

# from *Inside A Prune*

*Judas!* four may seem like just another issue four to you all. Here at *Judas!* central however it carries much more significance. When we started out we wondered if we would gain enough support to go on for more than a year. We committed ourselves to four issues and agreed to review where we stood at that time. Thanks to you good subscribers we are ahead of where we needed to be at this date, so we have rewarded your faith in us with a bumper issue and a pledge to keep bringing you the best magazine we possibly can in the next year.

It is good, too, that this issue coincides with a New Year, as it is a time for us to take stock of what we have done and look forward to what we can do for you in the coming four issues.

To look back (sorry, Bob) first, we said we would try to bring you writers from a wide range of callings, as well as well-known names from the world of Dylan writing. With articles by Peter Doggett, Gavin Martin and Mick Gold from the worlds of professional journalism and broadcasting, a number of dissertations from academic establishments, a host of sparkling new writers and contributions from a number of admired amateur Dylan commentators, we feel we have kept that pledge. Plus we have featured professional writers such as Michael Gray, Clinton Heylin, Stephen Scobie and Paul Williams (plus the luminaries from this issue's question and answer forum) in our first year's pages.

Indeed, contributors to this first year of *Judas!* are too many to list here, so we have put their names and details on a new section of our website at [www.judasmagazine.com](http://www.judasmagazine.com), with our thanks for all their work. The pages they supplied have been illuminated by a number of fine photographs, thanks to the sterling efforts of Duncan Hume and the generosity of those that supplied other originals for us to use, including the cover provided by John Hume for issue three.

Looking forward, we have more exciting contributors lined up. Besides these, we are eager to find writers from the world of musicians for example and the no small matter of over half the world's population - women. Yes we want female contributors and have been working hard in this respect for most of the year. Elaine Jackson and Michelle Engert saved us at the last from having a male-only year. Something that would have disappointed me - let's not have the possibility of one ever again, please.

We need to keep improving what we have been doing and follow through on our promise to further develop the website. Sorry that we ran out of time this year to do as much there as we had first planned.

Meanwhile, it has been an enthralling time on the Dylan front since issue three. Was it not wonderful to have all the buzz surrounding the October and November shows? From the opening surprise of a piano-based, acoustic 'Solid Rock', many a song was

transformed by the new approach. There were numerous additions to the Never Ending Tour list of transcendent covers. The word 'lonely' alone from 'Accidentally Like A Martyr' oft delivered a whole world of Dylan to us, and 'Mutineer' was simply astonishing, more of which inside this issue. And who could resist the fun of 'Brown Sugar' or the poignancy of 'Something'?

Plus there was a magnificent official release, *The Bootleg Series Vol. 5, Bob Dylan Live 1975*. It is dynamic, vibrant, overpoweringly moving and sensuous. Then when you manage to put the booklet down and put the music on, that's damn hot too.

So hot we felt we had to review it, step forward 'volunteer' Nicholas Hawthorne, who was given hardly any time to write a quality review of this important release, and take a bow for managing that so well. To make room for this I have moved my book reviews to Issue Five. So many books are now being published on Dylan, and from such a variety of angles, that I intend to look not just at the individual books but at the overall 'publishing on Dylan' picture.

In addition, some of the welter of proposed autumn 2002 books have been delayed. The 'most likely to be delayed', *Chronicles*, is already beginning to feel similar to the saga of that 'second most likely to be delayed' book, Christopher Ricks's *Dylan's Visions Of Sin*. The latter is definitely coming this time, 25th September 2003 is the expected publication date.

Stephen Scobie's updated and revised *Alias Bob Dylan* has also been delayed, in the naïve expectation that a new edition of *Lyrics* might enable a more up-to-date system of page references. Happily, this delay will allow Stephen time for further expansion of his thoughts on "Love And Theft" and give him a chance to cover all recent Dylan activities. There will be full details in the next issue, along with an in-depth interview with Stephen.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy New Year. I hope you have a Bob-full 2003 and that you remember in your busy lives to take time out to re-subscribe to *Judas!* and make ours a happy year too. With your support we can go from strength to strength, but without your subscriptions and contributions we cannot flourish. We hope we have done well enough for you to stay onboard for another sure-to-be-exciting year.

*Andrew Muir*

**Thanks** to all those who contributed articles and photographs to this issue and a special thanks to Peter Vincent for all manner of support and help.

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# Contributors

**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.

**Mick Gold** is currently making a documentary on the history and the meaning of Velazquez's painting 'The Rokeby Venus' for BBC2.

**Nick Hawthorne** has put aside years of bone idleness to present here his thoughts on 'Live 75', 'No Success Like Failure'. He has contributed letters to *ISIS* and lengthy Internet ramblings but this is his first published article. Nick first saw Bob Dylan in 1993 at Hammersmith Odeon when he was 17, but didn't let that put him off. Originally from down south, Nick is getting used to his new surroundings in Bonny Scotland and his splendid new wife!

**John Hinchey** is a staff writer & editor at the Ann Arbor (Michigan) *Observer*, a former *Telegraph* contributor, and the author of *Like a Complete Unknown*. He used to teach American literature at Swarthmore (Pennsylvania) College.

