornton had been persuaded to employ Blake by one of Blake's friends, but when he saw the product of Blake's labours he was appalled. His first response was to employ another engraver, and some of the wood-blocks were actually recut; but several members of the Royal Academy spoke up on Blake's behalf. Thornton was persuaded; Blake's blocks were used after all. Even so, Thornton felt it necessary to apologise for them in the preface of the book, explaining that they '*display less of art than genius, and are much admired by some eminent painters?*'² It isn't surprising that Thornton was unsure of his ground. There had been nothing like these wood-cuts in the history of art; yet at first sight, they almost look as if a child has cut them,



scoring the lines into the wood with either lack of care, or lack of skill, or both.

It's still possible today to feel something of Thornton's insecurity over these images - and you can judge your own reaction from the illustrations here. Yet these little prints inspired a unique and much-loved school of English landscape pastoral art, which can be traced right through the 19th and 20th centuries in the work of artists such as Samuel Palmer, Graham Sutherland, and Paul Nash. Childish scribbling on a wood block? Or works of genius? Well, Blake was an excellent engraver. He'd been trained as an engraver; he had decades of experience behind him. He could have produced something to satisfy Dr Thornton with no difficulty at all. Yet he chose to produce something that (he must have known) could easily be mistaken for incompetent bungling.

There's something here that makes me think of T.S. Eliot's notion of arriving where one started and knowing the place for the first time:³

*Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always -
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)*

Only after a lifetime of experience was Blake able to attempt something truly

simple, and make great art of it. By 1820 he knew all about 'the children in the apple tree'. But it's a risky road, attempting this particular kind of exploratory art; an art whose simplicity rests on the complex foundations of a lifetime's struggle for expression.

I've been forced to the conclusion that in this respect, Bob Dylan's approach to his harmonica playing, today, is a kind of parallel to what Blake was attempting in his (now, rightly) famous wood engravings. Sometimes it can almost be mistaken for the kind of thing that an inexperienced child would do if presented with a harmonica - that initial, sometimes discordant squawk, followed by the tentatively faint repetition of a couple of notes, as if unsure where the next note is coming from. It's the kind of thing you might do if you had no idea of where you were going. It's also the kind of thing you might do if you had a lifetime's experience of playing, and were venturing into an unexplored region.

I remember very well the first time this impressed itself on me - in fact I wrote an article about it for *Isis*.⁴ It was in Newcastle, 2000. We'd just sat through a performance of 'Tangled up in Blue' which had very little to commend it, yet Dylan achieved an extraordinary rescue job with a harmonica coda that lifted the performance onto an entirely different level. It started in the classic way, with tentative searching; then came the finding of a promising sequence of notes; and finally the celebratory unveiling of an absurdly simple but wonderfully effective resolution. It was the most memorable

moment of the whole show, though the impact doesn't quite come through on a recording. In this case, I think you had to be there.

Not so with the State College 'I Want You' to which, at last, I need to return. I wasn't there (though I wish I had been), but so much is wonderfully preserved in the recording that it doesn't seem to matter. If you're a stickler for technical perfection you're likely to find much of the song irritating, for Dylan stumbles over the words on several occasions; the lonesome organ grinder and the guilty undertaker fail to make an appearance; likewise the dancing child's flute. Yet there is so much to enjoy here despite that: sixteen different ways of saying 'I want you', for a start, each one of them expressing a different aspect of desire. And all the way through this performance the words seem somehow secondary; what dominates is his voice, at times more like an instrument than a voice, making sounds that seem to ache with longing. Finally, as the last words fade, he reaches for the harmonica. You can hear the buzz among some members of the audience as he does so, and this is not mindless Dylanolatry (*pace* Michael Gray); the buzz is coming from people who are sensing the potential of this moment. The music has reached an edge.

The start is uncertain. A squawk or two; a series of quivers on one note, while Larry Campbell's steel guitar winds the melody ever onward like a river of quicksilver; there are more squawks; and then here is something: what's this? Dylan hooks onto a little sequence of five or six

notes, like a fisherman who suspected there was something interesting down there in the water all along. He plays the sequence again, gets the feel of it; then again, more confidently. This is new. This is an exploration of 'I Want You' that has entered entirely unknown territory. There's a growing restlessness among the crowd. They too know that something is happening. And as Dylan opens the unknown, remembered gate, playing the simple sequence over and again with increasing confidence, it's as if he is holding aloft a great treasure he has found; as if he has burst upwards through the clouds into clear blue sky. The restlessness of the crowd becomes applause, and that tune becomes for a few moments all that matters to them, to me: a condition of complete simplicity, costing not less than everything. The dancing child has found his flute, and speaks.

1. Michael Gray, *Song & Dance Man III* (Cassell, 2000), p.850.
2. Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake* (Macmillan, 1863), p.274.
3. T.S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding'. *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (Faber & Faber, 1974), pp.222-23.
4. Alan Davis, 'A Tangled Tale', *Isis* 95 (Feb-March 2001), p.32.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to my wife Daphne and to Ben Clayton for reading the first draft of this article, and to Andy Muir for his encouragement. I'd also like to offer a long overdue 'thank you' to Una McLeod; without her inspired help neither this, nor any other of my Dylan articles, would have been written.

'Po' Boy, dressed in black' -

Bob Dylan's 'Love And Theft'

and the art of Blackface Minstrelsy

by Richard Jobes

*'Maybe I'm nothing but all the things I soak up,'*¹ Bob Dylan said at the age of twenty-one. Dylan's ability to assimilate the work of others into his own has always been a significant part of his art, from his use of folk and literary traditions to the Bible and pop culture. The release of *'Love And Theft'* in 2001, his thirty-second studio album, saw this aspect of his creative process at its height. The foundations on which the album are built are some the oldest traditions in American entertainment. Upon the album's release much was made of the fact that it shared its title with a book about minstrelsy by Eric Lott, and there is little doubt that it served as the source for the name of the album. Dylan adopts the traditions of the minstrel art and uses them as the framework upon which he builds his album. *'Love And Theft'* on the most basic level can be seen as a self-contained minstrel performance.

Blackface minstrelsy was the most popular form of entertainment in America for over a century. Robert C. Toll writes, *'To some mid-nineteenth-century Americans, it was "the only true American drama" or the "American National Opera." But to most people, it was simply the minstrel show, the best show in town, any town... From the White House to the Californian gold fields, from New Orleans to New England, from riverboats and saloons to 2500-seat theatres. The minstrel show was the first uniquely American show business form.'*² The phenomenon of white men blackening their faces to imitate the dance and music of black slaves is now understandably viewed as a product of a deeply racist society, yet the relationship between the different cultures is considerably more complex than it first appears. As Lott's book argues, the art of blackface minstrelsy was based not only on fear and ridicule, but also a respect and understanding. The influence that minstrelsy had upon all aspect of American culture and entertainment was extensive. Bill C. Malone writes, *'Minstrelsy introduced or popularised an abundance of songs, dances, instruments, and instrumental and vocal styles that moved into the repertoires of southern rural folk.'*³ It is the significance of southern rural folk traditions that is one of the most striking, and most important, elements of minstrelsy, and thus *'Love And Theft'*.

It is an album that constructs a world built upon the myth of what America is, and, most specifically of all, the romanticised South. *'Every one of the records I've made has emanated from the entire panorama of what America is to me,'*⁴ Dylan said shortly after the album's release. The album's use of minstrel art indicates the form's fascination with the Old South, and its ability to recall it. Alexander Saxton says, *'When the wandering minstrels carried their fragments of African-American music back to northern and western cities, they took them encased in a mythology of the South as a region fascinatingly different, closely wedded to nature, and above all, timeless.'*⁵ It reflects the universality of the Old South myth that very few blackface minstrels were actually from the South. Alexander Saxton writes, *'Typical purveyors of minstrelsy were northern and urban; they were neither New Englanders nor Southerners (although their parents may have been); and if of rural or small town origin, were most likely to come from upper New York State.'*⁶

The American South, like any worthwhile myth, never existed in the first place. Works such as *Huckleberry Finn*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Gone With The Wind* have each added their own element to the mythology, yet it is a world more indebted to these fictions than a reality that ever existed. Indeed much of the mythology has now been reduced to cliché, relying on over-simplified and tired images such as the riverboat gamblers, plantation owning gents and good-hearted farm workers. The romanticised notion of the Old South

first came into being during the years before the Civil War. Previously a population made up of immigrant from various areas of Europe; there was a necessity for the South to develop an identity that stood for more than being simply not Northern. Edward Ranson and Andrew Hook write, *'It was a need to believe in itself, to identify its own value, that produced the most potent and enduring images of the South... The South had created an aristocratic, agrarian civilization; the North, a democratic, commercial one. Totally different sets of attitudes and values animated the two sections. Essentially the North was a materialistic society given over to the pursuit of money; Southern society gave its allegiance to such values as honour and personal integrity. Hence, where Northern society was an aggregate of competing individuals, the South was an aggregate of communities. Northern society was rootless, changing, fluid, dominated by money-minded Yankees, while Southern society was conservative, upholding the values of the traditional way of life.'*⁷ The myth ultimately becomes so treasured because of the values it comes to represent. The idea of a society based on traditional values, such as family and community, became increasingly essential as America became industrialised, and many Southerners began to immigrate to the large northern cities. LeRoi Jones wrote of this emigration: *'They had come from all over the South, from backwoods farms as sharecroppers who had never been to the moderately large cities of the South, into the fantastic metropolises of the North... Everywhere was cement, buildings, and streets filled up with automo-*

biles. Whole families jammed up in tiny, unbelievably dirty flats or rooming houses... The South was home.'⁸ The Old South stood for the values that many felt were fading from American society.

While much of 'Love And Theft' uses the Old South as the setting for many of the songs, it is also used as a place of fond nostalgia for those who have left to work in the industrialised cities. 'Mississippi', 'Honest With Me' and 'Po' Boy' all deal with the notion of the country boys lost in the big city. LeRoi Jones writes, 'Nothing was quite as disparaging as to be called "a country boy."... To the new city dwellers, the "country boy" was someone who bore the mark, continued the customs, of a presumably discarded past.'⁹ Minstrelsy's incredible popularity in urban areas would support the belief that many who lived in the city were eager to escape its restraints, whether they originated from rural areas or not. 'Mississippi', 'Honest With Me' and 'Po' Boy' all wear their 'country boy' persona on their sleeve with a mixture of pride and paranoia. 'Mississippi', from the mandolin arrangement, the restrained electric guitar embellishments and the minimal drum-role that opens the song, is a song characterised by its dignity and taste. The song's opening verses at first appear to be unpromising, seeming to be stilted and wooden:

*'Every step of the way we walk the line
Your days are numbered, so are mine
Time is pilin' up, we struggle and we
scrape
We're all boxed in, nowhere to escape'*

It is so doleful and solemn, laced with all

the doom and gloom clichés of Dylan's writing at its worst. The only heartening moment comes when the narrator draws the comparison between himself and the mass of lost souls he appears to be singing to: '*Your days are numbered, so are mine.*' As the song progresses it begins to open up, as the central character comes to the fore:

*'City's just a jungle, more games to play
Trapped in the heart of it, trying to get
away'*

*'I was raised in the country, I've been
workin' in the town'*

*'I been in trouble ever since I set my suit-
case down'*

The need to travel on, and the fear of remaining in one place too long, returns us to the theme of movement that is ever-present in 'Love And Theft'. It is with the appearance of the first-person pronoun that the song begins to unfurl. The rigidity of the opening verses reflects the narrator's own feelings of restriction. A whole song built around such over-used stock phrases such as 'City's just a jungle' and 'We walk the line' would be a weary thing indeed (even if Dylan's ability to transform over-familiar clichés into something fresh and original is well documented). It is during the third verse that the song springs into full bloom:

*'Got nothing for you, I had nothing
before'*

*'Don't even have anything for myself
anymore'*

*'Sky's full of fire, pain pourin' down
Nothing you can sell me, I'll see you
around'*

This is the first of only two occasions on

which ‘Mississippi’ breaks from its strict AABB rhyme pattern, shifting instead to AABC (hardly a break of monumental proportions, but the effect it has is startling). It is this shift in rhyme that brings the narrator’s personality to the fore, offering a sense of relief after the restraint that has gone before. The final line characterises a dignified refusal to be controlled by the materialism and greed of the city, simply stating that this singer will not be satisfied by a mere product. ‘*I’ll see you around*,’ and the shift from the rhyme scheme, gives Dylan the opportunity for a droll roll of the eyes. The quick dismissal of the glossy salesperson drips with a world-weary wit, well aware that the narrator will be bumping into another similarly faceless individual in a world full of them. The use of the ascending bass line, an uncommon occurrence in Dylan’s recording career, gives the song a natural sense of ascension and grace.

The second occasion on which the rhyme scheme is broken is to emphasise the most open and touching element of the song:

*My clothes are wet, tight on my skin
Not as tight as the corner that I painted
myself in
I know that fortune is waitin’ to be kind
So give me your hand and say you’ll be
mine’*

The very real need for human companionship, and the comfort it brings, are expressed here in the simplest terms. The refusal to be broken down by the woes of the world is what characterises this and many of the other songs on the album. Nothing can deprive the narrator of his

dignity and grace, refusing to bow to the pressures of the shallow society that surrounds him.

*‘But my heart is not weary, it’s light
and it’s free
I’ve got nothing but affection for all
those who have sailed with me’*

‘Honest With Me’ works as the mirror image of ‘Mississippi’. Where ‘Mississippi’ is restrained and graceful, ‘Honest With Me’ is silly, loud and artless. The tasteful arrangement of the former song is replaced by a fast paced recreation of 60s garage rock music. Any restraint is quickly abandoned as the musicians take great delight in thrashing out the jarring slide-guitar-led arrangement. The base rock and roll charms suit the subject matter of the song, which sees the innocent country boy unable to fend off the poisons of the city in the way the narrator of ‘Mississippi’ manages to. The fact that the lines ‘*I’m not sorry for nothin’ I’ve done/I’m glad I fought - I only wish we’d won*’ recall lines directly from Civil War folk song ‘I’m A Good Old Rebel’ would indicate where the narrator’s loyalties lie:

*‘Oh I’m a good old Rebel
Now that’s just what I am
For this fair land of freedom
I do not care a damn.
I’m glad I fought against it
I only wish we’d won.
And I don’t want no pardon
For everything I’ve done’*

The line in Mississippi which stands in against the materialistic lifestyle of the city: ‘*There is nothing you can sell me, I’ll see you around*’ is contrasted in ‘Honest With Me’ with:

'You say my eyes are pretty and my smile is nice'

'Well, I'll sell it to ya at a reduced price'

The narrator's is more than willing to trade on his naïve country charms to find his place in the urban society, even if it means losing the values at the core of his personality.

'Po' Boy', while once again dealing with the country boy in the city, is a very different piece from both 'Mississippi' and 'Honest With Me'. The folkish whimsy of the music, along with the metre twisting lyrics, make this the most humorous and good natured track on the album. While the contrast between city and country life is still marked, neither appear quite as threatening as they do at other points on the album. As Dylan sings, '*The game is the same - it's just up on another level.*' The country boy, despite the challenges and successes of the city, never loses whatever values he once held:

'Poor boy in a red-hot town'

'Out beyond the twinkin' stars'

'Ridin' first class trains - making the rounds'

'Tryin' to keep from fallin' between the cars'

While it is a song that relishes in its 'aw-shuck' naïvety, it works due to Dylan's simple Chaplinesque humour. Indeed, Dylan has never appeared so hopelessly love-struck as when he delivers these lines:

'All I know is that I'm thrilled by your kiss'

'I don't know any more than this'

'Po' Boy', in it's own peaceable way, could be seen as one of the most affecting achievements of Dylan's career.

The dirt and grime of the city that runs throughout 'Mississippi', 'Honest With Me' and 'Po' Boy' is also present in aspects of the album's musical palette. The tougher, electric sound of 'Lonesome Day Blues' evokes the Chicago blues, epitomised by Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters, who both appeared on the city's Chess record label. When traditionally Southern musical forms travelled to the industrial cities of the North they adapted to the new surroundings. The swinging blues of 'Summer Days', made popular by Louis Jordan, was slicker and wittier to reflect the opportunities of city life and appeal to what was assumed to be more sophisticated audiences. The wider landscape adds another dimension to the album, enhancing its character.

While life in the city is an ever-threatening presence throughout 'Love And Theft', the album is able to recall an agrarian culture. It is through a great sleight of hand that Dylan manages to recall the rich mythological landscape of the Old South in so many of the songs. The stately trees of 'Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum', the summer breezes of 'Floater (Too Much To Ask)' and the dusky light and trailing moss of 'Moonlight', create a rich evocation of a rustic and stately world. While the lyrics play a significant role in creating the character and atmosphere of the album, the music is perhaps the most important element in making the setting live and breathe. So many commentators fail to acknowledge Dylan's achievement as a musician, often playing it down in favour of focusing on the lyrical content of the

songs (which is, admittedly, a great deal easier to pin down and analyse than the slippery subject of music). *'Love And Theft'* would fail to convince if it weren't for the abilities of Dylan and his band as performers. Dylan's singing of rising tides and lost love would achieve very little if the music were unable to add not only authenticity, but also a sense of life and grace. The most striking aspect of the album is the variety of music on display. It is an amazingly ambitious undertaking to attempt the range of music Dylan handles with such aplomb on the album. To shift from genre to genre, placing such opposing styles as Western Swing ('Floater (Too Much To Ask)') and muscular Chicago blues ('Lonesome Day Blues') side by side is in many respects an exceptional display of arrogance. Genre experimentation by musicians can so often be facile and empty, achieving nothing more than the dressing up of a song in an entirely inappropriate guise. Dylan's great ability is to shift from style to style with a true understanding of the musical style he and his band may adopt. There is nothing gimmicky about his wish to tackle such an un-Dylanesque genre as 1940s Hollywood balladry on 'Moonlight' (even if it is delivered with a certain twinkle in the eye). *'Love And Theft'* wouldn't work if the shifts in style were entirely superficial, because it would be both an insult to the audience and the music. It is Dylan's belief in his own abilities, as well as the musicians around him that make the album work.

The variety on display in *'Love And Theft'* also ties it in with the notion of the

old travelling show, in which the minstrels were an important element. Bill C. Malone writes, *'Long before talking machines and radios infiltrated the nation's backcountry, pop music was already accompanying the travelling shows that journeyed all over rural America in the nineteenth century. The pattern was in fact set by the end of the eighteenth century when puppet shows, circuses, animal acts, medicine shows, equestrian shows, and, of course, formal dramatic and musical concert troupes travelled from town to town along the Atlantic Seaboard.'*¹⁰ The stars of such entertainment even make a brief appearance during *'Love And Theft'*: *'The Siamese twins are comin' to town/People can't wait - they're gathered around'* ('Honest With Me'). Dylan could be singing of the original Siamese twins, Chang and Eng, who, writes Sean Wilentz, *'though born in Siam, started touring the United States in proto-carny style in 1829, coming to town right beside the minstrels.'*¹¹ The sense of mankind's fascination with the bizarre and freakish is perfectly captured against the decadent rock and roll rattle of Dylan and his band. The album's eagerness to interact with the audience is also an element that links it closely to such entertainment, most obviously minstrelsy. Dale Cockrell writes, *'Minstrelsy was obviously startling in its immediacy. Reports of audience behaviour confirm that the house felt fully in its rights to respond spontaneously, forcefully, and vocally to events on the stage. More than perhaps any other form of American theatre in the period, minstrelsy involved the audience.'*¹² *'Love And Theft'*, in much the same spirit, is eager to engage

with its audience on every possible level. ‘I’m gonna spare the defeated, boys, I’m going to speak to the crowd,’ sings Dylan during ‘Lonesome Day Blues’. The word ‘boys’ is delivered with a certain relish, which indicates the masculine bravado that runs throughout the album. While such displays could be off-putting in the wrong hands, here it seems entirely appropriate, serving only to heighten the sense of intimacy between the singer and the listener. The one-amongst-the-boys attitude is much in evidence in the album’s humour, from the leg-pulling references to impotence - ‘I got my hammer ringin’, pretty baby, but the nails ain’t going down’ ('Summer Days') - to the flirtatious leer of lines such as, ‘Jump into the wagon, love, throw your panties overboard’ ('High Water (For Charley Patton)'). One of the most unexpected moments comes again during ‘Summer Days’:

Everybody get ready – lift up your glasses and sing
 Everybody get ready to lift up your glasses and sing
 Well, I’m standin’ on the table. I’m proposing a toast to the King.

The idea of an intoxicated Bob Dylan, all wiry hair and riverboat gambler attire, teetering atop a table to raise a glass to Elvis Presley is so incongruous, yet so appealing, that it can’t fail to raise a smile. The album promises a party so celebratory, yet so debauched, it will be talked about for years to come. The album’s generosity of spirit makes ‘Love And Theft’ one of Bob Dylan’s most extrovert recordings. It is an album that swaggers and struts, dripping with all the bravado of a

country dandy. ‘How can you say you love someone else when you know it is me all the time?’ Dylan declares in ‘Summer Days’. While blazingly arrogant, it is handled with all the rascally charm that makes the lyrics sparkle with humour. ‘Summer Days’ contains some of the most creative and lively phrasing Dylan has delivered in many years, with lines and words being twisted to fit with the melody.

Amazingly, ‘Love And Theft’ is one of Dylan’s most cohesive albums, partly due to the web of lyrics which tie the record together, but also because the variety of music employed, which is the most important element in Dylan’s creation of his own Old South myth. George O. Carney writes: ‘Cultural historians, folklorists, and sociologists have long recognised that most, if not all, American music originated in the South... Music is one of the greatest cultural resources and one of the most valuable exports of the American South. The region has contributed styles, performers, institutions, instruments, and songs that have significantly shaped the entire realm of American’s folk and popular music.’¹⁸ The diversity of music to have emerged from this part of America includes rock and roll, country, blues, jazz, Cajun and Tex-Mex, and it is Dylan’s attempt to capture so much of this rich tapestry of music that gives the album its uniquely Southern flavour. It is tracks such as ‘Floater (Too Much To Ask)’, ‘High Water (For Charley Patton)’ and ‘Po’ Boy’ that best characterise this authentic rural feel. ‘Floater (Too Much To Ask)’ is particularly interesting in its use of the uniquely Southern musical

form, Western Swing. It was a style that first emerged during the 1930s, fusing elements of country, blues, pop and jazz. With the prominent fiddle part and its slow, ambling jazz undercurrent, ‘Floater’ is pure Western Swing. The key figure in the development to the music was Bob Wills, whose musical background appears particularly relevant to ‘Love And Theft’. Bill C. Malone writes: *‘Wills was a child of popular culture. His music came neither from cowboys nor from blacks with whom he had worked with in the cotton fields of West Texas; his eclectic mixture of sounds came from phonograph recordings, radio broadcasts, and the large spectrum of commercial American music.’*¹⁴ While a great deal of Dylan’s understanding of American popular music is undoubtedly first-hand, like Wills, he is, as Malone says, a ‘child of popular culture’. ‘Love And Theft’ is a direct product of this; not cut from historic fact, but American legend. This is an America built upon black and white photographs of Marlon Brando, Elvis Presley records and James Dean films. While it is an album that draws upon archaic records for its inspiration, it also uses the mythology built around such recordings. It is as much about a faded, yellow photograph of Dock Boggs, as it is about Dock Boggs himself.

Dylan’s has throughout his career been an artist who has used the culture that surrounds him to fashion his own art, yet it is with ‘Love And Theft’ that his allusions to the work of others have become such a major part of the creative process. Both the music and the lyrics sample with great delight from so many different areas.

Virtually a whole verse of ‘Sugar Baby’ is lifted word for word - along with a large section of the song’s melody - from the old Shikret and Austin standard ‘Lonesome Road’, a song recorded by Frank Sinatra, among countless others. ‘Mississippi’ borrows its key line, ‘Only one thing I did wrong/Stayed in Mississippi a day too long’, from the old folk song ‘O Rosalie’. ‘The Cuckoo Is A Pretty Bird’, ‘I Believe I’ll Dust My Broom’, ‘Sugar Baby’ and ‘The Darktown Strutter’s Ball’ are just a handful of the folk songs that are name checked over the course of the album. A use of literary allusions is also prominent, with such characters as Bertha Mason, the mad woman in the attic from *Jane Eyre*, appearing during ‘High Water (For Charley Patton)’. Few on hearing the album would be aware that the following passage from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* would be the source for a verse of ‘Summer Days’;

*‘I wouldn’t ask too much of her,’ I ventured. ‘You can’t repeat the past.’ ‘Can’t repeat the past?’ he cried incredulously. ‘Why of course you can!’*¹⁵

which is transformed by Dylan into:

*‘She’s looking into my eyes, she’s holding my hand
She says, “You can’t repeat the past.”
I Say, “You can’t? What do you mean
you can’t? Of course you can.”’*

Likewise, the lines ‘Last night the wind was whispering, I was trying to make out what it was’ in ‘Lonesome Day Blues’ are indebted to Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, where Huck claims ‘the wind was trying to whisper something to me I couldn’t make out what it was.’¹⁶ The

eager delight with which Dylan takes in manipulating his sources, and with them creating something entirely new, is done with a childlike relish. While many wouldn't be able to spot all of Dylan's sources, nor would they necessarily wish to, many are too obvious to go unnoticed. Lines such as, '*Well, they're going to the country, they're gonna retire/They're taking a street care named Desire*', in 'Tweedle Dee And Tweedle Dum', clearly wish to recall the Tennessee Williams play. The use of popular culture was a significant part of the minstrel art, which lifted from various areas of the culture (certainly not restricting its self to just African-American culture). It appears that such use of the culture was a natural element of Southern folk traditions, as Lawrence Levine writes: '*It is not necessary for a people to originate or invent all or even most of the elements of their culture. It is necessary only that they these components become their own, embedded in their traditions, expressive of their world view and life style.*'¹⁷

It would be an empty argument to discuss such assimilation of other people's work into his own as a simple case of 'bad-artist-copy-good-artists-steal'. Dylan manages to take his sources and create something exciting and new with them, but it isn't his intention to make them entirely his own. Many of the references appear artless upon first hearing, protruding from the songs in their awkwardness. When he sings in 'Moonlight', '*For whom does the bell toll for, love?/It tolls for you and me?*', it appears forced. Surely referencing the work of Ernest Hemingway could be done with more skill? The fact that Hemingway

himself took these words from the work of John Donne indicates that these words are now simply part of our cultural lexicon. If Dylan intended for his listeners not to make these associations then surely he would have chosen more obscure source material. Dylan wants his audience to make these connections, to show us what these things mean to both the singer and the audience. Many of the more obvious references become less noticeable over time, eventually settling into the context of the album. Certainly Dylan's use of adages such as 'It takes a thief to catch a thief' and 'There ain't no limit to the amount of trouble women bring' would indicate a desire to use familiar elements of the language. Many of the influences that appear in the album, bar a handful of exceptions such as Shakespeare and Hemingway, are what might be considered as 'classic' American culture. Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, Mark Twain, Dogg Boggs, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Robert Johnson, among many others are all present over the course of the album's twelve tracks. Such performers and writers are what America is to Dylan.

Perhaps the single most significant example of the album's cultural pilfering is the use of Charley Patton's 'High Water Everywhere' as the basis for 'High Water (For Charley Patton)'. The use of Patton's work in '*Love And Theft*' also returns us to the importance of blackface minstrelsy within the album. What always lay at the heart of the minstrel tradition - the imitation of black musicians by whites - is on full display here when Dylan uses Charley Patton's 1927 recording 'High Water

'Everywhere' as the basis for his own song. 'High Water (For Charley Patton)' is the song that perhaps most closely resembles traditional minstrel music. The first minstrel band, the Virginia Minstrels, built their sound around four instruments, banjo, fiddle, tambourine and bones. While the configuration would change over the coming years, becoming increasingly sophisticated, the banjo would remain central to the minstrel band's sound. It was an instrument of African origin, and, as Cecelia Conway writes, was '*the most complex, tangible, specifically African-American element in minstrelsy.*'¹⁸ Just as in the minstrel band, the banjo is at the heart of Dylan's 'High Water (For Charley Patton)', driving the song with its dry, distinctive sound. Behind this is the rich harmony vocals, supplying a deep, bass sound that recalls old black gospel vocal groups. The ultimate effect is to create a convincing recreation of the music played by string bands, who followed in the footsteps of the minstrels. Drawing upon such music was a significant part of minstrel art, as indicated in an 1845 review of a minstrel performance, in which the writer attempted to give credit where credit was due: '[Do the Negro poets] not set the fashion, and give laws to the public taste? Let one of them, in the swamps of Carolina, compose a new song, and it no sooner reaches the ear of a white amateur, than it is written down, amended (that is, almost spoilt), printed, and then put upon a course of rapid dissemination... Meanwhile, the poor author digs with his hoe, utterly ignorant of his greatness.'¹⁹ This is, in the most

basic terms, exactly what Dylan has done. He uses the music of Charley Patton, one of the most respected, mysterious and revered figures in American blues music, as the central inspiration for his own composition.

Patton's recorded legacy covers a mere five-year period, from 1929 to his death in 1934. The few photographs of Charley Patton reveal a neat figure, with delicate features and an expensive taste in suits. Yet, the accounts of his behaviour are entirely at odds with these evocative black and white photos. Alax Van Der Tuuk writes: '*He was light-skinned and had good hair but could be cocky and aggressive. He liked to drink, snort coke and chase women, advertising himself as a Delta dandy by always dressing as well as he could afford to.*'²⁰ Reports of his performances tell of a wild man, who played his guitar with his teeth and cut across the stylistic divides, playing material from show tunes to ragtime and anything else he could master. 'High Water Everywhere', a blues song in two parts, is considered to be Patton's masterpiece. The song tells of the 1927 flooding of the Mississippi River, a common occurrence before levee controls halted this yearly occurrence. David Evans writes: '*This flood, which took place in April and May of 1927, was the worst on that river in modern history... In all, sixteen and a half million acres of the land were flooded in seven states, over 162,000 homes flooded and 41,000 buildings destroyed, over 600,000 people made homeless and without food, and between 250 and 500 people killed*'²¹ 'High Water Everywhere' remains one of the most mysterious of all blues

recording. The recording quality is shockingly basic, even by 1929 standards, and it is only in recent years that CD reissues have rendered them even close to listenable. The abrasive surface noise of the ancient record combats, and in many respect has come to augment, some of the most otherworldly performances ever committed to tape. The deep, almost inhuman voice renders the lyrics virtually indiscernible, yet it is the fear and bewilderment conveyed in that voice, not the words themselves, that makes this an utterly mesmerising performance. The sense of rage and menace is thoroughly magnetic, with the basic, hypnotic guitar accompaniment. This is the performance that serves as the basis for ‘High Water (For Charley Patton)’. Yet there is very little similarity between the two songs in any obvious way. There are no shared lines, the closest been Patton’s, ‘*Ooh-ah, the water rising, islands sinking down,*’ to Dylan’s, ‘*High Water risin’, the shacks are sliding down*’. The journalistic documentation of the 1927 floods, adopted by Patton, is wholly absent from Dylan’s composition; the flood that Dylan sings of is wholly metaphorical. Patton’s song remains the inspiration for the song, with Dylan adopting the similar sense of driving fear for his own song.

It is during ‘High Water (For Charley Patton)’ that many of the album’s themes become introverted. The sense of social occasion present in so many of the songs, from the party scenes of ‘Summer Days’ to the double shuffle dancing of ‘Lonesome Day Blues’, are turned on their head at the album’s central point.

*‘Bertha Mason shook it – broke it
Then she hung it on the wall
Says, “You’re dancin’ with whom they
tell you to
Or you don’t dance at all.”
It’s tough out there’*

The joys of social interaction shift here, becoming something infinitely bleaker and isolated. The lines in ‘Mississippi’ that crave the need for human companionship, ‘So give me your hand and say you’ll be mine’, become desperate and broken in this context:

*“Don’t reach out for me,” she said
“Can’t you see I’m drownin’ too?”*

While the drowning metaphor is present in ‘Mississippi’ - ‘*Well my ships been split to splinters and it’s sinking fast/I’m drownin’ in the poison, got no future, got no past*’ - the sense of hopelessness is combated by the redemptive powers of human companionship. Such relief is never offered in ‘High Water (For Charley Patton)’.

Yet, for all its bleakness, it is far from a dark song. The bragging and bravado, along with outrageous humour, are once again central to the performance. Dylan’s humour is at its height during ‘High Water (For Charley Patton)’.

It seems that the deliberate name-checking of some key folk and blues songs is another aspect of the song’s humour. So many of Dylan’s musical sources such as blues, folk and country have now become so enshrined that they appear to be little more than the property of academics. The enjoyment of a Blind Lemon Jefferson record now seems almost secondary to its importance within folk traditions. What so

many fail to acknowledge is that this was popular music, to be enjoyed by the listeners, not to be dissected in a vacuum. While Dylan may cherish and respect the foundation upon which he creates his work, he never treats them with gloved hands. If such things were sacred to him '*Love And Theft*' would be nothing more than an antiseptic contemporary folk/blues album. The creativity with which Dylan attacks his sources renders them so alive to the moment that a listener can approach them with the same sense of joy they originally would have brought. 'I Believe I'll Dust My Broom', a Robert Johnson song, is one of the songs weaved into '*High Water (For Charley Patton)*'. The other is 'The Coo Coo Bird' which appeared on the *Smithsonian Anthology Of American Folk Music*, a set of six discs that brought together ancient country and blues recordings from the Twenties and Thirties. It was initially issued in 1951, and become the talisman for the folk boom of the early Sixties, from which Dylan originally emerged. It isn't only the greatness of the artists that appear on the set, which includes the likes of Mississippi John Hurt and The Carter Family, but it was the ability of the compiler, Harry Smith, to bring these artists together in a way that seemed so cohesive. While the brilliance of the set can't be exaggerated, its significance has been overly stressed since its reissue on CD in the mid-Nineties. Greil Marcus, in his much-lauded book *Invisible Republic*, discussed the set in association with Bob Dylan in a manner that would indicate that the singer's understanding of folk music goes no further than this set of records. As

Dylan slides these titles into his current compositions it not only reflects his deep understanding and love of such music, but also gives a sly wink to such critics. While Dylan would be the first to claim that he would never sink so low as to write for critics, lines such as '*The Cockoo is a pretty bird, she warbles and she flies/I'm preachin' the Word of God/I'm puttin' out your eyes*' appear to play up to such restrictive readings of his work, and mock their limitations.

The significance of 'High Water (For Charley Patton)' on '*Love And Theft*' can't be underestimated. Not only is it quite possibly the best song on the album, it serves as the album's centre of gravity, around which all the other tracks revolve.

The minstrel art is present in a number of other aspects of '*Love And Theft*', perhaps most obviously in the albums lampooning of Shakespeare. It was a common feature of the minstrel show to perform Shakespeare, but to transform the plays into something bawdy and farcical. William J. Mahar writes: '*Sketches were burlesques of popular English plays, of great English plays, of great Shakespearean masterpieces, or parodies of the popular Italian operas of the period.*'²² One such performance, *The Hop of Fashion* by Charles T. White is a perfect example of such twisting of tradition. It takes great liberties, bringing together characters as diverse as Richard III, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth and the usual array of civilians such as the Irishman, Pops, Captain Slim and Mose (one of the B'hoys). Richard the Third's formally grand speech is reduced to:

Richard: Now is de winter ob our discontent made glorious summer by de sun ob York, and all de clouds dat lowered upon our house am in de deep bosom ob de ocean...

Anthony: Well, say; I'll trouble you for a ticket.

Richard: Go hence, I'm busy now. A horse! (a basket horse, with a boy under it, crosses before him) A horse! My kingdom for a horse! (exit)²³

A similar attitude towards Shakespeare is adopted on two occasions during 'Love And Theft'. Romeo and Juliet once great love story is reduced to a farce during 'Floater (Too Much To Ask)':

'Romeo, he said to Juliet, "You got a poor complexion.

It doesn't give your appearance a very youthful touch!"'

Juliet said back to Romeo, "Why don't you just shove off

If it bothers you so much."

Likewise, Othello and Desdemona are handled during 'Po' Boy' in much the same way:

'Othello told Desdemona, "I'm cold, cover me with a blanket.

By the way, what happened to that poison wine?"'

She says, "I gave it to you, you drank it."

The same song borrows its opening verse directly from an 1866 minstrel performance of *Othello*, written by George Griffin. 'If for my wife - your daughter - you are looking,' Othello says to Brabantio, 'you'll find her in the kitchen busy cooking.'²⁴ Dylan takes these lines, and with very little variation, transports them into 'Po' Boy':

'Man comes to the door - I say, "For whom are you looking?"'

He says, "Your wife", I say, "She's busy in the kitchen cookin'."

Productions of *Othello* were highly popular amongst blackface minstrel's audience, unsurprisingly because of the play's racial themes. The manner in which George Griffin used music in his 1866 production of *Othello* indicates the liberties that were taken with Shakespearean texts to make them appeal to the minstrel audience. William J. Mahar: 'Having transformed the dramatic elements into comic situations, Griffin replaced Shakespeare's text with the rhyming couplets typical of popular verse and introduced every scene or action with melodies borrowed from contemporary American and Irish song.'²⁵ The use of song melodies such as 'The Low Back'd Car', 'Blighted Flowers' and 'Dixie' in a production of such a play reflect the minstrel's desire to make these elements of popular culture very much their own. William J. Mahar: 'The blackface and whiteface burlesques of Shakespeare's major plays could travel among different classes and types of theatres because his work was part of a shared American culture rather than the inaccessible and horded property of the "culturally illiterate."... Rather than transforming the principle characters of Othello, Hamlet, or Macbeth into plantation workers or urban characters living in social margins, the Ethiopian sketchwriters reduced royalty to common folk and translated the grand tragedies of life into short sketches about courtship, mixed-race marriages, or conventional domestic life.'²⁶ Minstrel shows were

mass entertainment, and were ‘America’s first new form of non-elite culture.’²⁷ Certainly this attitude to popular culture appears particularly relevant when associated with ‘Love And Theft’s own cut-and-paste attitude.