**Elaine Jackson** is undertaking a PhD in Romance Authors of the Inter-War Period (which at times seems never-ending) and have been a Dylan fan since 1970 She would like to be present when he eventually sings 'Lily, Rosemary' live and is the authoress of *Bob Dylan – Postmodern Troubadour?*

**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*.

**Stephen Scobie** has been listening to Bob Dylan for 40 years; it's an activity which keeps his ears healthy! For a living, he teaches Canadian Literature at the University of Victoria in Canada; for a vocation, he writes poetry (with a new *Selected Poems* coming out in March 2003; for an obsession, he writes about Bob Dylan (with a new, revised, expanded edition of *Alias Bob Dylan* due to appear next year).

**Manuel Vardavas** despite being nearly as old as Bob himself, still goes out and performs every week, just like the maestro. In Manuel's case this is not only as a cultured 'libero' on a football pitch, but also as an ex-angry fast bowler turned off-spinner and master tactician on the cricket field. More relevantly he is a highly respected figure of long standing on the rare record collecting scene, has contributed in the past to music publications such as *Why A Pig?* and *Live! Music Review*, and is well known to many Dylan fans from Camden and Utrecht record fairs. Oft engaged in a thus-far fruitless quest for the Squires only 7" single.

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# 'Brownsville Girl': Just Another Horse Opera

by John Hinchey

'Brownsville Girl' is as cunning a song as Dylan has ever devised, and yet it smacks as little of contrivance as anything he's written. The song is pure serendipity. It just unwinds along a palpably untrodden path of memory and desire opened up by the recollection of images from the obscure old movie - *The Gunfighter* - with which it begins. And it unwinds with an extraordinary illusion of spontaneity, as if Dylan (and co-writer Sam Shepard) had no idea where it was leading, let alone how it was going to get there. The lyric teems with observations - *'It's funny how things never turn out the way you had 'em planned,'* or *'I don't remember who I was or where I was bound'* - that seem to refer as much to the experience of composing the song as to its narrative. The song's narrative plotting often feels as if it were being conjured on the spot as a symbolic representation of the composers' experience in writing the song. 'Brownsville Girl' - the song - is itself, at any rate, the only certifiably factual evidence of the tragicomic misadventuring it ostensibly recollects. We can't get it out of our heads - any more than Dylan has been able to shake the memory of *'this movie I seen one time'* - because in the final analysis art is, in its own way, just as messy and unfinished as life. Art heals, but it also draws fresh blood.

This is an old theme for Dylan - Aidan Day treats it rather extensively in his book *Jokerman* - but I don't think Dylan has ever treated the limits of his art as compellingly or as accessibly as he does in 'Brownsville Girl'. Perhaps much of the credit for this should go to Sam Shepard, if not for his contributions to the lyric - I suppose we'll never know who wrote what - then at least for getting Dylan to loosen up and let down his creative guard. 'Brownsville Girl' isn't the first song in which Dylan allows his muse to take him on a wild ride, but it may be the first in which he declines to cover her tracks and conceal his own bewilderments along the way.

'Brownsville Girl' is a sort of mirror image of 'Isis', the 1975 Dylan/Levy song that - not coincidentally perhaps - is the only real rival to 'Brownsville Girl' as the best of Dylan's co-written songs. 'Isis' started out as a 'song about marriage' but quickly turned into a long parable about masculine identity and male bonding, before returning for conclusion to its original subject. 'Brownsville Girl' starts out as a seemingly casual meditation about male identity. Halfway through the song's third verse, this matter is abruptly supplanted by the inner appeal of some anonymous female who - by the end of the song anyway - figures as a mythic muse and mother as well as a long lost lover.

The theme of lost love - treated in a manner that recalls 'Tangled Up in Blue' rather than 'Isis' - nearly takes over the remainder of the song. Only in the final verse of each of the last three of the song's four major sections does Dylan manage to wrench his song back to its initial subject, the solitude of male heroism. But each time the repeated chorus, which divides the song into its four strophes, dissolves this re-assertion of male values in a celebration of the matrix of desire that authorizes and empowers the male ethos: the female who, 'shining like the moon above', will 'show me all around the world'. 'Isis' is a song about a man who, seeking refuge in marriage from the burdens of his male identity, discovers that marriage itself requires him to be re-initiated into the male world. 'Brownsville Girl' is a song about a man who, seeking to recover and reaffirm his primal bond to other males, discovers that access to the

male world is mediated by an interior paramour with whom he has all but lost connection.

The song's opening two verses recount the climactic scenes from *The Gunfighter*, a western movie initially released in 1950 (Dylan was nine years old). However, Dylan never identifies the film or the exact circumstances under which he saw it. He presents his memory of it directly and without explanation, as the anonymous, archetypal, virtually aboriginal 'stuff' of remembrance, a sort of primal scene 'I seen one time' and 'I keep seein'. The core of the memory is the image of the dying gunfighter who 'lay in the sun', unflinchingly face to face with death.

These opening verses have a tableau-like quality, with the gunfighter's heroic solitariness thrown into a kind of monumental relief by the pettiness of the social world that surrounds but never really touches him. Dylan's synopsis pits the authenticity of the gunfighter's unprotected exposure beneath the sun against the unreality of people who've all been variously unmanned by excessive socialization - not just the vain social ambition of the 'hungry kid trying to make a name for himself' but also the vigilantism of the townspeople and the marshal. Their own excessively violent responses seem to arise from some equally vain faith in society as the final arbiter of justice, as if their impulse to 'crush that kid down and string him up by the neck' or 'beat that kid to a bloody pulp' were animated by a belief that in doing so they could somehow undo the gunfighter's death - or at least blot out the terrifying common human fate of the

solitude in death to which this scene exposes them.

The dying gunfighter dispels this entire charade with his 'last breath':

*Turn him loose, let him go,  
let him say he outdrew me fair & square  
I want him to feel what it's like  
to every moment face his death*

Now, I have never seen *The Gunfighter*, and it wouldn't surprise me to find out that these words are uttered in a context that reduces them to pure bluster, just another vain bid to make a name for oneself: 'Let the kid see - fat chance - if he can be as big a man as I am/was - and don't you all forget it/me.' But however predictably cheesy the actual movie may (or may not) have been, Dylan clearly remembers this climactic moment as something very fine, a strangely benedictory final bequest the dying man offers by imparting the one thing he knows that's worth knowing. What he says, in effect, is something like this: 'You can say whatever you want, it doesn't matter, as long as you can live with it honestly in the face of your own death. If you can do that, smaller lies won't hurt you; and if you can't, the truth won't help you.'

In the remembered movie, the gunfighter addresses these words to his killer and to the townspeople gathered around him. In 'real life' (a concept upon which this song wreaks havoc), Gregory Peck addresses them to - well, among others, to a young Bob Dylan - young enough in fact not yet to have adopted 'Bob Dylan' as his lifetime role. What Dylan hears, or remembers hearing, is virtually the voice of the father speaking,

and the memory of it '*blows right through me like a ball and chain*' because what his father is telling - and showing - him is that his patrimony is a death sentence. (No one has to be reminded, I suppose, how closely the gunfighter's remembered words echo Dylan's own justly famous challenge to the *Time* magazine reporter at the end of *Don't Look Back*.)

To be a man is to face death - 'riding 'cross the desert' - and to be a man (in the hairy sense of the word) is what, up to this point, this song is all about. Interestingly, as we learn from Bill Flanagan's interview with Dylan in his *Written in My Soul*, 'Brownsville Girl' was undertaken as Dylan and Shepard's response to 'Doing the Things That We Want To', Lou Reed's 1984 song about the liberating effect on his life of Shepard's plays and Martin Scorsese's movies. I mention this because it plausibly reinforces my sense of 'Brownsville Girl's' opening as a meditation upon male mysteries.

'Doing the Things That We Want To' touchingly presents the fellowship of (male) artists as a companionable buddy system, and it's a mark of Dylan's genius that when challenged to come up with a sequel he thought of *The Gunfighter*. Male bonding and male rivalry are inseparable; indeed, these might be two names for the same thing. I'm not sure I want to assert that the deepest meaning for Dylan of *The Gunfighter* is that males express their mutual affection by agreeing to shoot each other, and/or condescend to notice each other only because they need someone to shoot and/or be shot by. (To tell the truth, though, this is exactly the meaning I've

always gotten from Peckinpah's truly surreal *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*.)

But some variant of this perception seems to inform this song, and that thought might be easier to swallow if we see the whole thing as an allegory, let's say, for the mixture of genuine affection and killer instinct that is bound to inform a creative tribute that any artist offers to one of his peers. And when you realize that the peership that prompted this song includes Dylan, Shepard, Reed, and Scorsese - more strutting male ego than you'd find at the average cock fight - well, it's no wonder Dylan was prompted to recall the image of a gunfighter.

One last thing about the song's opening sequence: Gregory Peck? What has he done to warrant the star billing in 'Brownsville Girl' accorded to Shepard and Scorsese in Lou Reed's song? The only thing we're told about him - apart from the fact that he 'starred' in the movie - is that '*he wore a gun and he was shot in the back*', attributes not of Peck's performance but of the character he was playing. Like the gunfighter he portrayed, Peck is remembered, it seems, simply because he acted his allotted part. He was a man.

Gregory Peck is unquestionably a great actor, but I've always had a bit of a problem with him. He's always a man, alright, but always (it seems) only a man, always a bit too emphatically masculine, a bit too stiff-legged in his chronic male stoicism and upright reserve. A bit too convincing in his enactment of the male role, convincing enough, in fact, to make the male role seem rather like a terribly oppressive - and occasionally even some-

what ridiculous - straight-jacket. Now, I have no idea whether Dylan's vision of Gregory Peck includes this element, or how he feels about it if it does. But in a song that later will ask us to take note of the way the people in movies move, how can Dylan not expect us to remember that Gregory Peck is the one who never seems to bend - even at the waist - even when he's sitting down? But pretend you've never seen Gregory Peck; pretend he doesn't exist, except in this song; isn't his name, the only thing the song gives us really, itself a kind of cock fight in embryo? It even refuses to rhyme rightly the final time it's asked to do so: Peck/back.

(I did in fact watch a video of *The Gunfighter* some time after I wrote this essay in 1989 or so. The only thing I, too, now remember about it is Gregory Peck, who played the gunfighter as a man palpably weary of his own male glamour. His performance appears then to have had a lot more to do with the genesis of this song in Dylan's imagination than I had thought it could - or than the lyric itself really reveals.)