Minstrelsy was entertainment for the masses, and unsurprisingly, figures of authority often served as the target for many of the jokes. Such characters were invariably riddled with greed and distrust, very much opposed to the traditional values of the Old South. Much of the humour in the minstrel performance was invariably aimed at such figures, and it is a humour and an attitude present on ‘Love And Theft’. There are many examples scattered across the album, such as:

*‘Politician got on his jogging shoes
He must by running for office, got no
time to lose*

*He’s been suckin’ the blood out of the
genius of generosity’* (‘Summer Days’)

Such punning was always a prominent element of minstrelsy, and while it may appear hopelessly flat when written on the page, when heard within the correct context, sounds both outrageous and funny. There is also the metre-twisting introduction to ‘Cry A While’, that is a testament to Dylan’s abilities as a vocalist that he sings it with the ease that he does:

*‘Well, I had to go down and see a guy
named Mr. Goldsmith*

*A nasty, dirty, double-crossin’, back-
’stabbin’ phony I didn’t wanna have to
be dealin’ with’*

It is perhaps the opening track ‘Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum’ that best epitomises this distrust of authoritative figures.

Dylan lifts the characters Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum straight from the pages of Lewis Carroll’s *Through The Looking Glass*, and uses them like so many of the cultural references throughout the album; as common currency which is universally familiar. Dylan’s use of nursery rhyme and fairy tale is an often over looked element of his writing. Michael Gray is one of the few critics who has acknowledged this significant element of Dylan’s art: *‘Dylan has alluded to nursery rhymes and children’s songs, and used nursery rhyme formulae, all through his career.’*²⁸ Where his use of nursery rhyme has been explicit, in songs such as ‘Under The Red Sky’ and ‘Handy Dandy’, it has often been dismissed, many assuming there is no place for such writing within adult songs. Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum are re-created here as the ultimate greedy urbanites, who now at retirement age are planning to spend their remaining years in the country. Certain listeners and critics often find themselves attempting to ‘solve’ the imagery that Dylan works with, assuming that there is a code to be cracked. The answers to the question, ‘Who are Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum?’ have varied from George Bush and Al Gore to drug addicts and terrorists. It is a chronic indicator of how limited people’s understanding is of what Dylan has attempted to achieve when they have to reduce such imaginative word play into such basic terms. It would indeed be a great shame to simplify the creativity and humour on display in this opening track into such a trivial guessing game. Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum are nothing more than

what they appear, and if the image has to be explained it has failed to work.

The song takes on a dark hue set against the bob and weave of the rockabilly music, especially with the childish glee Dylan takes in singing some of the more menacing lyrics:

*'Brains in the pot, they're beginning to boil
They're dripping with garlic and olive oil'*

This is part-nonsense like so many nursery rhymes and folk songs, but the delight is in the imaginative way in which the words are used. To hear Dylan roll the word 'oil' in his mouth, wringing all the life out of the boil/oil rhyme, indicates a playfulness and pleasure in the ghoulish imagery. If these lines were nothing more than gibberish the song wouldn't stand up to repeated listening, which it most certainly does. The stringing together of meaningless words, as so many of Dylan's infinitely less talented imitators have done, would achieve very little. 'Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum' brings its images together to construct a portrait of urban decay and greed that works so well because of its ability to laugh at the songs protagonists. Their skinflint nature is on full display:

*'Looking in the window at the pecan pie
Lot of things they'd like but would never buy'*

The hollow value that is placed upon material objects is questioned and contrasted with more spiritual and noble needs:

*'Well a childish dream is a deathless need
And a noble truth is a sacred creed'*

*My pretty baby, she's lookin' around
She's wearin' a multi-thousand dollar gown'*

Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum are painted as faintly ridiculous figures that remain intimidating due to their ignorance and unpredictability. While they may be like '*babies sittin' on a woman's knee*', their senseless violence is never far away:

*'Tweedle Dee is a lowdown, sorry old man
Tweedle Dum, he'll stab you where you stand
I've had too much of your company,'
Says, Tweedle Dum to Tweedle Dee'*

A general air of menace pervades the entire album, with the possibility of violence present on many of the tracks. The use of arrogance and threat are characteristics not unlike the Minstrel show. Dale Cockrell recalls the minstrel shows as '*joyous, entertaining and uplifting, yet also threatening and frightening. It promises sex and ecstasy and it is an incentive to violence. It is dirt and it is light. It is a reward and it is a weapon.*'²⁹ It is 'Moonlight' that typifies this threatening presence, which gives '*Love And Theft*' its dark undercurrent. The ambling easy-listening aspect of much of the music on the album, certainly on songs such as 'Moonlight', 'Floater (Too Much To Ask)' and 'Bye And Bye', is contrasted with the violence portrayed in the lyrics. It appears to be an attempt to not only play to the gothic aspect of the Old South, but also to undermine the saccharine elements of the musical accompaniment. Song titles such as 'Moonlight' and 'Bye And Bye' have lent themselves

many times to popular songs. Yet, Dylan here plays with these conventions, toying with the expectations of Tin Pan Alley-style compositions. Like much of the songwriting on ‘Love And Theft’, things start innocently enough on ‘Moonlight’:

*The seasons they are turnin' and my
sad heart is yearnin'
To hear again the songbird's sweet
melodious tone
Won't you meet me in the moonlight
alone?*

Such lyricism is so familiar and tired. Yet, there is an understanding of the form at the centre of the writing which prevents it from descending into cliché. The thick, heavy tones of the organ, along with the songs dragging pace, give the song’s setting a heavy, claustrophobic air. The naturalistic imagery that appears so often over the album is present once again here, but it soon splinters and darkens:

*The dusky light, the day is losing
Orchids, poppies, black-eyed Susan
The earth and sky that melts with flesh
and bone
Won't you meet me in the moonlight
alone?*

As in ‘Floater (Too Much To Ask)’, the rural promise initially offered is turned into something violent and foreboding. In ‘Floater’ it is the recurring image of burning trees, in ‘Moonlight’ it is nature as metaphor for the violated human form. Not only are there the double-connections of ‘black-eyed Susan’, it is present in lines such as ‘The earth and sky that melts with flesh and bone’ and the song’s final verse:

*My pulse is runnin' through my palm
The sharp hills are rising from
The yellow fields with twisted oaks that
groan
Won't you meet me out in the moon-
light alone?*

The groaning oaks tie to the notion of the tree as symbol of the human body. Ambiguous lyrics such as ‘The leaves fall from the limbs’ don’t perhaps support such a theory on their own, but within the context of the song it suggests aged, and possibly disfigured, body parts. The possibility that the would-be romantic narrator is something altogether more menacing is apparent when Dylan sings, ‘I know when the time is right to strike’, and the leering ‘I know the kind of things you like’.

The minacious aspects of these songs contrast with the warm and compassionate elements of the album. Indeed, ‘Love And Theft’ is made up of opposites: the urban and the rural, the aged and the youthful. As already seen across the album there are certain lyrics with an exact counterpart. Yet, ultimately what does it all add up to? For all the clever use of the minstrel art and allusions to various aspects of American culture, is ‘Love And Theft’ a brilliant recreation of a world that never existed in the first place and nothing more? Robert C. Toll states that the minstrels ‘took refuge in sentimental nostalgia’. The past, and learning how to live with it, is perhaps the central theme to all twelve songs on ‘Love And Theft’, as made clear on many occasions; ‘So many things that we never will undo’ (‘Mississippi’), ‘These memories I got, they can strangle a man’ (‘Honest With Me’)

and ‘*Some of these memories you can learn to live with and some of them you can’t*’ (‘Sugar Baby’) are just three such examples. Certainly the many recurring references to the family, particularly the mother, father, uncle and aunt figures, would indicate an album that hankers for simpler, safer times. Does ‘*Love And Theft*’, like the minstrels, take refuge in sentimental nostalgia? I believe that this isn’t the case, and that it is a work too alert and intelligent to waste itself upon the cheap sentimentality that epitomises so much popular culture. Dylan makes it clear during the album that the past offers no shelter from the present. Lines such as ‘*The future for me is already a thing of the past*’ (‘Bye And Bye’) are possibly jokey references to Dylan’s plundering of the past for his creative sources, rather than a genuine attitude towards life. For all the glorification of the past it is perhaps the lines ‘*You can always come back, but you can’t come back all the way*’ (‘Mississippi’) and ‘*You can’t turn back - you can’t come back, sometimes we push too far*’ (‘Sugar Baby’) that are perhaps at the very core of the album. It is the final song of the album ‘*Sugar Baby*’ that underlines the hopelessness of wallowing in a half-remembered past. With the caustic lyrics, the reverberating guitar and accordion arrangement, it is a song that possesses a dirge like quality that for those who are unable to enjoy Dylan’s work will find particularly difficult to appreciate. It is the only track on the album that doesn’t resemble a recognisable musical genre. While ‘*Lonesome Day Blues*’ may sound like Howlin’ Wolf, and ‘*Po’ Boy*’ may contain echoes of Leon

Redbone, what does ‘*Sugar Baby*’ recall? The deathly-still arrangement instils the song with the clarity of vision that enables it to ponder the significance of another broken relationship without ever becoming unnecessarily grave. The final lines of the album offer the need to move forever onwards:

‘*Sugar Baby get on down the line
You ain’t got no sense, no how
You went years without me
Might as well keep going now*’

It is the album’s turbulent sense of motion that signify the constant restlessness that is present in so many of the songs. Again this is a theme the album shares with the minstrel tradition, as Saxton writes: ‘*In minstrelsy’s complex matrix of social content, the journey became the central theme.*³⁰’ The need to travel on is ever present. ‘*I’m watching the roads, I’m studying the dust,*’ he sings during ‘*Bye And Bye*’, reflecting the desire to look at the traces that have been left behind, but acknowledge also the ever-shifting nature of the narrator’s own memories (which remain as fixed as the dust). While ‘*Love And Theft*’ is a fascinating tapestry of so many different elements of popular culture, like any great piece of music it remains constantly fluid, offering different paths across its landscape with every encounter. Despite the offer to spot many of the cultural references that are an important element of the album, it doesn’t render the work static. For all the engagement with the past, it isn’t a work that dwells upon it. ‘*Love And Theft*’ remains constantly open to the present moment and, in many respects, that is its greatest achievement.

1. 'Positively 4th Street' (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), p. 121.
2. 'On With The Show' (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 81.
3. 'Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers' (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1993), p. 51.
4. 'Like A Rolling Stone', interview by Mikal Gilmore, published in 'Rolling Stones' Magazine Issue 822 (22/11/01).
5. 'Blackface Minstrelsy', published in 'Inside The Minstrel Mask', ed. by Bean, Hatch and McNamara (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996) p. 75.
6. 'Blackface Minstrelsy', published in 'Inside The Minstrel Mask', ed. by Bean, Hatch and McNamara, p. 75.
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8. 'Blues People' (New York: William Marrow and Company, 1963), p. 105.
9. 'Blues People', p. 106.
10. 'Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers', p. 46.
11. 'American Recordings: On "Love and Theft" and the Minstrel Boy', www.bobdylan.com/etc/
12. 'Demons Of Disorder' (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 58.
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15. 'The Great Gatsby' (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 117. Research in Matthew Zuckerman's 'Summer Days Are Here Again' articles, published in 'Isis Magazine', ed. by Derek Barker (Coventry: Centre Point, 2001).
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20. 'The Definitive Charley Patton - Liner-notes', published in 'The Definitive Charley Patton' (Catfish Records, 2001), p. 3.
21. 'Charley Patton: the Conscious of the Delta', published in 'The Voice of the Delta' (Liege: University of Liege, 1987), p. 192.
22. 'Ethiopian Skits and Sketches', published in 'Inside The Minstrel Mask', ed. by Bean, Hatch and McNamara (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996) p. 183.
23. 'The Hop Of Fashion', published in 'Inside The Minstrel Mask', ed. by Bean, Hatch and McNamara (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996) p. 132.
24. 'Ethiopian Skits and Sketches', published in 'Inside The Minstrel Mask', ed. by Bean, Hatch and McNamara, p. 193. Author's research.
25. 'Ethiopian Skits and Sketches', published in 'Inside The Minstrel Mask', ed. by Bean, Hatch and McNamara, p. 191.
26. 'Ethiopian Skits and Sketches', published in 'Inside The Minstrel Mask', ed. by Bean, Hatch and McNamara, p. 187.
27. 'African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions' (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), p. 85.
28. 'Song & Dance Man III' (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 641.
29. 'Demons Of Disorder', p. 11.
30. 'Blackface Minstrelsy', published in 'Inside The Minstrel Mask', ed. by Bean, Hatch and McNamara, p. 75.



Hi Andrew,

Thank you for your lengthy and considered reply to my letter. On the whole I think the points you make are valid, or at least acceptably present the other side of the argument in the interests of stirring up debate. Inevitably though, a few points.

As far as rating Dylan's post-TOOM work is concerned, people respect informed, considered, reasonable and argued opinion. What is harder to accept is when someone with a respected platform to express opinion on Dylan fails to offer the argument, but presents the opinion anyway. If, for example, a high-profile biography is published, running to 800 pages plus, purporting to offer some kind of definitive account of Dylan's career, it rankles somewhat to see more than half of it devoted to the first decade only of Dylan's career. Whatever a fan's opinion of the artistic merit of a period in Dylan's career, there is certainly no less to say about the latter period of Dylan's career; it all has the same integrity and human complexity. What Dylan is doing at present is indeed hard to quantify right now because, as you say, there is no perspective to help us. However, in working into old age and at such a level, Dylan is breaking new ground in popular music, and as such demands our thoughts and considerations the same as he always has.

Gushing praise is of no more use than mindless criticism, of course. But whilst there has been raucous dismissal of 'The Never-Ending Tour' as a concept and an artistic reality from certain quarters, (*'he is treading water artistically'*, as Clinton Heylin said to me, and he is not alone in thinking this), the articulate and coherent argument has yet to be heard. It is telling that, as you note, on Bill Pagel's site after every show there are people claiming to have experienced moments of transcendence. And why is this? Are all these reviewers living on nostalgia? It is not enough simply to say Dylan isn't as good a performer as he once was. Whether or not the reviewers are in control of their critical faculties, what is interesting is that Dylan is able to make people feel this way. Not just when he sings his old songs, but with his brand new material also. This suggests he is doing his job rather well. If as much attention was paid to the last five years as was paid to the Sixties, we just might be a little closer to appreciating how and why Dylan is currently having this effect on people.

I'm sure you're right that Glen Dundas's concert-going experience is typical of the general experience of many fans. But I'm not sure this makes it also of specific interest. Don't you feel it might alienate anyone not acquainted with Glen or his friends? I guess with so little copy space I like to read as much about Bob as possible, but there should certainly be space for the odd light-hearted interlude. It's my personal response, though, that Bob should be the focal point of discussion in a journal of this sort, especially one that aspires to move away from the 'fanzine'-mentality, as stated in the opening editorial.

As far as the name goes, I respect the fact that you undertook research, and I also see the irony. However, my point was that, however 'ironic' the undertones, the bottom line is that at a glance there is a picture of Bob with the word 'Judas' printed on it. This leaves no room for ambiguity. And I don't feel the message it offers is even fair, let alone complimentary, to Bob Dylan. And perhaps a magazine dedicated to the appreciation of his art should have a title that is fair to the artist. I feel this is more important than a title that serves as a knowing wink from one fan to another.

One point that sprang to mind, glancing through issue 2, was Clinton Heylin's letter. This inevitably, was irritating to me, since he seems to judge the quality of Dylan's work at any given time purely on Dylan's officially released, studio-recorded, newly-written output. To put it mildly, this seems to me to miss the point: Heylin is imposing his own criteria on Dylan, criteria that the man himself has never subscribed to. The briefest glimpse at the balance of Dylan's output shows Dylan does the real work in the live arena, an arena that Clinton seems incapable of evaluating. Therefore, I was delighted to see you reiterate the excellent point, in your review of the NET Covers Set, that Dylan needn't have written a single one of his extraordinary words for him still to have been the most significant artist in your life.

Clearly this concept is alien to Clinton Heylin. Otherwise he surely would have listed 'Po' Boy' as one of the GREAT Dylan tracks, for the warmth, tenderness, humour and aching compassion in Dylan's vocal. It seems to highlight a fundamentally different approach to Dylan's art between his various critics... '*Some people they ain't human, they ain't got no heart or soul.*'

Anyway, sorry to go on again at such length! As I say, if the purpose of your reply is to stir up debate then I think it is effective (see above) and I thought I'd offer you my instinctive response, and expand a few of the points I made initially.

Toby Richards Carpenter

Thanks again, Toby, we are grateful not sorry that you 'went on again at such length'. I will not continue to answer all your points. Just to say that, for now at least we'll just have to agree to disagree on the title, but rest assured your points have been carefully considered and you'll see some other views in the following letters. You raise a new point re Clinton's letter

in issue 2, hopefully he will answer it himself. There must be more to it than you raise here because I have met few, if any, people more into the live performance of popular music than him.

As for suggesting that the purpose of my reply was to ‘stir up debate’ just because it went on for far longer than your letter and threw up points tangential to it - that is a disgraceful accusation. It’s tantamount to... well, to the truth actually!

Dear Judas!

I do have one comment on Clinton Heylin’s letter. It makes a pretty great case for the 80s being a decade of great work for Dylan. But I think he’s looking back on the 80s as perceived from the viewpoint of the 90s: a lot of the songs he mentions weren’t released (officially anyway) in the 80s (and some still aren’t). As I perceived Bob’s 80s while they were occurring, it was a dismal time. I was awestruck at several of the 1980 shows at the Warfield, really liked *Shot of Love* and *Infidels* (though I didn’t know of its unreleased treasures until the end of the decade). *Empire Burlesque* was OK, but didn’t stay on my turntable long. I got of a copy of *Ten of Swords* in the mid-80s, which further discolored the contemporary output. I saw two Petty shows in 1986 (Berkeley and Mountain View). Then there was the Grateful Dead Tour, *Knocked Out Loaded*, *Down In the Groove* and *Hearts of Fire*. As someone who had spent the 70s pretty obsessed with the boy, it was hard to find much during the 80s to pay attention to. Until the Never-ending Tour and *Oh Mercy*, at which I got drawn back in again. The masterpieces Clinton mentions are, indeed masterpieces and some great songs. But the albums as a whole are not. I submit that though they don’t contain as many masterpieces, *World Gone Wrong* and ‘*Love And Theft*’ (and maybe *Time Out Of Mind*, ask me again tomorrow), are better albums than any actual album released in the 80s. I know I listen to them a lot more now, and listened to them a lot more when they were released, than I did any of the albums released in the 80s (oh, all right, I did listen to some of *Infidels* quite a bit). Anyway, thanks again, and keep up the good work. Looks like the old boy will be back around here in October again. Can’t wait. Cheers.

Steve Michel

I hope you enjoy your show, Steve, thanks for writing. Clinton’s list provided a good new perspective on Dylan’s most recent album(s) but it was only one, dramatic though its effect was for me and others that have spoken to me. If one has to compare decades, you are now shining the torch of perspective from another angle - that of the released albums. It has to be acknowledged that the Infidels and Oh Mercy sessions were considerably more impressive than the released albums, though I’d argue that the latter still is a coherent and powerful achievement in its released incarnation. Comparisons are remarkably difficult things; for example, I think ‘Love And Theft’ as an album is a greater achievement than Shot of Love as same but, if pushed into some kind of weighing up of artistic worth, would probably place

'Every Grain Of Sand' as 'worth more' (this is why comparisons are odious!) than any other song to such a degree that it'd pull the rest of Shot of Love up with it. To judge Knocked Out Loaded as an album would seem easy at first, just dismiss it as woeful, and yet it includes 'Brownsville Girl'.

However, such caveats aside, your point re albums as a whole is well made. I am extremely fond of World Gone Wrong and 'Love And Theft' still totally captivates. Approaching a year after I first heard it, 'Love And Theft' is still the record I play most each and every week, unofficial ones included. This has never happened before in my life, though it undoubtedly would have happened with Blood on the Tracks had I not then been discovering Dylan's entire back catalogue, both official and bootleg. (Something still going on when Desire was released). Were I even older than I already am, I would have had such a rapidity of releases to contend with in 1962 to 1966 that I guess I would have had no chance then, either, to have one album dominate my listening for so long until Blonde on Blonde. 'Love And Theft' is still the first tape, CD, disk whatever, I pack for any journey, long or short, too.

Hello there

Some comments, then, on Judas! 1 and 2:

By and large I liked them very much. Very handsomely produced; great photos in #2. I think the double-column format is an excellent idea. I found the articles variable in quality. Some were excellent, and really gave me new information and perspectives. Others seemed to me to re-hash things I had read before. But I won't name names.

I'd also like to comment, if I may, on 'To Ramona'. I know your readers may be sick of this topic by now, but I was fascinated by John Gibbens's article in #1. Unfortunately, I haven't seen his book, *The Nightingale's Code*, so the points I'm about to make may very well have already been made there. If not, you may be interested in including them in your Letters column.

What fascinated me was that his reading of 'TO RA' offered at least one possible explanation, however esoteric, for something which had vaguely, at the back of my mind, bugged me ever since I first saw the title, way back in 1964: and that is the sheer oddness of 'To Ramona' as a song title. For one thing, it seems to take the format of a dedication (usually a sub-title, or something that appears on one of those miscellaneous pages at the front of a book before it really begins), and elevate it to the status of a full title. Why not just 'Ramona'?

Secondly, if the title does take the form of a dedication, why not 'For Ramona'? What is the difference, in a dedication, between 'to' and 'for'? (Today at lunch, I was talking to one of my academic colleagues, and she said that she had always dedicated her books 'To David'. I realised that I had always dedicated my books 'For Maureen'.) The 'To' form seems, to me at least, a bit more distanced, or formal, or even confrontational. In English poetry, you get titles like Robert Herrick's 'To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time', or Yeats's 'To a Wealthy Man who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin

Municipal Gallery If It Were Proved the People Wanted Pictures' (which has a decidedly polemical air to it!). Or 'To' can be used in epistolary contexts, where the poem takes the form of a letter. But in the sense of dedication as an offering, something intimate, surely 'for' would be preferable.

There is no other song-title in the whole of Dylan's output that takes the form 'To X'. Nor indeed, is there any 'For X'. (The closest you get is 'Advice for Geraldine on her Miscellaneous Birthday' - and even here it's 'for', not 'to'.)

So, as I say, the title 'To Ramona' had always struck me as odd, as having something slightly off-putting about it. If it turns out that the wording was (consciously or unconsciously) manipulated to produce 'TO RA', I will be surprised but in some way, after many years of slight uneasiness, satisfied.

Stephen Scobie

Many thanks Stephen, a fascinating point you raise. I would instinctively have always used 'To', without even thinking there was a choice. Until now that is. As you later pointed out to me, reading through the dedications in books on Dylan alone starts to intrigue one as to the whys and wherefores of using one or the other (or both in one case).

Dear Keith and Andrew and Alan

I was very pleased to have been sent a complimentary copy of *Judas!* 2, and then, as I'm sure you can imagine, delighted to find Alan's generous appreciation so prominently placed in it. Why, it quite made up for the deep pain of having been studiously ignored by C. Heylin, and my deep envy of M. Gray's multiple reprints and busy touring schedule! So, thanks to you all - Alan for your kind words, Andrew for nurturing the original letter into an article, and Keith for making the magazine happen.

Best wishes John Gibbens

Cheers, John. As you'll see from the above, and the editorial, the 'To Ramona' talk is still going on.

Dear Andy et al,

Just thought I'd say well done for making *Judas!* a success. I have to applaud you. Firstly, for being stupid enough to even begin to believe there's a space left in the overpopulated Dylan Market for a stall offering intelligent, well-argued, informative, scholarly-yet-approachable debate and opinion. And secondly, most importantly, for managing to turn that lunatic idea into a solid reality. Having missed the first issue, I've caved in to increasing pressure and finally subscribed. Issue 2 arrived the other day. I read it. It was great. The colour photos were gorgeous, and the word bits weren't too shabby either. On the subject of which, it wouldn't surprise me at all if you got some comments about that letter from Clinton Heylin. Containing as it does a number of mildly barbed

remarks, it's bound to wind a few people up. The ego has landed. Again. Well, good on him. The Dylan world is far too full of nodding dogs, elitist bonding rituals and cobwebbed intellectualising. It's not healthy. This is why I've always liked Clinton's style - he's a true gonzo writer. There's nothing wrong with seeking the flashlight of attention - let's face it, we're all frustrated rock stars at heart. As Clinton (and Michael Gray for that matter) quite rightly recognises, the bland and inoffensive road is the one that leads to critical death. Attack is often as valid as defence, and recognition comes when heads get scratched, assumptions get questioned and tables get hammered in frustration. It often doesn't matter if you're right or wrong, it's whether you sound like you mean it. Who wants to be Glen Matlock when you can be John Lydon? I've said it before and I'll say it again: Michael Gray and Clinton Heylin are the Ken Barlow and Nasty Nick of the Dylan world. They're both actors playing a role, and there's room enough for both of them, but I know which one I'd rather have a beer with.

Anyway, I've got to dash. Real life is calling.

Keep it up, wish you all the best yadda, yadda.

Ben Clayton

Please explain this 'real life' that you mention. Surely discussing Dylan is real life and everything else is just to be measured out in teaspoons?

Many thanks for your letter, though I did feel a bit like the judge who stopped a mid-80's trial to ask 'who is this Mr. Springsteen?' vis-à-vis 'Nasty Nick'. (He and Ken Barlow are names from UK TV for those overseas readers as bereft as me of knowledge of them and how they compare with our esteemed or otherwise Dylan authors.) Everybody else here seems to know all about them, and those that I asked seemed to appreciate Ben's point is all I can say. I hope though that you haven't started a trend of spotting Dylan writers in other form or we'll land up with some more ridiculous interpretations of 'TweedleDee and Tweedledum'.

Hello hello

I'm sure that this will be one of many messages you'll get today about *Judas! 2* - just thought I'd share a few things about it with you for what its worth - at risk of being accused of some elitist in-crowd backslapping :-)

OK - I think in general *Judas! 2* is a giant step forward from *Judas! 1* (no disrespect to the actual articles in *Judas! 1*, just talking in general terms). I said to you before that I like the cover and I still think it looks great, as do the colour photos inside the magazine. Also, in a strange way, I think the advert for *Song & Dance Man III* on the inside back cover adds a certain something.

Pretty Good Stuff by Manuel Vardavas is excellent and sufficient. It's an interesting look at the best of the latest bootlegs without ever treading on the toes of *Isis*. It made me want to track the discs down!

I haven't studied Paul William's piece in detail yet so I'll reserve judgement on that for

the time being, but *Writers & Critics* was an excellent evaluation of *Judas!* 1 - the Michael Gray interview was a great way to finish the edition (I have similar fears about the potential naughtiness of *Masked and Anonymous*, incidentally).

Oh, and *Equality In School* was brilliant also!!! No - seriously - I thought it came out well and 'looked good' on the page, even though there are lots of things I want to change now that it's printed; but that's the writers curse!

I think the real winner, though (and surely an important feature of *Judas!*'s to come) is the Letters page. A testament to Issue 1 that the response was such, and not just because of the novelty of a new magazine, I think. I thought you did well to publish letters critical of J1 and not just those offering congratulations.

However, between you and I, I thought Clinton Heylin's letter was a bit unnecessarily sharp, and interesting that in a letter attacking faux pas, he put some L&T tunes in his 90s list. I know he said that '*here the nineties runs to 911*' but he can't extend decades like that - timewise, if '*Love And Theft*' is a 90s album then *under the red sky* is an 80's album, *Shot of Love* (and *Saved*) 70's albums and *New Morning* and *Self Portrait* 60's records. Hmmmmmmmmmm.

The letter from Toby Richards-Carpenter (which, incidentally, I think you handled well) was interesting also. I have to say that the magazine's title has never been an issue for me up to now and I don't think that having Bob's pic underneath the word *Judas!* implies that Bob is such. I also think that anyone who finds this 'implication' offensive should perhaps re-evaluate themselves.

I grudgingly took his point though about '*in-crowd concert-going friendliness*' etc. He is right that people will buy such a mag to read about Dylan and not about eating dinners before shows with friends (unless, of course, the mag is strictly aimed at those friends), but I don't think J is guilty of that.

Andrew Davis

Thanks Andrew, but 'one of many messages you'll get today about Judas! 2'? - I wish! Response was healthy and encouraging but not to the extent of many letters a day so come on everybody, more letters please!

Manuel's article 'making you want to track the discs down' is the best compliment imaginable, hopefully that'll please him so much we'll see more reviews from him in issue four.

I'm particularly pleased you liked the Letters page. As I keep saying it's my favourite part too. Interestingly enough we may have to rename it 'Letters and articles in response' soon, as we are receiving the latter too, for which we are grateful. For example the final letter is in article form (but I have included it here so I can respond to it!).

I like the new issue and think it is better than issue #1. To weigh in on the title controversy, I don't mind *Judas!* but I don't think you need the word 'magazine' under it. I mean, we know it's a magazine, right? *The Telegraph* did not need 'magazine' under it, nor does *The*

Bridge. However, if you ARE contemplating a change, how about these suggestions:

Play Fucking Loud

You're a Liar

Po' Boy

Wanted Man

Highlands

Hey, look on the bright side; if you did change the name, those first two issues would be highly sought after!

Jack Kelleher

Hahaha - well, of course they'll be highly sought after anyway, Jack! Thanks for your suggestions - some of those garnered votes the first time round but we are sticking with Judas! for now. You are correct re 'magazine'; it was an attempt to make Judas! obviously not refer to Dylan just in case anyone missed the point of the title - but it hasn't worked so we'll be dropping it from the title. To keep the spines consistent for the first year, we will leave it there for this and the next issue.

Fashion School

A Snapshot of Academia and Bob Dylan When I Was On The Catwalk

The British academic world is not structured readily to accept an artist like Bob Dylan as a literary or musical giant, even if he is one. However, he has not been ignored by it.

The Andrew Davies article *Equality in School: The Academic and Aesthetic Significance of Bob Dylan* seems to me to have at its core the idealistic and cosy notion that academics are all-encompassing, ingenious arbiters of artistic taste. That certainly wasn't the case when I read English Literature and History in the late seventies/early eighties.

Faction and snobbery were rife among the English Lecturers. I remember the very artistic worth of D.H. Lawrence being a particular bone of contention. I recall one Lecturer who specialised in the Romantic period trying to poach William Blake from the Eighteenth Century on the grounds that he used the word 'wander'd' like the Romantics did! This carpet-bagging was a fact of academic life. So was the compartmentalising of the English canon into distinct periods. The Lecturers picked, or were assigned, a period. That period's writers became the ones they championed, researched, thought and wrote about. Writers from other periods were often derided. Already here we are dealing with artificial boundaries, and what amounts to a fashion parade.

University courses aim to provide intellectual training, not to dictate taste, although they may do that as well, vicariously. The material covered in English Lit courses is necessarily selective because the canon is too vast to be covered comprehensively. You don't have to read Charles Dickens's whole oeuvre, or indeed any of it, to gain an English degree, because you can be intellectually trained without him. In my curriculum, Twentieth-Century English ended in the early 1930s.

So how did Bob Dylan fit into this milieu? Bob was well known among some of the members of staff. We swapped albums, bootlegs, sheet music, tabs even, and I lent a couple of them Michael Gray's *Song & Dance Man II*, which was well received. All this was done at the pub, of course. We discussed his work there too. I remember that the main drift of these talks was as to whether Bob was a poet or not. I never accepted that as a valid question: Dylan is a songwriter. 'Poet' is a term given to those who publish verses. There are great, good, not-so-bad, iffy, minor, poor and downright bad poets. The term is not a superlative, though is often mistaken for one. These lecturers were open to Dylan, but wanted to discuss him on their own terms.

Obviously, many other members of staff were oblivious to him. (A soon-to-be superannuated specialist on Shelley is unlikely to be found practising Dropped-C tuning on a beat-up Martin 000-18 on her stoop in the evenings.)

Before I left college, Wilfred Mellers gave a talk on Dylan, I think in 1981/2. It was very well attended by staff as well as students. These were the difficult days of the evangelising/post-evangelising period in Bob's work. Mellers was given no aggravation with the evangelism however, but had to respond to a couple of hostile questions as to whether Dylan should have gone electric or not. Such is ignorance (I guess they were science students!). On balance, Mellers was very good on Bob's music; less good on his words. And Aye! there's the rub ... Michael Gray, Christopher Ricks et al are good on Dylan's words, but less good on his music. (Andrew Davies is unfair on Ricks: he has put his head on the block for many years in support of Dylan.)

Having been out of academe for twenty years, I'm not sure what's happening there now, but I can't believe it's changed that much. Dylan's multi-disciplinary art challenges the academic establishment because it doesn't conform to the pigeon-holing that underlies its very structure. Who is qualified to teach Dylan? How does one become qualified? Why bother? Let's teach Dickens instead. We can talk about Bob in the pub.

But it's no good whingeing that Bob is not taken seriously in academic circles. Many good modern writers are completely ignored in university English curricula. Many great writers from the past have simply fallen out of fashion. Unfortunately, music just doesn't come into the equation. Similarly, as far as I know, there is no scope for teaching close textual analysis of the written word in university music courses.

It may be that the United States, with its more flexible tradition of Liberal Studies and Cultural Studies, offers more hope of providing meaningful course work on Dylan and rock in general. Yet, this is also the land where an acquaintance of ours gained a degree in Buffy the Vampire Slayer Studies! So we're back to fashion again. Real Dylan aficionados want him bracketed with heavyweights like T.S. Eliot and Blake, not the transient pipsqueaks that television and the movies generate seemingly incessantly.

Dylan's own attitude to education seems to be ambivalent. On the face of it he is hostile. There are plenty of instances of this in his early work, for example: '*Twenty years of schoolin' and they put you on the day shift*', '*... the superhuman crew/ Come out and round*

up everyone/ That knows more than they do? Yet, ironically, Dylan accepted the Honorary Doctorate conferred on him by Princeton in 1970. A further irony is this: by immersing himself fully in the works of Woody Guthrie, Harry Smith's Anthology, folk music in general, Pre-war blues and virtually anything from the '40s and '50s, he displayed the kind of abstraction usually associated with university dons. In one sense, he not so much dropped out of university as changed courses. The course he chose, however, wasn't officially available.

That, in itself, underlines the limitations of the academic system, and shows that possibilities exist for working around it.

Paul Warburton

Many thanks, Paul, for such a detailed and informative response.

I think the point re 'poet as superlative' is complicated by its informal uses such as 'poet of inner soul', 'poet of New York' etc. The 'Poet' as deep seeing artist/prophet/first rate exponent of any art has become a common usage, though.

I was very surprised to learn that the acoustic debate was still going on as late as the early eighties. Surprised and depressed; the latest I remembered it was 1978 and that was in a hysterically (both senses) sour Folk magazine editorial re his upcoming UK tour. To think anyone else was still so blinkered is alarming.

You remind me too of Christopher Ricks's comment that it would take a 'genius critic' to be able to give Dylan his proper due, the critic would need to be a master of so many disciplines.

Many thanks to everyone who wrote in with best wishes, private comments and so forth. Just to make it clear, the letters page is for subscribers and all correspondence from you will be presumed to be for publication unless you state otherwise. Naturally, the views expressed in the letters page are not necessarily those of *Judas!* The response to issue 2 was very heartening, please keep it up!

Keith Lawson
1956 - 2002

'May you stay forever young'

by Jim Brady

Struck By The Sounds

This is an extract from a dissertation presented by Jim Brady to Strathclyde University Literature Department. Taken from near the opening, it concentrates on two songs that envelope Dylan's mid-sixties' 'classic' songs. Jim's dissertation began with a series of qualifications regarding his subject being a singer-songwriter rather than a recognised 'literary' figure. Writing in the early 1970s, he continued:

As a final introductory qualification, it should be noted that Dylan's best songs belong to the period from nineteen sixty-four to sixty-eight; before then his work, though literary and intelligent, was essentially social polemic with little depth. Some of it is redeemed by ironic humour, often filtered through an endearingly naive persona; 'Talking Bear Mountain Picnic Massacre Blues' demonstrates this, embodying a comment on the rigours of American economic life in a story about a picnic cruise.

‘I got shoved down ‘n’ pushed around
All I could hear there was a screamin’ sound
Don’t remember one thing more
Just remember walkin’ up on a little shore,
Head busted, stomach cracked
Feet splintered, I was bald, naked
Quite lucky to be alive though’

Unfortunately, the inflated sloganising rhetoric of ‘The Times They Are A-Changin’ is more typical;

‘Come Senators, congressmen
Please heed the call
Don’t stand in the doorway, don’t block up the hall
For he that gets hurt
Will be he who has stalled
There’s a battle outside
And it is ragin’
It’ll soon shake your windows
And rattle your walls
For the times, they are a-changin’”

Commendable as that political statement might be, it is of little literary interest; its polemic has overwhelmed its art, and the earnest tone is that of the politician, not of the writer.