Nonetheless - and regardless of whether or not it is reinforced by the image of Gregory Peck - a feeling of unease with undiluted masculinity has been slowly gathering throughout the song's opening sequence, gathering underneath the overt feeling of admiration for the gunfighter's splendid fortitude. The image of the 'ball and chain' partly stands for this as well, an incipient sense of oppression by the bright aridity of male courage. Something is missing, and



what's most striking about what happens next is how little prompting - and how little delay (none) - is required before that missing something returns. Before Dylan can say anything more, before he has a chance even to realize what he's starting to feel, she is here at his (mind's) side:

*You know I can't believe we've lived so long and are still so far apart*

*The memory of you keeps calling after me like a rolling train*

These are great lines, as fine and potent as any in a song that swarms with strong stuff, and the first thing to be recognized about this passage is its crucial irony. Dylan can't believe how 'far apart' he is from this woman, but he's also audibly taken by surprise to discover - just now - how close to him she still is, as she suddenly appears, 'calling after' him, at the bottom of memories that had seemed to have nothing to do with her. (The irony is similar to that in 'Tangled Up in Blue', where '*I seen a lot of women/but she never escaped my mind*' also means 'my mind has never escaped - gotten rid of - her'.)

Dylan's unspoken surprise introduces one of the major themes of 'Brownsville Girl', the dark and fearful side (from his point of view) of his relationship with this woman/all women. He is not in control; he can't keep her from coming to him; he can't keep her away. But he'd sure like to, and evidence of his vain struggling to convince himself that he is in control - not so much of her as of his own emotions - keeps surfacing throughout the song, especially in the remainder of this first section, which offers an evocative synopsis of the history of their relationship. In fact,

the crucial moment in that relationship comes when she leaves him in Mexico '*to find a doctor*'. (Why do I assume she's going to get an abortion? Does anyone else jump to this conclusion, too?) His refusal to follow her seems to originate in some (stupid) need to assure himself that he's still his own man, still inwardly free to let her in or keep her out of his heart. I'm not sure what physical danger (if any) we're supposed to imagine is being referred to when he talks about not '*letting my head get blown off*', but surely the deepest fear this image expresses is his fear of losing his mind to her. But it's too late, he's already lost his head. He's only deluding himself in thinking that this is a matter still within his control, something he can let or not let happen.

Dylan himself (that is, his protagonist, whom I always feel free to call 'Dylan' because Dylan is, after all, his own fiction, a fiction that in the present case, Sam Shepard is helping to concoct) - Dylan himself seems to know this, though he doesn't yet seem to recognize the truth of it. Some such odd mixture of self-deceit and self-knowledge infuses the final verse of this opening section, in which Dylan, by way of explaining how he gets on without his one true love, imagines himself in a car heading east with another woman, who '*ain't you but she's here and she's got that dark rhythm in her soul*'. The truth is that this other woman is not really 'here' either, because without his true love there is no 'here' here. Like Louise in 'Visions of Johanna', this other woman is 'just near,' inhabiting a spectral 'here' made mockingly unreal by her absence.

She - the Brownsville girl - remains inevitably 'here' for him in the only way that counts - a fact that the other she knows not to bring up because '*she knows this car would go out of control*'.

'This car,' I would suggest, is this song, a vehicle Dylan both does manage precariously to control - he is driving, finding the words that drive it forward - and does not control: he can't get out of it. This is the only car he's got; indeed, now that he's '*got in behind the wheel*', it's got him and is taking him for a ride, and along a path he does not seem really free to alter. The composer of this song is less the driver of a car on the open highway than the engineer of a 'rolling train'.

And that brings us back to from where we started. Who is this woman, and what is she to him? There are a lot of ways to try to answer that question, though the narrative manner of this song finally thwarts any efforts to apprehend this relationship in terms of some solidly defined fictional history. In a song which improvises fictions upon its own fictions as freely as this one does, every image is eventually mobilized as a vehicle in some still deeper metaphor.

It's not just that it doesn't pay to speculate whether the Brownsville Girl might be Sara Dylan, or some ur-Sara we don't even know about - that way always leads to an imaginative dead end. My point here is that even within the fictional context of the song in which she appears, the Brownsville Girl (like Johanna) possesses a reality that is some unresolvable mix of the figurative and the literal. Or put it this way: Listen to this song often enough and

when the Brownsville girl makes her first appearance in the third verse you're less likely to believe that the speaker is actually remembering someone than to feel that he's spontaneously inventing a 'local habitation and a name' for an emotion that has suddenly overtaken him. (Or put it this way: Dylan-as-fiction has become in this song a figure for Dylan-as-fiction-maker.)