Dylan's later work is simplistic and straightforward in a slightly different way, concentrating on autobiographical love songs, often largely pastiches; 'If Not For You' is a representative example.

*If not for you, my sky would fall,
Rain would gather too
Without your love
I'd be nowhere at all
I'd be lost, if not for you
And you know it's true'*

At his best, Dylan, however, is capable of striking poetic insights into the social and individual condition. His basic concern in this period is didactic, and in the work of this period he demonstrates the difficulties of the attempt to live a meaningful inner life in an empiricist, materialistic mass society where spiritual questions are scorned, discouraged, or even feared, and where the acceptance of conformity and superficiality of being is always an easier and more comfortable option than attempting to reach any kind of deeper or more fulfilling truth about oneself and one's place in the universe.

As we will see with the two songs discussed below, Dylan's conception of the spiritual life is essentially romantic. Saul Bellow's *Herzog* provides a fitting definition of the sense in which that term applies to Dylan's vision of modern life:

Romantic individuals (a mass of them by now) accuse this mass civilisation of obstructing their attainment of beauty, nobility, integrity, intensity. I do not want to sneer at the term "Romantic". Romanticism

guarded the "inspired condition", preserved the poetic, philosophical and religious teachings, the teachings of transcendence and the most generous ideas of mankind during the greatest and most rapid of transformations, the most accelerated phase of the modern scientific and technical transformation.'

Dylan, like Bellow, perceives in mankind a potential transcendence, something beyond the merely physical or animal. Again, like Bellow and the Romantic poets, Dylan sees man as an entity which bears a coherent, meaningful and dignified relation to his world; his basic metaphysical stance denies the truth and value of the reduction of man to something meaningless (or at best a cosmic joke) which is so prevalent in this rationalist century.

Together these two songs constitute a kind of spiritual manifesto and it is possible to read them as a framework for the other songs of this period; having described the state that the individual can - and should - aspire to, Dylan goes on to examine the kinds of pressures and distractions which may divert the individual from the search for self-knowledge and its subsequent revelation of metaphysical truth.

The first - chronologically as well as thematically - of these songs of spiritual didacticism is 'Lay Down Your Weary Tune', and close textual analysis of this will, I hope, bear out my opening remarks. This song is on one level: '*a pantheistic vision - a vision of the world in which nature appears not as a manifestation of God, but as containing God within its every aspect*'. In this definition of the song, Michael Gray (*Song & Dance Man*, 1972) understates his case; it would be more accurate, if more exalted, to say that it sees Nature as a

perfectly integrated unity, metaphorically a ‘tune’, constituted by a number of instruments playing in perfect harmony.

Thus, the rising sun is paired with the morning breeze, the waves with the shore, the clouds with the rain, and the riverbed with its water; each ‘player’ perfectly complementing the other within the pairs, and each pair harmonising with all the others:

*‘Struck by the sounds before the sun
I knew the night had gone
The morning breeze like a bugle blew
Against the drums of dawn’*

*‘The ocean wild like an organ played
The seaweed’s wove its strands
The crashin’ waves like cymbals clashed
Against the rocks and the sands’*

The chorus summarises this perfect unity:

*‘Lay down your weary tune, lay down
Lay down the song you strum
And rest yourself ‘neath the strength of
strings
No voice can hope to hum’*

For Gray that chorus suggests ‘*a moral gulf between the divinity of Nature and the reductive inadequacy of man*’, but this interpretation fails to explain the exhortation ‘rest yourself ‘neath the strength of strings’, which would be pointless if Dylan intended to dismiss man so abruptly and finally. I would suggest, contrary to Gray, that this ideal picture of Nature is not designed to belittle man; clearly, the song’s pantheism (despite the central image of nature’s perfectly tuned strings recalling Coleridge’s Eolian Harp) is not ‘Romantic’ in the sense of including man as an integral player in nature’s sublime ‘orchestra’; however man and nature are - for Dylan - separate entities and are to be judged by different standards.

The contrast in these two opening stanzas between harmonious nature and ‘tuneless’ man is not an end in itself but a means towards pointing out man’s flaws.

The third stanza details those flaws; its first couplet,

*‘I stood unwound beneath the skies
And clouds unbound by laws’*

suggests that we allow our energies to be corrupted by our conformity to unnaturally restrictive laws; the term is carefully chosen in that it does not propose - as Blake would - freedom from all restraint but from ‘laws’, not ‘morals’.

Besides this the couplet may contain an incidental repudiation of any Newtonian account of nature (as in ‘Scientific Laws’) which categorises the elements of nature into a mechanistic unit; indeed the entire song, on its ‘pantheistic’ level, is an assertion of organic creativity over predetermined mechanics.

*‘The cryin’ rain like a trumpet sang
And asked for no applause’*

In ‘asking applause’ for his ‘tune’ man is betrayed by pride into acting, not out of his own genuine desires and impulses, but in conformity to someone else’s; this is a betrayal and forfeiture of the self which contrasts with the egolessness of the ‘crying rain’.

Egotism, in the form of sexual jealousy, is also the subject of the fourth stanza.

*‘The last of leaves fell from the trees
And clung to a new love’s breast’*

That picture of the ‘falling leaves’ with their ‘new love’, is an image of the emotional freedom invariably lacking in man; the ideal contrast is this natural, seasonally rhythmic progression, where, in spite of the changing situation harmony remains; the heavenly music is undiminished by possessiveness or

envy. The branches, although bare, are not, and do not feel, forsaken; neither are they without a 'partner'. They continue to play:

*'The branches bare like a banjo played
To the winds that listened best'*

From this discussion of man in the verses it would seem that 'the weary tune' of the chorus is the egotistically limited human personality, and it is these tarnished features of our 'selves' which we are exhorted to rest. Now, the simple argument against Gray's negative interpretation is, as I remarked earlier, the very existence of that exhortation; if the author does not believe that man's weary, 'reductive' self can be transformed or improved then why does he write, 'rest yourself? Clearly there is a gulf between, at one extreme, that second-hand worn-out 'tune' of our personalities (a 'Wastepaper basket', full of 'scraps' as Lawrence called it) and these strings which '*no voice can hope to hum*'; but Gray's mistake is that he takes both the image of the voice and the song's basic contrast too literally.

Firstly, Gray reads 'voice' as if it were an everyday prosaic term; in context, though, it is a part of man's inadequate personality, and although the song states that this everyday state of mundanity falls short of the ideal, it does not rule out the possibility that he may transcend that personality and - continuing the metaphor - find a more 'musical' voice.

Gray's other mistake is to judge man and nature by the same standard, and this brings us to the two senses in which the song - again contradicting negative interpretations - shows us how we may 'rest ourselves' under nature's 'strings'. The first and most conventional sense of 'rest' is that of communing with nature, using its beauty

and harmony to uplift the spirit; this is the sense of:

'I stood unwound beneath the skies'

and of something like Coleridge's relation to nature in *The Eolian Harp*:

*'And thus, my love! as on the midway
slope*

*'Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,
Whilst through my half-closed eye-lids I
behold*

*'The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on
the Main,*

'And tranquil muse upon tranquillity;'

The second, and - to this song - most important sense of 'rest' is the idea that nature reflects our flaws by its perfection. Its exemplariness, though, is not something we can attain, since it is unselfconscious and fundamentally limited; inhuman in its very perfection. Dylan's intent, I suggest, is not a literal contrast between that condition and man's; rather he makes what is almost a parable of nature, selecting particular features as poetic images from which we learn about ourselves; and as of course with any artistic statement, images such as the falling leaves say much more and penetrate the understanding further than any kind of paraphrased equivalent.

To summarise, then, 'Lay Down Your Weary Tune' does in a way exalt nature above Man in the line '*no voice can hope to hum*'. Such exaltation however is incidental to the song's main purpose, which is to establish for Man - a different entity altogether - an image of how he may transcend his 'wastepaper-basket' self and attempt to find a greater being within.

Despite its exaltation of nature, the message 'Lay Down Your Weary Tune' has for Man is one of muted optimism. This is true also of 'All Along The Watchtower';

another song which cautiously but firmly asserts the proposition that the state of our inner being can be improved, that is, made spiritually worthwhile, and dignified as a meaningful entity. Dylan does this by presenting two Biblical, or if you like, historical parallels to the contemporary spiritual crisis. The first verse views life as chaotic and pointless, and its apparently cryptic terms refer to one of history's most famous moments of despair. The joker who speaks these words is Christ complaining to one of the thieves being crucified with Him of his race's materialistic debasement of spiritual values:

*'There must be some way out of here
Said the joker to the thief
There's too much confusion
I can't get no relief
Businessmen, they drink my wine
Ploughmen dig my earth
None of them along the line
Know what any of it is worth'*

That bitter expression of disbelief recalls Christ saying 'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' The thief (and in terms of Dylan's symbology a thief is someone morally trustworthy, like the Shakespearian Fool - as Dylan had written, '*To live outside the law you must be honest*', meaning that the man who lives by his own rules has greater moral integrity than one who simply abides by the established pattern) listens to this quietly, stoically and above all compassionately, and his faith-affirming answer draws out the implicit nihilism of Christ's despair, refuting it at the same time:

*'No reason to get excited'
The thief, he kindly spoke
'There are many here among us
Who feel that life is but a joke'*

*But you and I
We've been through that
And this is not our fate
So let us not talk falsely now
The hour is getting late'*

The ensuing silence implies acceptance of this stoical positivity as both men await their impending doom; these concluding lines have a 'calm before the storm' atmosphere reminiscent of Yeats's apocalyptic *Second Coming*:

*'And what rough beast, its hour come
round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born'*

The way that they suggest such an intensity of fear and horror through their balancing of mystery and revelation is typical of this song's economy (although admittedly untypical of Dylan, who is rarely so concise);

*'All along the watchtower, princes kept
the view
While all the women came and went,
barefoot servants too
Outside in the distance a wildcat did
growl,
Two riders were approaching, the wind
began to howl'*

The choice of tense here is crucial to interpretation; because the song uses the present tense it can ascribe these feelings of apocalypse to Christ without contradicting its earlier denial - through the thief - of metaphysical chaos, since we know of course - as Christ did not - that confusion would give way to peace. His Father did not forsake Him, and Dylan uses this discrepancy between Christ's fearful expectation that some kind of cosmic anarchy will mock Him and invalidate man's existence, and His own 'actual' (future) salvation to suggest that firstly, faith is possible even in

the midst of soul-destroying confusion; secondly, that salvation from nihilism is a metaphysical reality which will justify such faith; and finally that if a man in the anguish of being crucified by his own people can reject the idea that man is a meaningless cosmic absurdity as ‘talking falsely’ then modern western man - particularly the intellectuals and artists who have in their ‘confusion’ made commonplaces of Nihilism and Absurdity - should not find the idea of such ‘mystical’ faith in ourselves to be difficult or shameful to accept.

The pattern of the second Biblical event which ‘All Along The Watchtower’ recalls is analogous to the despair, faith and redemption of the Crucifixion. As Anthony Scaduto puts it, Dylan ‘borrowed heavily from the book of Isaiah’ and the coincidence of terms like ‘princes’, ‘two riders’, ‘eating and drinking’, ‘barefoot servants’ and ‘watchtower’ bears this out. As with the ‘Christ’ parallel, we are shown - following this alternative interpretation - a situation where people await some terrifying incomprehensible doom. The ‘barefoot servants’ of the song are the oppressed Jewish people:

‘And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia;

So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.

And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory

And the inhabitant of this isle shall say in that day, Behold, such is our expectation, whither we flee for help to be delivered

from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?’

Dylan ‘borrows’ this disillusion and despair and again makes use of the discrepancy between present expectation and future reality; in their present the Jews are told (through Isaiah the prophet) only that the approaching ‘riders’ will portend:

‘As whirlwinds in the south pass through; so it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land.

A grievous vision is declared unto me; the treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth’

Awaiting the ‘riders’ then., they fear this vision of apocalypse – ‘The cool twilight I longed for has become a terror’ – and only afterwards (as with Christ) will they realise that it is their oppressors who are doomed; again our knowledge of the events which actually followed those alluded to within the song is crucial to understanding:

And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.

Both of these biblical parallels unite the apparently conflicting parts of ‘All Along The Watchtower’, reconciling the faith of ‘let us not talk falsely now’ with the apparent crisis of ‘two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl’. This relation of man to images of a universe in incoherent chaos states inversely what ‘Lay Down Your Weary Tune’, with its ideally integrated world had asserted: that man’s condition is neither hopeless nor absurd, and that we can and will find some kind of salvation within ourselves if we have the faith to reject those self-conceptions which are negative, nihilistic and demeaning.

1962: *Bob Dylan* & *The Coo-Coo Bird*

by Robert Forryan

On 22 October 1962, the President of the United States, John F Kennedy, announced a blockade of Cuba and threatened military action unless the Soviet Union dismantled the nuclear missile bases that were under construction on the island of Cuba. This was the action and reaction that took the world to the brink of nuclear war and it has been known ever since as the Cuban Missile Crisis.

This was the same President Kennedy who called up Bob Dylan one time and said: '*my friend Bob, what do we need to make the country grow?*' In October 1962, just seven months had elapsed since the release, to underwhelming acclaim, of Dylan's eponymous first album. At the time of the crisis Dylan was in-between the recording of the various songs that would make up *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* LP. Four days after Kennedy's announcement, Dylan recorded 'Corrina, Corrina' in Columbia's Studio A in New York City. On 1st December 1962, with the crisis over, Dylan recorded the song from which I quoted at the beginning of this paragraph: 'I Shall Be Free'. Much had happened in those forty days.

When I began writing I assumed that any readers would be aware of the slice of contemporary history known as the 'Cuban Crisis', but then I remembered how old I am and that there may be readers for whom forty years ago does not seem contemporary at all - readers for whom it might as well be pre-history. So bear with me while I re-tell the tale. It is relevant for what follows.

Fulgencio Batista had ruled Cuba as dictator from 1952 until 1958 and had been sympathetic to American political and economic influence. In 1958 Fidel Castro and his beard led a Marxist revolution which finally succeeded in January 1959 with the overthrow of Batista. Castro, not surprisingly, turned away from the USA and looked to the USSR for support. The US government disliked the new regime and encouraged its opponents. In particular, Kennedy supported an ill-fated invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs by Florida-based Cuban exiles. This is recalled as one of the low points of Kennedy's presidency. The catalyst for the crisis was Castro's invitation to Soviet Russia to construct nuclear missile bases on Cuba. This was a move that America considered to be an act of aggression, though there were those who pointed out that America itself had missile bases adjacent to the Soviet Union in Turkey.

Through September and October of 1962 worldwide tension mounted. By 22 October Russian supply ships were on their way to Cuba and Kennedy began the stand-off. This was, as Patrick Humphries wrote in *Oh No, Not Another Bob Dylan Book*: *'the first opportunity for mankind to appreciate the awesome power of the weapons which would now be used. Hiroshima and Nagasaki 17 years before had seen a destruction unleashed which had rendered the cities into dust, by the 60s the scale of the weapons had multiplied'*. The tension escalated and a state of near-panic existed at the highest levels. On 23rd October in England, Bertrand Russell, the

90 year old philosopher, issued a public statement to those who would listen: *'You Are To Die: Not in the course of nature, but within a few weeks, and not you alone, but... hundreds of millions of innocent people... Conformity Means Death. Only Protest Gives A Hope Of Life'*.

Whilst this was going on the youthful Bob Dylan, soon to be the great white hope of the Protest Movement in the US, was spending much of his time in New York's Greenwich Village. Early Sixties Greenwich Village has attained a mythical status in the minds of those of us who are, approximately, of Bob Dylan's generation; especially perhaps for those who have never actually been there: *'There was music in the cafes at night, and revolution was in the air'*. When Dylan arrived in Greenwich Village it was, wrote Humphries, *'experiencing some sort of golden age as the artistic hub to which the hip gravitated. This is how Liam Clancy recalled it to me when we spoke over 20 years later: "It was a certain sort of spontaneous combustion. It's a thing that happens round the world at different times. It happened in Paris in the 20s, when Hemingway was writing, a mini-renaissance. It moves from place to place, and there are people who try to find out where it's going to happen next, to follow it. But you can't control it, you can't predict it"*.

In *No Direction Home*, Robert Shelton describes the places frequented by Dylan: *'the Commons, the Gaslight, the Café Wha?, and the Folklore Centre all had doors facing MacDougal, a dark, bustling, new main drag... MacDougal Street smelled of romance, art, independence, cappuccino, and*

sausage sandwiches'. Dylan once told Shelton that the Gaslight was '*the Broadway of folk song, where all the stars were*'.

Al Aronowitz said '*The Gaslight became one of the first of the Old-time Village basket houses. Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso read their poetry there*' (*The Telegraph* 24: quoted by J Bauldie in '*Hard Times In New York Town*'). A basket house was a place where a basket was passed around for the audience to toss money into which would then be shared among the various performers. At a later date Gaslight singers were paid but as it could only accommodate about a hundred people it didn't pay Broadway-style wages. Neither does it sound all that prepossessing. Eric Von Schmidt described the Gaslight as '*a scarred place with wood furniture... everything about it made you want to duck. It was downstairs from the sidewalk. You entered into total darkness. It was always a matter of not hitting your head, not bumping into people, not sitting on someone or standing in their way. The stage was a small, illuminated area at the far end of the room. The only way to get to it was to walk through the audience... An "intimate living room atmosphere" was a kind way to describe the room*'.

It had a problem with leaking pipes that used to drip on the performers' heads. Worse were the hot, steamy New York summer nights when condensation would form on the ceiling before dripping down on to performers and audience alike - bathed in a stream of other people's impure sweat.

Possibly the best evidence of Dylan's artistic development at the time comes from his performances at the Gaslight and which are preserved on, what was known for a long time as, the second Gaslight Tape. There seems to be a mystery regarding the precise dates of these recordings but Clinton Heylin places them as mid-late October 1962 (*Stolen Moments*). The sleeve notes from an unofficial CD of *The Gaslight Tapes* suggests that there were three performances by Dylan at the Gaslight in this period, of which two go to make up the 17 songs here recorded. I would love to think that these recordings actually took place during the Cuban Missile Crisis - it would be artistically and thematically perfect. Even if they occurred just before 22nd October they would still have had as their backdrop a tensely fragile world. In *Behind The Shades*, Clinton Heylin recalls that Dylan was writing '*A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall*' '*in September, with the Cuban Missile Crisis imminent and tension-filled talk in all the coffee-houses*'.