What this means for the issue at hand - who is this woman? - is that in 'Brownsville Girl' such issues are best addressed as questions about the song's implicit mythology. The Brownsville girl is an archetypal female - just as Gregory Peck/the gunfighter is an archetypal male - and the female in Dylan's mythology is the human form of motion, just as the male is the human form of stasis: the renewals of life ('rolling train') against the finality of death ('ball and chain'). The male embodies the courage and wit and spirit required to face death, something Dylan seems to apprehend instinctively; but the female embodies something that Dylan finds almost unimaginable without her mediation, the courage and wit and spirit to face life:

*I can still see the day you came to me on  
a painted desert*

*In your busted down Ford and your  
platform heels*

*I could never figure out why you chose  
that particular place to meet*

*Ah. but you were right it was perfect as  
I got in behind the wheel*

The image of a 'painted desert' as the setting for the beginning of this relationship is especially evocative of the tensions endemic to it, suggesting both the female's

fertile vitality and the ascetic male's inbred suspicion that her colours are a species of harlotry, a mere cosmetic upon the face of death in a world where, to steal a phrase from another song, *'it's doom alone that counts'*. This conflict is not so much resolved as held at bay by other aspects of the manner in which she first comes to him. The *'busted down Ford'* - considerably less intimidating than a *'rolling train'* - disarms him with an appealing vulnerability, and her *'platform heels'* betoken a seductive compliance to male preferences. (Getting women onto a pedestal has always been a favored male ruse for getting them to keep still.)

There's something self-betraying as well in those platform heels, and it seems clear that the Brownsville girl shares some of the responsibility for the failures in this relationship. She seems to be hedging her bets in setting out for Mexico to find a doctor, just as he hedges his in not going after her. The only additional glimpse we get of their relationship comes in the song's second section, when they visit Ruby outside Amarillo, where she is installed in the absent Henry Porter's *'wrecking lot'* in a grimly demonic vision of female entrapment within the male's sublime solitude. Held in her place by a lack of money (a male fetish, if not in fact a male concept), Ruby has lost the will to take control of her own destiny. But she knows what she has allowed to happen to her, and she can smell the same thing happening to this other woman. When Ruby asks them how far they're going, one of them (probably the man), answering (superficially) for both of them, responds:

*We're going all the way till the wheels  
fall off and burn*

*Till the sun peels the paint and the seat  
covers fade and the water mocassin dies*

This is (mythologically speaking) an exclusively male vision, the same apotheosis of sun-bleached purity into which the gunfighter made his triumphant exit at the beginning of the song. What is evoked here is a kind of ritual journey to purify the male of any taint of the female - no rolling wheels in motion, no paint or covers to shroud the naked truth, no slithering mocassined feet, no life. Bop till you drop: the male's antagonistic genius for turning a fertility dance into a dance of death. In accommodating to this, the Brownsville girl has been reduced to going along for the ride on a trip that would have been inconceivable without her:

*Ruby just smiled and said, 'Ah you  
know some babies never learn.'*

The truth about what has kept these two 'so far apart' all these years is fairly hideous to contemplate, and the memory of Ruby's words sends Dylan's mind back to the memory of the old movie he started with. He returns with a difference, however. He recognizes it now as his movie - he's suddenly inside the movie he was earlier just watching - but he's strangely immobilized:

*But I can't remember why I was in it  
or what part I was supposed to play*

What he does remember is Gregory Peck - the apotheosis of immobility - and something new: *'the way that people moved'* and the sense that they're *'looking my way'*, expecting him to make his move. The second section of the song ends here,

rather abruptly, and when the chorus returns, it does so this time as a sort of spontaneous prayer to the goddess of motion, whom he needs now to *'show me all around the world'*.

The song's third section opens with Dylan caught up in the midst of a shoot-out in some variant of the western movie he originally *'had in mind'*, a variant that Dylan's imagination has probably concocted on the spot, a spontaneous fiction that might even qualify as an *'original thought'*. At any rate, as in a dream, though he recognizes it as his movie (if it wasn't his, he wouldn't be in it), he has no idea what he's doing in it. All he has to go on, it appears, is some obscure sense that he's gotten himself into this mess, because when *'shots rang out'* - and he must react with the instincts either of a victim or a violator - he chooses the latter: *'I didn't know whether to duck or to run, so I ran.'* He's quickly *'cornered in a churchyard'*, and the next thing he knows, his picture is in the papers, *'a man with no alibi'*.

The exact plot never becomes clear, but that hardly matters. This dream/movie is some sort of spontaneous fable about - well, that's hard to say without spoiling it, but for lack of anything better, let's just say a fable about what it's like to be absolutely your own man, and only your own man. A true original, your own life becomes something of an excrescence, and your being is arrested in a false position, always somewhere you do not belong, hoisted with the petard of your own alienation - which is as good a way as any, I suppose, to interpret the literal hanging that seems to await him.

There is no imaginable rescue - unless someone goes *'out on a limb'* (ah, the way some people move!) and claims you as her own: *'You said I was with you'*. In rescuing him from his alienation by providing him with the spiritual *'alibi'* of a connection with someone outside himself, her identification of him is a fundamentally creative act: *'It was the best acting I saw anybody do'*. The emotional repercussion of this remembered redemption - which figures finally as an oblique allegory of their first meeting - jolts Dylan out of his reverie, provoking two half-hearted evasions before he finally yields to the emotional force of her claim on him:

*I've always been the kind of person that  
doesn't like to trespass but some times  
you just find yourself over the line  
Oh, if there's an original thought out  
there I could use it right now  
You know I feel pretty good but that  
ain't saying much. I could feel a whole  
lot better  
If you were just here by my side to show  
me how*

Dylan's expressed aversion to trespassing masks a deeper aversion to being trespassed against - she may have saved him from a hanging but, as we've seen, she is herself an emotional snare from which he cannot escape - and his plea for originality is a last bit of gallows humor from a man who's still not quite ready to concede that getting hitched is not the same as getting hanged. But having gotten that last grasp at sublime solitude out of his system, he abruptly drops his guard and owns up to the simple truth that his well-being is inextricable from his responsiveness to her.