We know that Dylan frequented the Gaslight during this period. The then owner of The Gaslight Café, Sam Hood, told Al Aronowitz: '*I remember the night of the Cuban Missile Crisis. We closed early and sat around the big table - Dylan, Dave Van Ronk, Tom Paxton and Luke Faust. We said it was all over, the end of the world*'. I remember feeling this way myself - I was seventeen and all my friends felt the same. Maybe the young felt it more because we had the most to lose? In memory, the period of the crisis seemed much longer

than it actually was. We seemed to be hanging suspended on the brink for weeks. Maybe it's similar to the way time seems to slow when you are in a car accident: how the period between realising that you are going to crash and the impact - what can only be a couple of seconds - seems to last about five minutes. Except in this case, mercifully, the impact never came.

The Gaslight Tapes are not filled with anti-war songs, though as well as 'Hard Rain' there is also 'John Brown'. Mostly it's a collection of traditional songs or covers of songs written by other people. Neither is there any between-song chat (on my recording anyway) to give you an indication of what was on Dylan's mind. But if the running-order is to be believed he opened with the most topical of choices in 'A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall'. In his biography, Anthony Scaduto quotes Dylan: *'I wrote that when I didn't figure I'd have enough time left in life, didn't know how many other songs I could write, during the Cuban Crisis. I was in Bleeker Street in New York. We just hung around at night-people sat around wondering if it was the end, and so did I. Would 10 o'clock the next day ever come?... What could we do? Could we control men on the verge of wiping us out?' So to open his set with 'Hard Rain' would be entirely understandable.*

I know we say this sort of thing so often but the Gaslight Tapes are remarkable performances. Dylan's voice is as smooth (not an adjective one would always apply), as meaningful and as controlled as it gets. It's as if he's blossoming as a singer even though he's only

21 years of age. The voice is generally superior to that which we hear on *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, which suggests to me that these gigs really mattered to him. It's an exercise in vocal dexterity. All the time it feels as though he's trying to push his voice to do new things - or to do them better than before. It's an ongoing process of discovery and almost convinces you that this is a musical experience rather than a lyrical one.

In his book *Performing Artist*, Paul Williams writes about the Gaslight Tapes as follows:

'Dylan conveys... a great respect for and sensitivity to the material he's performing. In hindsight it seems a kind of farewell salute to his sources, to the blues songs and ballads that have given him so much, because on the evidence of surviving recordings this was his last significant public performance of non-original material for many years. The richness of Dylan's voice on the Gaslight tape is striking. In a way the entire performance seems a celebration of the songs themselves as musical entities (not for what their words say, but for how deep and full of mystery words and music are, the way they work together structurally, rhythmically, and as conveyors of feeling, mood, sense of place)... At a time when people were becoming excited about Dylan because of the messages and ideas in his songs, he appears more interested in the ways music expresses feelings'.

Of course, if this was recorded during the Cuban crisis, Dylan might have performed the songs with intensity as a 'farewell salute' not just to the songs but to

everything. It's fanciful to make such emotional mental leaps though, and I never feel comfortable about making assumptions as to Dylan's motivation in choosing particular songs on particular nights or in projecting some sort of meaning on to a song in any such setting. There's something almost anthropomorphic about those kinds of assumptions.

There is, however, something poetic or serendipitous about one of the songs chosen by Dylan at The Gaslight - that is, if these performances really did take place at the time of the Cuba Crisis. It's a song for the moment and its title is given as 'The Cuckoo Is A Pretty Bird'. I have read that this is a song Dylan performed regularly in the early days, and he certainly performs it here in a manner that suggests his familiarity with the material. It seems possible that one of the verses may be self-penned. I am not aware of any other recordings of Dylan singing 'The Cuckoo', and in recent months this one performance of the song has insinuated itself into my brain so that it is now one of my favourite Dylan recordings. It joins a few other personal favourites that share the distinction of only being available in one recorded version. Other such favourites include: 'I'm Not There (1956)', 'Dirge' and 'Black Diamond Bay'. They have a rarity which enhances their value.

'The Cuckoo', aka 'The Coo-Coo Bird', is an old folk song with British origins. And the way Dylan picks the folk-guitar intro would sound very familiar even if you'd never heard the song before. However, when he gets into the perform-

ance he almost presents it in a blues format with a real rhythm and he appears to hit those guitar strings. It is truly compelling and becomes more so with each succeeding listen. It's a persuasive, accomplished reading of the song though it lacks the sinister air I have heard from other performers of 'The Coo-Coo Bird', and which would have made it rather special. It needs that atmosphere which imbues the Basement Tapes recording of 'This Wheel's On Fire'.

It seems probable that Dylan learned the song from Clarence Ashley's 1929 version which appears on Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* and which Greil Marcus writes about in *Invisible Republic*. On that collection it is given the traditional title of 'The Coo-Coo Bird' and it is noticeable that Dylan actually sings 'Coo Coo', not 'Cuckoo'. In the 1950s and 1960s the song was performed and recorded by many artists, including Doc Watson, Rambling Jack Elliott, Pete Seeger and The New Lost City Ramblers. Even Rory Gallagher and Taj Mahal had a go at it. But the one version, apart from Dylan's, that intrigues me most is truly sinister and is by the late-60s outfit, Kaleidoscope.

Before I look at the song in a little more detail and remind you what Marcus said about it, here are the lyrics of 'The Cuckoo Is A Pretty Bird' as sung by Dylan at 'The Gaslight' sometime in the autumn of 1962:

*Oh, the cuckoo is a pretty bird
And she warbles as she flies,
But she never sings cuckoo*

*Till the fourth day of July.
I've a-gambled in England
I've a-gambled in Spain,
And I bet you ten dollars
That I'll beat you next game.
I'll build me a cabin
On a mountain so high
So I can see Mary
As she goes riding by.
I wish I was a poet
And could write a fine hand
I'd write my love a letter
Lord, she would understand.*

I have not come across any other versions containing this last verse, so I do wonder whether this is, appropriately, Dylan's own 'fine hand'? Clarence Ashley has a different fourth verse and begins with the 'cabin' verse - except his reason for building it is so that he can see Willie, not Mary, riding by.

Greil Marcus writes of 'The Coo-Coo Bird': '*There is no more commonplace song in Appalachia; the song has been sung for so long, by so many, in so many different communities, as to seem to some folklorists virtually automatic, a musicological version of the instinctive act, like breathing – and therefore meaningless*'.

I don't agree that the song is meaningless, even if any meaning only resides there in a metaphorical sense. Certainly if Dylan sang it at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, as seems most probable, then it would have been given meaning by virtue, at the very least, of its reference to the 'fourth day of July'.

Marcus's reasoning for saying that the song is without meaning relates to what he

sees as the fragmentary way in which various singers put the lyrics together. He sees them as '*disconnected verses*' that '*have no direct or logical relationship to each other*'. Harry Smith seemed to think the song arrived in its usual version around the middle of the 19th Century.

If the song is as without meaning as Marcus suggests, I rather doubt that it would have become as ubiquitous as it did during the Folk Revival in the middle years of the 20th Century. It obviously meant something to a lot of people. Even Marcus himself identifies a theme: '*displacement, restlessness, homelessness*'. I suspect that any meaning the song has is really that which is projected onto the song in the minds of listeners and performers. It is so easy to do that because of the significance of the date, the fourth of July, and the symbolism of the cuckoo - the bird that lays its eggs in other birds' nests. It's so easy to make these connections that a child could do it, but just because it's easy does not mean that it cannot be worthwhile.

Marcus quotes Oliver Wendell Holmes: '*we Americans are all cuckoos, we make our homes in the nests of other birds*'. Indeed, you might say that Modern America is a giant cuckoo sitting on a nest it never built or had any right to own - maybe the finest nest in the world. I am no more anti-American than the average Frenchman, but I do think the cuckoo as a metaphor for the USA has much to commend it. For one thing, opinions are as divided about the merits of the bird as they are about the country.

Marcus claims that the cuckoo was hated in England (it is unknown in the USA): '*It's very cry was reviled through the centuries as aggressive, repetitious, maniacally boring, a cry to drive you crazy, a cry that was already crazy, befitting a bird that was insane*'. He reminds the reader that the cuckoo kills the host birds chicks (or breaks its eggs) '*as we Americans drove out or exterminated Indians*'.

I am not sure that the cuckoo is universally hated in England. People listen for its call as a harbinger of the spring and write letters to the newspapers heralding its arrival. T A Coward in his standard work *The Birds of the British Isles and Their Eggs* (1927) claimed that '*the bird is popular*'. In fact, there are mixed views. Henry Williamson (author of *Tarka The Otter*) described the bird in *Cuckoo Notes*, 1916 - as '*callous*', '*a fraud*', '*a positive blackguard*' - '*I have often wondered if cuckoos have the power of projecting into other birds the maternal love, or instinct, that is so obviously deficient in themselves*'. In fact, there are 77 other species of birds in the world that lay their eggs in other birds' nests.

In The Bible, The Book of Leviticus (Ch11 v 13-19) lists a number of birds that '*shall not be eaten, they are an abomination*'. They include the eagle, owl, swan, heron, lapwing and cuckoo. At least one modern translation excludes the swan and the cuckoo but adds the beautiful hoopoe. Why such a lovely bird should be considered an abomination is a mystery.

In one way the lyric sung by Dylan is nonsense - it is not true that the bird does

not sing 'cuckoo' until 4th July, but one can understand the poetic, even sinister, reasons for that line. When I was young we used to learn a little rhyme:

*The cuckoo comes in April
He sings his song in May
In the middle of June
He changes his tune
In July he flies away.*

The call 'cuckoo' which is heard in England in April and May is actually the male bird's courtship song, which is why it is not heard later in the summer. In Roman times an adulterer was known as a cuckoo, and in Medieval and Elizabethan England the cry 'cuckoo' was used to mock cuckolded husbands. In *The White Goddess* Robert Graves pointed out that in Welsh poetry the cry of the cuckoo presented as 'cw-cw', pronounced 'ku-ku', means 'where, where?'. It cries 'Where is my love gone?', which could again be linked to unfortunate cuckolded husbands. All of which makes me wonder whether the singer who wants to see 'Willie' or 'Mary' riding by is in fact overseeing his rival or his wife/lover on the way to commit adultery.

'The Cuckoo Is A Pretty Bird' is, like the bird, not what it seems. Beauty is in the eye, or the ear, of the beholder, and I am not at all sure that the cuckoo is a pretty bird. It is easily mistaken for the sparrowhawk, which may have a savage kind of beauty, but you would not call it pretty. Likewise the song. It does not strike me as being a lighthearted 'Olde Englishe' folk song. It feels darkly sinister. Clarence Ashley captures some of that

feeling, but the version that really nails it, that makes me feel that they have bottled the essence of ‘The Cuckoo’ is that by Kaleidoscope.

If you don’t know them, Kaleidoscope were, from 1967 to 1970, the most eclectic of bands; playing in all kinds of styles from folk through country, middle-Eastern and into psychedelic acid rock. They were truly kaleidoscopic in their ambition. The late John Platt, editor of *Comstock Lode* magazine, wrote that they were ‘once described by Pete Frame, in a rare moment of poetic insight as “most mysterious and charismatic of all the Los Angeles musical ensembles”. And he was right; ever since the release of their first album in ’67, stories had filtered through of this bizarre outfit who played up and down the West Coast and came across like a gypsy caravan train on acid.’ Their version of ‘Cuckoo’ is well worth a listen: a seriously weird acid rock version that sounds like it could have been Cream. Not surprisingly it is very different from Dylan’s early reading, but it more than hints that the song is somehow ‘about’ America:

*‘She never has a sad word till the fourth day of July,
She just sucks on pretty flowers to keep her voice so clear
And she never hollers coo-coo till the last day of the year’*

We began in 1962, in Kennedy’s America. During the Cuban stand-off, Kruschev offered to dismantle his bases in Cuba if Kennedy would do likewise with the US bases in Turkey. Kennedy refused

and, eventually, Kruschev backed down. The crisis was at its peak for just thirteen days.

It is often regarded as a victory for Kennedy’s nerve, but Bertrand Russell held another view: *‘Kruschev yielded rather than embark upon a nuclear war. In any crisis involving the danger of nuclear war, if one side yielded and the other did not, I should think the side that yielded more deserving of praise than the other side, because I think nuclear war the greatest misfortune that could befall the human race... Kruschev, when he saw the danger, abandoned his policies. Kennedy did not. It was Kruschev who allowed the human race to continue’*.

There have been many differing interpretations of ‘The Coo-Coo Bird’ and it would not be true to say that there is something sinister in every case, although I believe that the song contains within itself a darkness which some performers and some listeners discover for themselves. Kaleidoscope mined that darkness and produced a nugget of black gold; so did Clarence Ashley. I am not sure that the young Bob Dylan attained a sinister insight, but he was very young and if he did perform ‘The Cuckoo Is A Pretty Bird’ at height of the Cuba Crisis, the song would have conveyed sufficient meaning for the discerning listeners. The reference to the Fourth of July is present in all the 20th Century American versions I have heard, and whatever truth it carries for individuals it must surely say something about the USA. It was a song whose time had come in the 1960s when it passed

from singer to singer, band to band, with an adulterous alacrity which almost seems to have made cuckolds of them all. Like the bird itself, it flourished for a season and was gone. Even the American cuckoo removed its missile-eggs from Turkey in the end.

Maybe I am stretching imaginative intuition too far in suggesting that Dylan may have chosen to sing 'The Cuckoo Is A Pretty Bird' on an October night to somehow allude to the Cuba Crisis. Nevertheless, the song was, in retrospect at least, perfect - living briefly in its moment. The Gaslight Tapes would be diminished by its absence and I live in the faint hope of one day hearing that cuckoo again on a small stage somewhere in the West. After

all, Dylan has clearly not forgotten the song. It was recently pointed out to me that he quotes the lines: '*The cuckoo is a pretty bird, she warbles as she flies*' in the 'Love And Theft' song 'High Water'. So maybe its inclusion in this late, broodingly apocalyptic composition indicates Dylan's own recognition of a darkness at the heart of 'The Cuckoo'.

At the end of Kaleidoscope's 'Cuckoo' we hear a blood-curdling laugh. It is the laugh of a madman and it is the truest possible conclusion to their performance. As I write these words - less than one year after 11 September 2001 - the world seems every bit as dangerous a place to live in as it did in October 1962; a place fit for the laughter of madmen.

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'lies that life is black and white'

Bob Dylan and the reality of protest

by Toby Richards-Carpenter

Part One: Ideological Conflict and the Electrified Dylan

'There must be some way out of here'
'All Along The Watchtower', 1967

'What is true in a man's life is not what he does, but the legend which grows up around him.' So said Oscar Wilde, in a perception that squarely pinpoints the battle raging between the artist and his audience ever since Robert Allen Zimmerman achieved fame as Bob Dylan in the early 1960s. By 1963 Dylan was saddled with the labels of 'Folksinger' and 'Protest Singer', labels that left a residue of seething contempt when Dylan attempted to peel them off a year or so later. This conflict manifested itself in the hysterical audience reactions to Dylan's live performances from mid-1965 through 1966. This hysteria was unique. It was not hysteria of the kind elicited by Elvis Presley in the mid- 1950s, nor did it compare with the madness of 'Beatlemania' in the following decade. These were not the more commonly- heard shrieks of excitement towards the sugar-coated vibrancy of a pop idol's mere presence.

Peculiarly, Dylan had inspired ideological devotion. As Dylan evolved as an artist, that devotion was refracted back towards him as hatred. When Bob Dylan, backed by members of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, performed three high-octane electric rock numbers at the Newport Folk Festival on July 25th 1965, he experienced for the first time the possessed screams and shouts that would provide accompaniment for his live performances until midway through the following year. These were declarations of anger and betrayal. Simply by getting on stage and singing a certain type of song in a certain way, here was a performer who could inspire torrents of abuse and waves of fury from those who felt let down.

On May 17th 1966, Bob Dylan took to the stage at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, England. The show would come to symbolise the rage that had brewed amongst a proportion of Dylan's audience for nearly two years. Dylan had reached a cultural high water mark. Through some mysterious alchemy, through defiance in the face of hostility, he was delivering performances of magnificent spite, decadent majesty, inspired rebellion. Yet again, Dylan would have to face down a raucous paying public, an unsympathetic rabble who decried Dylan as a sell-out, unappreciative of his recent songs of inner reflection, and his recent sounds of electric rock music. The unforgiving had congregated at the Free Trade Hall, unaware that their angry, self-righteous racket would swiftly pass into legend, immortalised on one of the first bootleg records.

Dylan's opening acoustic set had been received with ecstatic, respectful reverence. Here they recognised the old Dylan, the folk singer with the guitar strapped across him and harmonica hanging round his neck. No matter that his songs now dripped with richly lyrical and abstract verse, inhabited by Tambourine Men, flesh-coloured Christs that glow in the dark, and Einstein disguised as Robin Hood. No matter that he now told his listeners to '*Leave your stepping stones behind*'. It was enough for the folkies that Dylan should appear on stage and perform a set stripped to the naked acoustic essentials, just like in his 'protest' days. The audience knew what to expect when Dylan strode off at the show's interval. They

knew what was coming. Some of them left the arena there and then, preferring not to face the onslaught. A vocal minority remained.

Disgruntled murmurings rose from the stalls as the amplifiers were wired up. Watches were anxiously checked as the audience pounded through the nervous moments before The Hawks, Dylan's backing band, would step out before them. Then the lights went down. Bodies emerged from the stage wings. A figure shuffled behind the drum kit, others picked up guitars. Dylan swirled up to the microphone, stamped his foot, and cast forth a cacophonous explosion of sound. The folkies in the audience were appalled; they couldn't hear the words, Dylan's precious words! The hecklers spat bile at the artist between numbers; Dylan mumbled incomprehensibly back at them to put them off. The Hawks rocked ever-harder, Dylan singing with gusto and menace, friction palpably increasing with every number. As they tuned up for the final song, time froze as a lone cry rose above the din: '*JUDAS!*' Shocked anticipation. '*I don't believe you*', Dylan sneered in reply. A further sensational pause. '*You're a LIAR!*' raged Dylan, before turning and yelling at his band to '*Get fucking loud*'.¹ Then it was straight into the final putdown, '*Like a Rolling Stone*' in all its vicious, apocalyptic glory.

The madness couldn't last. On July 29th 1966, with months of touring scheduled ahead of him, Dylan was thrown from his Triumph motorcycle in Woodstock and sustained broken vertebrae in his neck. The crash probably saved

him from becoming the ultimate rock'n'roll martyr. The pace his life had been travelling at, the pressures that were upon him, and the substances he was consuming to meet these demands, had created an unsustainable lifestyle. At this point Dylan took the opportunity to withdraw completely from public view. It would be another eight years before he would tour again. In the previous six years Dylan had brought intelligence and eloquence to the popular song, and it had got to the point where his every utterance was obsessed over with religious fervour. In the beginning, however, Dylan fought for recognition. He made a calculated decision as to which entry-point to his chosen profession would be most likely to give him an audience, and a break. In 1961, he arrived in New York and presented himself as a folksinger.

Part Two: The Greenwich Village Education

'Gotta get up near the teacher if you can, if you wanna learn anything'
‘Floater (Too Much To Ask)’, 2001

It is tempting, logical even, to view the first incarnation of an artist as the most genuine or authentic, as demonstrative of the style that most purely reflects the artist's disposition towards his art-form. The logic of this is that there has been less time for the artist to become corrupted by commercial forces that may impair his original vision. What an artist presents with his early work is an original idea strong enough to make an impact on its

own merits, unsupported by reputation or promotional bombast. The temptation, though, is for us to champion the early work of an artist purely through sentiment, through a sense of nostalgia. As an audience, we tend to desire that an artist should remain at exactly the same place creatively that he was at when we were first hooked. Just as we worry about getting older, we would prefer things to stay as they were in the pop charts to make us feel as we did years ago, to maintain an illusion of youth. We want to believe that the artist we admire was in their prime at the same time we were. If we don't like that artist's later work, as original fans we will generally decry it as inferior. Not to do so would be an admission that the artist that we felt at one with and related to has left us behind, left us for dead, moved on comfortably without us. This creates a misty-eyed nostalgia for whatever has gone before, regardless of its merits relative to current trends.

The folk-music fans who mourned Dylan's move to more sophisticated forms of writing and performance had wanted to contain Dylan as their own. Rather than feeling gratitude for all he had done in raising the profile of the folk revival, for all the wonderful songs he had written as a folk singer, and for all the wonderful music he had given them, they turned their back on him as a ‘sell-out’ to commercial forces, and as a traitor to their, and his, cause. The nostalgia here was for the time when Bobby Dylan was one of them, and now suddenly there were people world-wide, of myriad influences,

claiming him as their own. However, in Dylan's case the usual accompanying logic to bolster the selfishness of the original fans is nowhere to be found. From his earliest days, Robert Allen Zimmerman never saw himself as a protest singer, nor sought to limit himself to the bigoted 'rules' of folk-singing that the folksingers sought to impose and enforce. As he put it in 1966, '*I don't break the rules, because I don't see any rules to break*'.²

The protest material should not be viewed as the most 'authentic' voice of Bob Dylan, nor as the style that most truly reflects the artist's predispositions towards his art form. Dylan was not simply playing the hand that fate had dealt him. Dylan's entry to the arena via the folk audience was calculated. Dylan may have started out as a performer and artist in Greenwich Village, but he didn't come from there. He chose to go there because he recognised the importance of folk music: '*Folk music is where it all starts and in many ways ends. If you don't have that foundation, or if you're not knowledgeable about it and you don't know how to control that, and you don't feel historically tied to it, then what you're doing is not going to be as strong as it could be*' (2001).³ He also chose to begin his career by presenting material with a political slant because he realised that he would get heard, and could muster an audience, if he did so: '*Those records I've made, I'll stand behind them, but some of that was jumping into the scene to be heard, and a lot of it was because I didn't see anyone else doing that kind of thing... You know - pointing to all the things that are wrong*' (1964).⁴

Dylan's Arrival In New York

'Where do you come from, where do you go?' ('Summer Days', 2001)

The audience for Dylan's protest material was indeed ready-made. At a time of race-derived social unrest in the Southern States, and with the ever-present threat of the Cold War hanging over the American people, a climate of discontent was developing amongst middle-class youth. Rioting in American cities was commonplace and would escalate as the Sixties progressed. The Cuban Missile Crisis was just around the corner, and America was already being lured into ever-deeper involvement in Vietnam. The epicentre of artistic dissent could be found in Greenwich Village, New York, and by the time Dylan arrived the full thrust of the folk revival could be felt.

Robert Allen Zimmerman, born May 24th 1941 in Duluth, Minnesota, arrived in New York, chubby-faced and cherubic, on or around January 24th 1961. When, in June 1959, Dylan finally graduated from Hibbing High School, he wrote in the yearbook of his ambition '*to join Little Richard*'.⁵ By this point he had outgrown Hibbing, his home since the age of six, and had tired of bleak Minnesota and the stale prospects afforded by his father Abe's electrical store. Dylan revealed these frustrations in 1965; '*I left where I'm from because there's nothing there... When I left there I knew one thing: I had to get out of there and not come back*'.⁶

Upon leaving Hibbing Zimmerman had travelled around, staying in Denver and Chicago, but he knew, as all young folksingers did, that New York was the

place where any aspiring talent had to make it. It was a place to learn, and a place to be recognised. The scene was focused on the Greenwich Village area. For decades the low rents in the streets around Washington Square had drawn in creative spirits who wanted to learn their trade. Artists, musicians and writers frequented the many cafes and coffee shops that housed willing audiences; in the early sixties, the 'Beat' writers such as Ginsberg and Kerouac were woven into the cultural fabric of the Village along with the folkies. Establishment owners were happy to have performers to entertain their customers. They rarely had to pay them, and could charge inflated prices for drinks to keep profits up. It was a challenging environment for an inexperienced performer, desperate to make an impression.

Dylan arrived in Manhattan in the midst of a bitterly cold winter, the coldest for twenty-eight years. With the snow piled high on the sidewalks, he slithered and crunched his way along to the Café Wha?, to take in a 'hootenanny', an open-microphone evening during which performers passed round a basket.⁷ Dylan toured the clubs within a few days, places like the Gaslight Café, Gerde's Folk City, the Figaro, the Commons, the Limelight and the Village Gate. Some of these establishments enabled Dylan to get up on stage and get his face known, while at others he could observe and learn from other performers. Before long Dylan would have a regular gig at the Wha? (where a certain Jimi Hendrix would be discovered within five years), and he would be learning from such luminaries as

Alan Lomax, Pete Seeger, Ramblin' Jack Elliot and Cisco Houston, mainstays of the folk revival. Speaking about his education in traditional folk song, Dylan has been keen to emphasise the significance of witnessing live performances as opposed to recordings; '*You could hear the actual people singing those ballads. You could hear Clarence Ashley, Doc Watson, Dock Boggs, The Memphis Jug Band, Furry Lewis. You could see these people live and in person. They were around*' (2001).⁸

That's not to say New York wasn't one of the few places where '*hard-core folklore music*'⁹ could be found in record stores. Dylan recalls, '*In New York City, there was a place called The Folklore Center that had all the folk-music records. It was like a library, and you could listen to them there. And they had folk-music books there.*' (2001).¹⁰ The Folklore Center also had a room through the back that made a regular haunt for folkies at a loose end; the Sunday after his arrival Dylan was heard blasting through a rendition of 'Muleskinner Blues' from within. He was learning fast.

Dylan had pitched himself into this melting pot of creativity and performing intensity to educate himself. He went with a brief to learn, not to shut himself out to ideas or approaches to musicianship or song writing. Through this approach he was greatly influenced by those around him; '*(My old) songs were all written in the New York atmosphere. I'd never have written any of them - or sung them the way I did - if I hadn't been sitting around listening to performers in New York cafes and the talk in all the dingy parlours.*' (1969).¹¹

Liam Clancy sums up Dylan's approach with a neat image, '*He was a teenager when he came to the Village, and the only thing I can compare him with is blotting paper. He soaked everything up. He had this immense curiosity, he was totally blank, and he was ready to suck up everything that came within his range*'.¹² It is therefore important to realise that at this early stage Dylan had not professed any exclusive commitment towards folk music as a genre, nor had he any elitist views as to what instruments could be used, or to the way in which certain songs should be played.

Indeed, on more than one occasion Dylan has expressed contempt for those who did: '*There were commercial folk-music records, like those by the Kingston Trio. I never really was an elitist. Personally, I liked the Kingston Trio. I could see the picture. But for a lot of people it was a little hard to take. Like the left-wing puritans that seemed to have a hold on the folk-music community, they disparaged those records.*' (2001).¹³ It is also important to bear in mind that here was a lad who had only recently professed his ambition '*to join Little Richard*', perhaps the most outrageous rock 'n' roller of them all.

Dylan sought as broad a grounding as possible in the musical and performing landscape, keeping an open mind to the opportunities presented by different forms of song and delivery. However, there were those, the 'left-wing puritans', who would rather restrain and contain Dylan to a far narrower arena. These were the same people who felt there were certain songs only worthy of accompaniment by an acoustic guitar, and only

worthy of being played by a select group of performers, the same people who in 1965 would cry 'sell-out' at Dylan without realising what they were saying. For had they been listening closely, they would have realised that Dylan never had any such limited beliefs about music to sell out. All Dylan ever had was self-belief.

The Record Deal And The Rise To Fame

'Stick with me anyhow, things should start to get interesting right about now' ('Mississippi', 2001)

In September 1961, New York Times folk critic Robert Shelton witnessed an early Bob Dylan gig at Gerde's Folk City, and wrote a review of such enthusiasm that Dylan carried around a copy of it for months afterwards, showing it to anyone who cared to read it. This review prompted Columbia Records talent-spotter John Hammond to seek out Dylan. After making his recorded debut through a harmonica contribution to a Carolyn Hester record, Dylan was offered a record deal and, at a cost of just \$402, cut his debut album over two days in November. At this stage Dylan was yet to begin writing his own material in earnest, and the album, simply entitled *Bob Dylan*, included just two Dylan originals from thirteen tracks. These were the autobiographical 'Talking New York' and Dylan's touching tribute to his idol, 'Song to Woody'.

Even with the benefit of hindsight, it is hard to see signs of the creative explosion that was just around the corner for Dylan. We are presented with a Dylan affecting

the accent of a grizzled old bluesman, grinding his way through traditional folk-songs as though he had been performing them from town to town for forty years or more. The effect doesn't come off all that well; there is an element of conviction needed in successfully tackling these songs that, as Dylan would later prove, only comes with experience. The record, unsurprisingly, sold poorly, and it was only at Hammond's insistence that Dylan remained signed to Columbia, earning Dylan the nickname 'Hammond's Folly' in the process. The decision to stick by Dylan was the right one. By the time Dylan would come to record his follow-up, he would be writing with a profligacy and expertise that belied his years.

As 1962 progressed, Dylan wrote with the frequency and insistence of a man possessed, driven by the twin traumas of absent love and political unrest. Dylan's girlfriend, Suze Rotolo, was introduced to the world on the front cover of the *Freewheelin'* album, but by that stage her relationship with Dylan was on the rocks. In 1962 she took the opportunity to evade the reflected celebrity her boyfriend's rising stardom would afford, by moving to Italy to consider her options and forge her own way of life. Dylan was distraught, and the period produced some of his most affecting and enduring love songs. These songs introduced a guile and intuitiveness to the popular song that had no precedent. By way of example, 'Tomorrow Is a Long Time', first known to have been performed by Dylan in August 1962, offers a moving evocation of a lover who longs for his absent girlfriend:

*I can't see my reflection in the water
I can't speak the sounds that show no pain
I can't hear the echo of my footsteps
Or remember the sounds of my own name'*

Taken from the second verse, Dylan here describes his loss of identity when his lover is not with him. He only recognises himself through her, not even water can reflect him. Nothing he can say, no sounds he can make, can escape, deny or obscure the pain he is suffering. He laments the absence of his lover's footsteps faithfully echoing his own, and feels his name is only recognisable when it is uttered from her lips. Dylan has invested every emotion in this woman, and is broken, dysfunctional, without her. In 'Tomorrow Is A Long Time', Dylan showed an ability not only to understand but also to articulate his emotions that was unique within his chosen medium. He wrote it around the time that The Beatles were recording their debut single 'Love Me Do', in which the lines '*You know I love you/I'll always be true*' were the best that Dylan's song writing contemporaries could come up with. Dylan was showing that he could harness a breadth of emotion in his songs that went far beyond the confines of a one-dimensional protest.

He also demonstrated that he was unafraid to confront his inner emotion through his songs in public, and could perform them with heartbreaking defiance and vulnerability. At the Town Hall on April 12th 1963, Dylan's first solo concert at a major New York venue¹⁴, he performed a version of 'Tomorrow Is A Long Time' that masterfully combined the

aching fragility of an isolated lover with the strength and maturity of a man who understood that his feelings ran much deeper than the simple hysteria to which most popular songs reduced unrequited ‘love’. Indeed, given that Dylan had preceded that night’s performance with a blazing row with girlfriend Suze¹⁵, the performance is as much a profound peace offering as a sorrowful lament. It is hard to credit that a rendering of such sophistication and beauty could come from one so inexperienced. Still a month short of his twenty-second birthday, Dylan’s performance that evening far outstripped anything that had appeared on his debut album, and was a startling indication of the speed with which Dylan had learnt in the preceding twelve months.

Dylan had acquired a vast knowledge and repertoire of folk songs by this time, which he was distilling into his own writing and modifying for the times. He drew on this knowledge for both his ‘protest’ writing and his personal songs. When the time came to record his second album, he had so many songs to choose from that it was unclear until the last possible moment what form the record would take. The eventual *Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* album would not only confirm Dylan as a major new song-writing force, but be hailed as the greatest folk album of the decade, and influence countless artists for decades to come. The record’s complicated gestation, however, offers a vital insight into the mind of a songwriter who was moving along at such a pace that his own record company couldn’t keep up with him.

Part Three: Bob Dylan’s Dream - The Multi-Faceted *Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* Album

‘I’m strolling through the lonely graveyard of my mind’ (‘Can’t Wait’, 1997)

In late April 1962, Dylan aired for the first time a song called ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’, which featured a melody adapted from the traditional ‘No More Auction Block’. It was a breakthrough for Dylan, regarded by all who heard it as his most impressive lyric yet. A series of nine rhetorical questions that incisively pointed to the corruptions of society and the insecurities of nature, ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’ was swiftly embraced by the folk community as a protest hymn, with its ambiguous, spiritually uplifting refrain, ‘*The answer is blowin’ in the wind*’. It was the first truly timeless Dylan composition, and it cemented Dylan’s position as the (reluctant) figurehead of the folk revival. The song gained commercial success initially through Peter, Paul And Mary, who took it to Number Two on the Billboard Chart and turned it into a sing-along anthem. Forty years on, the song still closes around a hundred Dylan concerts a year, to rapturous acclaim from audiences that span generations. ‘Blowin’ In The Wind’ would open Dylan’s second album, and the definitive take was bagged early on, at the second recording session on July 9 1962. The first sessions had taken place on April 24-5, and a year hence Dylan would still be tinkering with the final track selection for the finished record.

What is most remarkable about the making of *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, in the light of subsequent events, is that two full recording sessions were held with Dylan backed by an electric band. Those who would hail Dylan as a saviour for the folk revival, and a pure political protest singer with a social conscience, might have been a little less eager to pin such labels on Dylan had they heard either of his rollicking renditions of Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup's 'That's Alright Mama' from October and November 1962. Indeed, Dylan's observation at the end of the first take, 'I wanna do it again fast', shows that his enthusiasm for rock 'n' roll remained undimmed from his high school days. Dylan's pedigree as a 'protest' singer should also surely have been undermined by his choice of debut single, a spunky electric blues called 'Mixed Up Confusion' that sank without trace upon its release in December 1962. The single was backed by a version of 'Corrina, Corrina', a well-known song first recorded in 1928*, which also featured electric accompaniment, and significantly, would appear in the same arrangement (though as a different take) on the forthcoming album.

The electric sessions, which took place on October 26 1962 and three weeks later on November 13-14,¹⁶ show not only Dylan's early willingness to experiment with a sound that he would adopt full-scale three years hence, but also his utter

obliviousness to the supposed parameters within which he should remain as a 'folk singer'. All that was important to Dylan was getting the right take of a particular song, and he was prepared to explore many avenues to do this. Clearly, he was excited by the feel of the electric 'Corrina, Corrina', which in Dylan's solo acoustic take sounds rather spartan and limited compared to the gentle fluidity that the addition of electric bass guitar leant to the subsequent takes.

Dylan chose to issue the electric takes of this throwaway love ballad for the simple reason that they surpassed, indeed transcended, an acoustic version that did not deserve a release on its own merits. The implications of this in the context of the career of a supposedly devoted 'protest' singer were a matter of supreme indifference to Dylan. Had he been out to make a defiant point to those who sought to contain him, the second take of 'That's Alright Mama' would surely have been a prime candidate for release. Had Dylan wanted to milk the potentially lucrative 'protest' image that had been imposed upon him to further a career that, thus far, had afforded him a flop album and a flop single, presumably 'Corrina, Corrina' would not have got anywhere near the final track listing for his second LP. In truth, Dylan did not react to his growing reputation one way or the other. What he reacted to was the muse, and it was his

* Ed: This first recording was copyrighted as 'Corrine Corrina' to Bo Chatmon and J. Mayo Williams, but probably was written by Chatmon alone. It would best be described as ancestral to Dylan's version, as Dylan made a number of lyrical and musical changes to a song that had already evolved through a bewilderingly large number of recordings – in fact, Dylan may well have never heard the original version, claiming as much in the liner notes to *Freewheelin'*. Interestingly, Chatmon had two brothers in the Mississippi Sheiks and worked with the band himself.

personal feeling as to what was truest to his current thoughts when the deadline arrived, that determined the contents of *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*.

In early April 1963, Columbia were preparing for the release of the second album by 'Hammond's Folly'. The track list included four major Dylan compositions, 'Blowin' in the Wind', the magnificent 'A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall' (see supplement), 'Let Me Die in My Footsteps', and Dylan's remarkably subtle and affecting retaliation against the love song, 'Don't Think Twice, It's All Right'. The other tracks included a number of blues- 'Rambling Gambling Willie', 'Rocks And Gravel', 'Down The Highway' and the satirical 'Talkin' John Birch Paranoid Blues'. Also included were the electric 'Corrina Corrina', the throwaway 'Honey, Just Allow Me One More Chance', the protest 'Oxford Town', and two examples of Dylan's distinctive talking blues style, 'Bob Dylan's Blues' and 'I Shall Be Free'. Promo white label copies of the album were pressed up and distributed to the media.¹⁷

As part of Dylan's promotional activities for the forthcoming album, he had been scheduled to appear on America's most popular light entertainment programme, *The Ed Sullivan Show*, on May 12 1963. The exact sequence of events at this point is murky, but what is known is that Dylan was heard by the programme producer rehearsing 'Talkin' John Birch Paranoid Blues', and was told that he could not perform the song on national television because its lyrical content potentially libelled members of the

Society. Some reports say that Dylan flew into a rage at this act of censorship, others say he took it with calm resignation, but either way Dylan refused to perform on the show if he could not choose his song. In the immediate aftermath of the Ed Sullivan debacle, which gained Dylan much publicity portraying him as a heroic, rebellious counter-culture figure, Dylan forced a last-minute reconfiguration of his forthcoming album, pulling four tracks from the original record and replacing them with newly-recorded songs he taped at a session on April 24.