And by admitting the truth of her claim on him, in an important sense he brings her to his side. He suddenly does feel 'a whole lot better', and this access of good feeling shows in the first two verses of the song's next and final section, a sort of post-coital epilogue in which the two of them converse in a newly free and easy exchange of mutual disappointments and satisfactions. This passage, one of the most satisfying representations of sexual intimacy Dylan has ever composed, is full of fine things, though I am especially fond (perversely enough, I guess) of the way Dylan manages slyly to sneak in an imagined recovery of solitude ('when I'm gone') under cover of a (not insincere) profession of self-abnegation. The best thing in this passage, however, is these lines:

*And you know there was something  
about you baby that I liked that was  
always too good for this world  
Just like you always said there was  
something about me you liked that I left  
in the French Quarter*

I haven't the faintest idea what specifically it might have been about the Brownsville girl that was 'too good for this world,' or what it was that Dylan 'left in the French Quarter'. But then I don't think Dylan intends for us to know; in fact, I'm not sure Dylan knows himself. These lines are pure circumlocution. They draw a discreet circle of words around what's better left unsaid, even as they assert that part of what holds this couple together is the something that's missing from what each can give to the other. Their satisfactions are inseparable from their disappointments.

Dylan's newly recovered good feeling first manifests itself just before this, at the end of the third section, when he returns to the figure of solitary male heroism with which his song began. He returns this time with a further difference: his attachment to Gregory Peck - and all he stands for - is no longer felt as a species of possession by some fated yet strangely self-alienating obsession. He's standing in line now because he wants to, out of a freely confirmed affection for a figure in whom he now recognizes himself: 'I'll see him in anything, so I'll stand in line'.

You might say that this verse is what Dylan (and Shepard) began the song trying to find a way to write - words that express, in a credible way, the grateful attachment we feel toward those artists and their created images to which we turn and return to discover and replenish our sense of ourselves. As an aside I'd also suggest that beyond whatever importance it has in his own psychodrama, the measured self-reliance of this verse is also probably intended as a lesson for us - Dylan fans. Certainly the words Dylan used earlier in the song to describe his obsession with his memories of *The Gunfighter* - 'something about that movie though, well I just can't get it out of my head' - are echoed in his complaint to an interviewer (included in the 1987 TV show celebrating *Rolling Stone's* 20th anniversary) that his fans 'think they know me just because I've written some song that happens to bother them in a certain way that they can't get rid of it, you know, in their mind.' If we can't get his songs out of our heads, that's our responsibility (and pleasure), not his.

Dylan returns to *The Gunfighter* one last time, in the last verse of the song's final section, and he returns this time in a way that acknowledges, sombrely yet without a trace of self-pity, the tragic destiny that defines him. He begins this verse by repeating the song's first line, and the repetition allows him to identify what was false about that old memory:

*There was a movie I seen one time  
I think I sat through it twice*

As Dylan initially recalled it, *The Gunfighter* was no tragedy. It was merely high melodrama, precisely because the slain hero was allowed a final apotheosis, as if doom alone counted. Finis.

But that's not the way it is at all. In fact, it hasn't been right since the opening credits and the '*man riding*' *cross the desert*'. A man doesn't ride across the desert; a man rides a horse across the desert. And tragedy, you might say (and if you won't, I will) is the imaginative horse-sense that insists upon reclaiming the meaning of death within the eternal circle of life, where everything keeps on happening. Death finishes nothing; it all always remains to be done again. They will indeed talk about you 'plenty' when you're gone, because they don't care that you're dead; they won't even let you remain good and dead, because what the dead are good for is grist for the living. In this sense, from the perspective of the (woman's) eternal circle, the (male) heroes are always '*shot in the back*', always '*torn down*' from their lonely apotheosis in the sky to light the way for new life. The dead themselves are truly dead and gone, 'a long time ago.' Life simply goes on. The horse survives its riders.

### **Appendix: 'New Danville Girl'**

In the course of my essay on 'Brownsville Girl', I suggested that we'll probably never know what parts of the lyric Dylan wrote and what parts Sam Shepard wrote. However, we can learn a lot about who wrote what by comparing the lyric of 'Brownsville Girl' with that of 'New Danville Girl', the song that Dylan and Shepard actually wrote and that Dylan recorded (but didn't release) for *Empire Burlesque* (1985). In re-recording the song for *Knocked Out Loaded* (1986), Dylan seems to have revised the original lyric on his own, without Shepard's help, so all these lyric changes can be attributed to Dylan. Also, the places Dylan chose to revise the lyric probably tell us something about where his interest in the song is strongest, and we can make some semi-educated guesses, based on that, about where each co-writer may have taken the lead in composing the original lyric.

When I wrote my essay on 'Brownsville Girl', I hadn't heard 'New Danville Girl'. Now that I have heard it I am less interested in comparing the two to find out what Dylan wrote than in doing so simply to watch and admire how genius works. 'New Danville Girl' is a good song, more or less as good as 'Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight', the *Infidels* (1983) song that in fact it somewhat resembles. 'Brownsville Girl' is a great song, but Dylan didn't arrive at it by trying just to improve the original. He changed it into a fundamentally different kind of song. 'New Danville Girl' is a song about spinning your emotional wheels; 'Brownsville Girl' is a song about hitting ground again.