The reasons for the alterations are not clear. The four tracks Dylan removed were 'Rambling Gambling Willie', 'Rocks And Gravel', 'Talkin' John Birch Paranoid Blues' and 'Let Me Die in My Footsteps'. These were replaced by 'Bob Dylan's Dream', 'Girl from the North Country', 'Masters of War' and 'Talkin' World War III Blues'. By way of explanation for these substitutions, Dylan is quoted as saying '*There's too many old-fashioned songs in there, stuff I tried to write like Woody (Guthrie). I'm goin' through changes. Need some more finger-pointin' songs in it, 'cause that's where my head's at right now*'.¹⁸

On the face of it, this comment would appear to be an admission by Dylan that at the time he saw himself as a moral crusader, protesting and pointing the finger where he saw wrong-doing, and seeking to use his second album to publicise the ills of American politics and society. However, the changes he made to the album do not have this effect. In particular, the inclusion of 'Girl from the North Country' and 'Bob Dylan's Dream'

lend the album an intimate and intensely personal vision that was somewhat lacking as a theme in the original record. ‘Girl from the North Country’ was a sincere and affectionate tribute to Dylan’s first serious girlfriend, Echo Helstrom, with whom he was at high school.

As a companion piece, ‘Bob Dylan’s Dream’ works rather well, since Dylan here sings of the *‘first few friends I had’*, longing for the innocence and security of youth, for long-lost conversations, and for all the friends who have disappeared. Taken together with the touching ‘Corrina, Corrina’ and ‘Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right’, a masterful love song filled with heartbreak, vengeance, regret, sympathy and bravado, there is an introverted, soulful, human essence to the released *Freewheelin’* that was spiritually absent from the original version. The record was given greater breadth of purpose by the inclusion of ‘Girl from the North Country’ and ‘Bob Dylan’s Dream’, pushing it far beyond its initial conception. Their inclusion posed greater challenges to Dylan’s audience, who might have expected no more than a dominant sequence of rough-edged acoustic protest renditions from his second album.

Dylan’s assertion that he wanted ‘some more finger-pointing songs in it, *‘cause that’s where my head’s at right now’*, is also hard to credit in view of the removal of one of the strongest tracks from the original line-up, ‘Let Me Die in My Footsteps’. In this powerful lyric, Dylan denounces those who spend their lives in paranoid preparation for war, rather than living their lives to the full while they have the

chance. Dylan has described writing the song after observing builders constructing a nuclear fall-out shelter. It is a song of beguiling eloquence, capturing both the cynicism of a poet who knows the value of life, and the idealism of a youth who wants politics to go to hell so he can enjoy the planet he has been given:

(verse six)

*Let me drink from the waters where the mountain streams flood
Let the smell of wildflowers flow free through my blood
Let me sleep in your meadows with the green grassy leaves
Let me walk down the highway with my brother in peace.
Let me die in my footsteps
Before I go down under the ground*

There can be no question that the album would have been immeasurably stronger had the passionate plea of ‘Let Me Die in My Footsteps’ been included, and one can only assume in its absence that here was a case of Dylan insisting on putting his most up to date songs on the album. The album as released has, partly, something of a work-in-progress feel to it, the deliberate consequence of the inclusion of the talking blues numbers, and our knowledge of the omission of the stunning ‘Let Me Die in My Footsteps’ confirms that impression. And this feeling of incompleteness is an honest reflection of Dylan’s position at the time; he was spilling out new ideas at such a rate that he couldn’t have created a definitive statement.

In spite of this, *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* certainly had its fair share of heavy-

hitting songs, the most spectacular of which, ‘A Hard Rain’s a-Gonna Fall’, is discussed elsewhere. It was the record that propelled Dylan onto a rising curve that did not relent for more than three years, by which time he had restructured the foundations of his art form, and come to within an ace of dying in his footsteps.

Part Four: Changing Times and the Protest Mask

‘Don’t get up gentlemen, I’m only passing through’ (‘Things Have Changed’, 2000)

‘I’ve made shoes for everyone, even you, while I still go barefoot’ (‘I And I’, 1983)

Dylan’s reputation grew further in 1963 with his increasing profile in the folk community. In particular, Dylan’s relationship with Joan Baez, the renowned ‘Queen Of Folk’, helped him gain acceptance and attention as a performer. Baez began frequently to invite Dylan on stage at her concerts to duet on a few songs, and the rapport between the two was obvious. Their first cooperation came at the Monterey Folk Festival on May 18th, where they duetted on ‘With God on Our Side’, and their association continued through the summer, with Dylan spending time at Baez’s home in Carmel. The pinnacle of these early liaisons came at the Newport Folk Festival, July 26-28, when Dylan sang with Joan to a hero’s welcome on the first afternoon of the festival, before performing his own set on the main stage in the evening.¹⁹

Following these triumphant performances, Dylan joined Baez’s summer tour

and made guest appearances on stage (for which he was paid more than his headlining accomplice).²⁰ Baez undoubtedly had an important influence on Dylan at this time. She was such a famous performer and forceful personality herself that her endorsement of Dylan created a significant boost in his standing, and enabled him to perform to audiences of a magnitude that he could not yet hope to command through his own reputation. For a brief fleeting period of a few crucial, formative months, Dylan was able to bask in her reflected glory, and this was vital for a performer who never failed to get a reaction from a crowd, but who was still lacking wide acclaim, and had a divisive impact on those around him. Baez describes this effect in her autobiography;

In August 1963 I went out on tour and invited Bobby to sing in my concerts. I was getting audiences of up to ten thousand at that point, and dragging my little vagabond out onto the stage was a grand experiment, and a gamble which I knew he and I would eventually win. The people who had not heard of Bob were often infuriated and sometimes even booed him. I would respond by wagging my finger at the offenders like a schoolmarm, advising them to listen to the words, because this young man was a genius. They listened.²¹

Within a year, of course, Dylan would leave Baez eating dust in all respects, as his fame began to reflect his abilities. As long as he was closely associated with the ‘Queen of Folk’, however, he also became more closely associated with the protest genre, an image that Dylan simultaneously cultivated and shunned in 1963. On

August 28th, at the Washington Civil Rights March at which Martin Luther King made his ‘I Have A Dream’ speech, Dylan sang ‘Only a Pawn in Their Game’ and ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’ to the crowd of half a million. ‘Only a Pawn in Their Game’ was a new song that described the murder of a black man, Medgar Evers, who was Mississippi leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, by a white man. Dylan sarcastically denies the white assassin’s responsibility for his crime, since he was part of a wider culture of prejudice that he couldn’t prevent, and was ‘only a pawn in their game’. This rousing, outraged monologue appeared on Dylan’s third album, *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, the record which would forever associate the name of Bob Dylan with the righteousness and idealism of youth, railing and speaking out against injustice and corruption.

***The Times They Are A-Changin':
Dylan The Protester***

In terms of the public perception of this, Dylan’s third long-player, it matters not that of the ten tracks that form its contents, two are tender love ballads, one is a thinly-veiled insult to the protest genre, and of the remaining seven, only four, at a push five, could be considered unambiguous head-banging protests. What matters is the tone of this album. That tone is set, forcefully, by the front cover, a grim black and white shot of Dylan in a work shirt, looking tough, malnourished, gritty and real. It signalled Dylan’s intent; contained within this

sleeve would be songs of harshness, regret and integrity, of pain, resilience and experience. This was the image Dylan wanted. And the sound of the music articulated all these things; it was raw, sparse and acoustic, Dylan growling in a haggard, world-weary nasal drawl, abrasive and trustworthy, incisive and intense. To cap it all off, Dylan named the album after his most famous and memorable protest anthem.

It proved to be too memorable: people liked the image. They could understand and relate to it. The vivid young protest singer Bobby Dylan telling America’s mothers and fathers that ‘The Times They Are A-Changin’, warning them not to criticise what they can’t understand, was such an affront, it was never going to be forgotten easily. The trouble for Dylan was, by the time of the album’s release in January 1964, he had virtually lost interest in its contents. The tone of this album is one of straight-laced protest, criticising capitalism (‘Ballad of Hollis Brown’, ‘North Country Blues), authority (‘Times They Are a-Changin’), the legal justice system (‘The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll’) and blinkered religiosity (‘With God on Our Side’), although closer analysis of the specific contents suggests a slightly murkier picture. It needs to be stressed, however, that in the case of this album the tone is the most important overriding concern, since this is what Dylan wanted to convey in the hope of developing his audience.

When Dylan left protest for fresher pastures in 1964, many of his followers were so disappointed as they felt he had

shifted from being a voice of social conscience, reflected in the songs from *Freewheelin'* and particularly *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, to a voice of internal conscience, concerned more with himself and the individual. They felt he had abandoned political concerns for personal ones. In the light of this, it is interesting that so many of his 'protest' songs relate directly to individuals, which suggests that Dylan rarely took an interest in a general state of affairs. 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll' is a startling example of Dylan's commitment to the human, rather than the general social concern.²² In this song Dylan relates the senseless cold-blooded murder of servant Hattie Carroll by her master William Zanzinger. Hattie is portrayed as a diligent cleaner and loyal mother, a fundamentally good soul, and her master as a decadent, selfish old-money aristocrat. As this story unfolds, Dylan inserts the following chorus at the end of each verse:

*'And you who philosophise disgrace and
criticise all fears
Take the rag away from your face, now
ain't the time for your tears.'*

When, in the final verse, a corrupt judge convicts Zanzinger of first degree murder before handing him a pitiful six-month sentence, Dylan resolves the final line of the chorus,

*'Ah but you who philosophise disgrace
and criticise all fears
Bury the rag deep in your face, for now's
the time for your tears.'*

On the face of it, here is a song in which Dylan points the finger at corrupt judges and brutal aristocrats who abuse their

positions of power. This is the most common assumption as to the intent of the song. However, the effect of the song's ending is to scorn, for their insincerity, those who proclaimed their outrage at the murder of Hattie Carroll. Dylan is despairing of the conspicuous liberals who would philosophise about such a murder, yet for whom the real tragedy is not that an innocent and valuable life has been needlessly lost, but that the legal justice system favours the wealthy. Dylan here is ridiculing this 'liberal' conceit, suggesting that people who like it to be known that they have society's best interests at heart, in fact miss the essential point, which is that the individual can get destroyed.

By implication, therefore, Dylan's own concern in this song is simply for Hattie Carroll. He cares not a jot how she died, or why she died, of what has become of her killer, but simply that she died. This is the reason for Dylan's tears. The social implications of her murder may give the chattering classes something to moan and speculate over, but they will not bring her back. Dylan's actual position in this song, therefore, is the exact opposite of his perceived position. Dylan is not criticising those who abuse their power, he is criticising those who would do just that in the face of more important human concerns. He has cleverly constructed the song in such a way that it continues to cultivate his image as protester, whilst simultaneously remaining true to his personal ideals.

Such finely balanced critiques of the protest element could be made of several of the other 'finger-pointing' songs in this album, but aside from this, there is a wider

agenda on display. Just as Dylan's previous album had featured a cameo of love songs, so *The Times They Are A-Changin'* offered the conciliatory sorrow of 'One Too Many Mornings' and the bitter despair of 'Boots of Spanish Leather', both aching tributes to relationships that had run their course. Aside from the timeless beauty that allowed these ballads to stand out like shining beacons from the heart of this unremittingly grey record, here were two further clues to Dylan's audience that he was prepared to explore the rather more three-dimensional issues of human existence, rather than sacrifice his talents to the infinitely worthy, but artistically limiting causes of the civil rights movements.

Nowhere was this inclination made more explicit than on the album's final cut, 'Restless Farewell'. The song's companion bookend on the album, *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, was embraced as an anthem for a generation, and it very much sounds like a song for other people, rather than for Dylan himself; it may be clever, but it is too calculated to involve emotionally, a product of the head rather than the heart. In the final verse Dylan sings,

*'The slow one now will later be fast
As the present now will later be past'*

In a comparison with the following words from the album's closer, Dylan could hardly have made his future intentions clearer;

*'And since my feet are now fast
And point away from the past
I'll bid farewell and be down the line'*

If this was Dylan consciously

distancing himself from his famous 'anthem', he would go on to evoke a more wistful sense of passing and reflection that confirmed he considered 'protest' something that had gone before, rather than an idea for the future:

*'And ev'ry cause that ever I fought,
I fought it full without regret or shame'*

And the final words of Dylan's 'protest' phase:

*'So I'll make my stand
And remain as I am
And bid farewell and not give a damn'*

Dylan was therefore not attempting to spring any great surprise on people when he named his next album, a very personal affair containing love songs and reminiscences, *Another Side Of Bob Dylan*. He had recognised the end of a particular path, and acknowledged it with admirable honesty and devastating eloquence, in 'Restless Farewell'. It is not hard to understand why Dylan wanted to leave the 'protest' arena behind. Aside from the limited artistic scope it afforded, the audience that embraced him for singing *The Times They Are A-Changin'* simultaneously tried to stop him from moving and changing with those times, from practising what he preached. They wanted him set in stone, a 22-year old museum piece. Dylan had to keep moving.

Conclusion: 'Strike Another Match, Go Start Anew'

(*'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue'*, 1965)

Bob Dylan's entire career has been a constant process of reinvention, at times sabotage, at other times inspiration. He

said in 2001 ‘at times you need to surrender your ambition at a certain point, and assume another character in order to survive’. Essentially, Dylan’s involvement with protest songs was a process of survival. He knew that his career would develop quickly if he turned his attention to the protest genre. As he recalled in the Sixties:

I had to hold a lot of things back before. That’s why I was doing other kinds of writing, because I could of never got away with it in song. People would never understand, they would have killed me. I would have been dead, they would have chased me off the stage, I would have been a total failure. I held it back because I had to survive, I had to make it back then, I couldn’t go too far out. I needed bread, and I had to scuffle. But I don’t have to scuffle any more. I can do it my way now.²³

This pragmatic attitude was what so appalled members of the folk music community when Dylan first ‘plugged in’ at, of all places, the Newport Folk Festival in July 1965. Dylan had been the darling of the festival for his appearances the previous two years, and was greeted by the aghast crowd with boos, heckles and, as legend has it, the surreal sight of Pete Seeger attempting to cut the electric cable. This aggressive reaction gave Dylan a taste of what was to come over the next year, as his audience struggled to adjust to his ever-changing reality.

It is easy to understand the anger and sense of betrayal felt by sections of Dylan’s audience in 1965. Without the benefit of the wider number of unofficial recordings from the early Sixties that have since been

circulated, there would have been few clues as to Dylan’s rock’n’roll roots, little perspective as to the significance of those two electrically-backed releases from the *Freewheelin’* sessions, ‘Mixed Up Confusion’ and ‘Corrina Corrina’. And a glance at the front cover of *The Times They Are A-Changin’* suggests an artist happy to play the role of folk singer, protest singer or dustbowl balladeer, following in the footsteps of his idol Woody Guthrie. However, with the glorious hindsight afforded by a four-decade recording career that, as I write, is continuing to unfold, it is clear that Dylan’s ‘protest’ phase is as valid and precious as any of his other incarnations. It takes its place alongside the psychedelic rock pioneer that followed, alongside the mellow country drifter of 1968-1971, alongside the big venue superstar of 1974, the travelling gypsy minstrel of the Rolling Thunder Revue tours of 1975-76. The ‘protest’ years were in essence the same as the slick orchestrated showman of 1978, the ‘born-again Christian’ years of 1979-81, and the roaming troubadour that has toured the world non-stop from 1988 until the present day, honing and reforming his art on a nightly basis, a new town every day.

‘Protest’ was the first in this long sequence of masks Dylan has adopted during his career, as he puts it, in order to survive. What he did in those early years became a typical trait: Dylan takes a genre, dives headlong into it, swims around until he has ridden every wave, then climbs out to find another idea to explore. This is not to imply that anything he has done whilst

expanding a particular genre is devalued because he has not spent his entire career there. The proof of this is in the live performances from the past fifteen years or so, in which Dylan has returned to songs of all eras to reinvent them on stage. This would not be possible if the songs didn't have a fundamental integrity. Dylan explains:

(question) *'Do you get bored in general playing the songs you played over 30 years ago?'*

(Dylan) *'Well, for me the songs are alive. I don't get bored singing the songs because they have a truth to them. They have a life to them. And it changes from night to night, any old kind of way that I want to play them.'*²⁴

The songs were all true when they were written, and that truth endures. And Dylan has demonstrated on many subsequent occasions the truth the 'protest' genre holds for him. He has tapped directly back into this style of song in 1971, on 'George Jackson', and in 1975, on 'Hurricane', concerning the plight of boxer Rubin Carter. On other occasions live performances, such as the version of 'Masters of War' played at Nuremberg in 1978, have held poignant significance.

Never have Dylan's 'finger-pointing' songs seemed more spectacularly relevant than during his tour of the United States of October and November 2001, in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist atrocities that so rocked the American people on September 11th. Invigorated by a triumphant new album, '*Love And Theft*', and stimulated by the political climate, Dylan rolled across the States

from the West Coast to the East, night after night delivering harrowing renditions of 'Masters of War', 'John Brown', 'A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall', 'This World Can't Stand Long' and 'Searching For a Soldier's Grave', to console the American people. Just as he has always done, Bob Dylan keeps moving, keeps spreading his word, and as a result, remains as relevant as ever.

1. That is how I hear it, rather than the oft claimed 'Play Fucking Loud'
2. Ed. Derek Barker, 'Isis- A Bob Dylan Anthology', (Helter Skelter) 2001, p.viii
3. Rolling Stone Issue 882, November 22nd 2001, 'Bob Dylan by Mikal Gilmore', p.66
4. Interview with Nat Hentoff, first published in The New Yorker October 24 1964 issue).
5. Heylin, 'Behind The Shades', p.29
6. Heylin, 'Behind The Shades', p.30
7. Heylin, 'Behind The Shades', p.58
8. Rolling Stone 882, p.66
9. Rolling Stone 882, p.66
10. Rolling Stone 882, p.66
11. Heylin, 'Behind The Shades', p.302
12. Patrick Humphries and John Bauldie, 'Oh No! Not Another Bob Dylan Book', (Square One Books Ltd. 1991), p.31
13. Rolling Stone 882, p.66
14. Clinton Heylin, 'A Life In Stolen Moments- Bob Dylan Day By Day: 1941-1995' (1996), p.42
15. Heylin, 'Behind The Shades', p.118
16. 'The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan', Peter Doggett, in 'Record Collector' No. 180, August 1994, pp 24-29
17. RC 180, p.26
18. Heylin, 'Behind The Shades', p.115
19. Heylin, 'A Life In Stolen Moments', p.46
20. Andy Gill, 'Classic Bob Dylan 1962-69: My Back Pages', (Carlton 1998), p.37
21. Joan Baez, 'And A Voice To Sing With', (Summit Books 1987), P.90-91
22. The subtlety of 'The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll' was revealed to me through a fascinating lecture by respected academic and renowned Dylan enthusiast Christopher Ricks, at the National Geographical Society in London in 2001.
23. Anthony Scaduto, 'Bob Dylan', (Abacus 1972), p.156
24. Serge Kaganski, interview with Bob Dylan, in MOJO issue 51, February 1998