Despite the fact that Dylan changed little more than one-third of the words, 'New Danville Girl' and 'Brownsville Girl' are as different (and as related) as 'Shot of Love' and 'Every Grain of Sand'. The genius of it all is that his revision was exactly that, a re-visioning of what the song could be all about. He was able to look at a more or less fully finished song and see in it the rough draft of another - and better - song altogether.

I'm mostly just going to tell you how Dylan changed the song, but I'll try to say a few things along the way to justify these claims.

The chorus is unchanged except for the change of 'take me all around the world' to 'show me all around the world'. This latter change is a simple stylistic improvement, since 'show' fits better with the image in the previous line of the girl 'shinin' like the moon above'. And, of course, where the original has 'Danville girl', the revision has 'Brownsville girl'. (Yes, 'Danville,' not 'New Danville'. The song is called 'New Danville Girl' for the same reason the song on *Street-Legal* is called 'New Pony'. There is a traditional song called 'Danville Girl', though Dylan undoubtedly also knew the Woody Guthrie/Cisco Houston adaptation which includes not only the image of 'Danville curls' - as the traditional song does - but also the rhyme with 'pearl': 'Bet your life she was a pearl, she wore that Danville curl'.)

'New Danville Girl' (hereafter NDG) opens on a note of troubled uncertainty that doesn't arise in 'Brownsville Girl' (BG) until the end of the second section

and that's utterly alien to the sense, with which BG opens, of a mind abruptly seized by some fatal knowledge:

*I wish I could remember that movie just  
a little better*

*All I remember about it was that it  
starred Gregory Peck*

The rest of the opening verse is the same, except we're told the gunfighter was shot down 'in the back', information that's withheld in BG until the final lines of the song.

Differences in the next three verses are all stylistic. We get 'the sheriff beat that boy' instead of 'the marshal now he beat that kid' (as the killer is called twice in the first verse); 'into' rather than 'to' a bloody pulp; 'your memory', not 'memory of you' (a more evocative phrase & cadence); and 'the painted desert' for 'a painted desert'. The fifth verse also has a couple of stylistic differences: 'all night into San Antone' instead of 'all night until we got into San Antone' and 'see' rather than 'find' a doctor. (I don't think I would have been as likely to assume she's seeking an abortion had I heard NDG first. 'Find' suggests more strongly she's in some sort of trouble & is looking for help.)

The fifth verse also has a major substantive change. The original has them sleeping beneath the Alamo 'out under the stars', where BG changes the subject to recall that 'your skin was so tender and soft'. By itself, this may be a pointless change, but the revision gives Dylan a new rhyme to work with, enabling him to fashion one of the song's greatest lines, the first in the song to touch directly on his crippling emotional fears: 'I would have

*gone on after you but I didn't feel like letting my head get blown off.* The original expressed merely his disorientation after her abandonment of him: *'I stayed there a while till the whole place it started feeling like Mars'*.

Similarly, the original version of the final verse of the long opening section glossed over the feeling of utter deprivation Dylan expresses here in BG. The opening and closing lines of this verse were unchanged, but the middle lines in NDG would, I'm sure, never have provoked me to think of Louise in 'Visions of Johanna':

*Something about her reminds me of you, like when she sings 'Baby Let the Good Times Roll'*

*Ah but I'm too over the edge to remember the things we used to talk about or do*

The first three verses of section two - the tale about Ruby - remain unchanged in substance, but Dylan extensively revised the first two verses to make Ruby a more vividly realized figure and to make her victimization by Henry Porter more unmistakable. This is how NDG goes:

*Well we crossed the panhandle and then we headed out towards Amarillo  
Rushing down where Henry Porter used to live, he owned a wrecking lot outside of town*

*We could see Ruby in the window as we came rolling up in a trail of dust  
She says, 'Henry's not here he took off but you all can come in and stay a while'*

*Well she told us times were tough but we never knew just how bad off she was*

*You know she would change the subject every time money came up*

*You know her eyes were filled with so much sadness, she was so disillusioned with everything*

*She said, 'Even the swap meets around here are getting pretty corrupt'*

The final verse of this section was also greatly rewritten. The original went like this:

*I keep trying to remember that movie though and it does keep coming back  
But I can't remember what part I played or who I was supposed to be  
All I remember about it is it's starring Gregory Peck and he was in it  
And everything he did in it reminded me of me*

To a large extent the revision merely tightened and sharpened the language of what is probably the weakest verse in NDG. It also sharpened our sense of what is going on here, jettisoning something we don't need to be told (*'everything he did in it reminded me of me'*) in favor of bringing to the fore Dylan's anxieties about being put on the spot by being pressured to make some self-revealing move.

Dylan's revisions to the third section amount pretty much to a series of deft stylistic touch-ups. In the first verse of this section in NDG, *'they opened fire'* when he was crossing the street, and when he runs, *'it sounded to me like I was being chased by the midnight choir'*. This image is attractive, but the suggestion of some sort of quasi-religious ritual sacrifice is both heavy-handed and excessively oblique in comparison to the image of Dylan being *'cornered in a churchyard'* in BG.



Three of the four changes made in the second verse all testify to the difference one or two words can make. The words in brackets are all missing from NDG: ‘*underneath [it] it said*’, ‘*testify [for me]*’, and ‘*cry [real tears]*’. The final change turns a compliment into a prayer: ‘*It was the best acting I saw anybody do*’ was originally ‘*It was the best acting I ever saw you do*’.

The third verse has a few very minor changes - the ‘oh’ at the beginning of the second line was originally in the middle of it, and the last two lines began with a ‘*yeah*’ and an ‘*oh yes I could*’, respectively - and one major improvement. The opening line of this verse in BG, a finely shy confession/evasion of Dylan's congenital shyness, replaces a balder, prosier plain statement in the original: ‘*Now I've always been an emotional person, but this time it's asking too much*’.

The final verse of this section has another trivial change - ‘*oh yes I am but*’ instead of ‘*but you know*’ at the beginning of the second line - and a couple of substantive changes in the last two lines that don't change the meaning much but sure do say it a whole lot better. NDG has this:

*He's got a new one out now  
You know he just don't look the same  
But I'll see him anyway and I'll stand  
in line*

The BG version of these lines - especially the revision of ‘*anyway*’ to ‘*in anything*’ - is a lot more emphatic in placing responsibility for standing in line squarely within the heart of the fan.

Except for the opening ‘*you know it's funny how*’, the first two verses of the

song's final section were completely rewritten. This is NDG:

*You know it's funny how people just  
wanna believe what's convenient  
Nothing happens on purpose, it's an  
accident if it happens at all  
And everything that's happening to us  
seems like it's happening without our  
consent  
But we're busy talking back & forth to  
our shadows on an old stone wall  
Ah you got to talk to me now baby tell  
me about the man that you used to love  
Tell me about your dreams just before  
the time you passed out  
Oh yeah tell me about the time that our  
engine broke down and it was the worst  
of times  
Tell me about all the things I couldn't  
do nothin' about*

This is where we know we're dealing with a different song, where we notice that a lot of what happened - emotionally - during the course of BG hasn't been happening in NDG. Apparently, back toward the end of the third section of NDG, she didn't silently come to his side (as I said she did in BG) when he said ‘*if you were just here to show me how*’. (The wistful ‘*Ah yes I could*’ at the beginning of that line in NDG helps ensure we won't be tempted to think she may have.)

Unlike in the corresponding two verses in BG, those in NDG quoted just above don't allow us to overhear the marvelous intimacy of a couple unexpectedly together. He doesn't quote her, as he does in BG, because, in NDG they are ‘*still so far apart*’, not yet on speaking terms again. He is still pleading with her to talk

with him, and the language in which he does so has a rather tired, defeated sound to it, like he's grasping for straws. At the end of NDG, this couple is still talking back & forth to their shadows on an old stone wall. (What a great line! - the only one in this passage that, tellingly, doesn't sound tired & defeated. Too bad it had to go.)

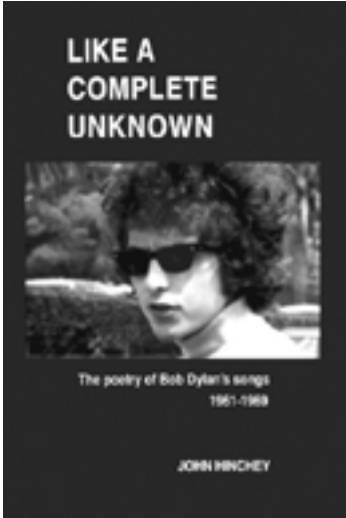
The sense of having gone nowhere, of being in the same fix he was when the song began, is clinched by the final verse, which simply picks up & reiterates pieces from earlier sections. You may think I read too much (or the wrong things) into the final verse of BG, but I would never have been tempted to read much into this:

*There was a movie I seen one time  
And I think I sat through it twice  
I don't remember who I was or what  
part I played  
All I remember about it was  
It's starring Gregory Peck*

*But that was a long time ago and it was  
made in the shade*

It's amazing what a difference one little word can make. In BG, 'I think I sat through it twice' is lethally ironic, deftly deflating the illusions of singularity and finality that have gathered around the image of the gunfighter. The 'and' at the beginning of this half-line in NDG chases away the unspoken 'yet' that makes that reading possible and turns this statement instead into an elaboration of the preceding half-line. That 'and' - abetted for sure by the context of a different song - reduces this half-line to a mere testament to the depth of Dylan's still unresolved obsession with the gunfighter.

'Made in the shade' provides, for my tastes, too awkwardly abrupt an ending, though it does have something to be said for it. The implication, anyway, is that Dylan is himself still in the dark as he sings these words.

	<p>'A sincere, in-depth, nonacademic look at a fascinating subject. Hinchey's thoughtful and clear sharing of what he hears in these songs will offer many readers stimulating reminders of and insights into their own relationships with this songwriter's poetry.'</p> <p><b>Paul Williams, author of Bob Dylan: Performing Artist, vols. 1 &amp; 2.</b></p> <p>To purchase this publication in the US visit the authors website at: <a href="http://www.stealinghomepress.com">www.stealinghomepress.com</a> and for UK/European sales go to the <i>Isis</i> website.</p>
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# No Success Like Failure...

## A Review of *Live 75 - The Rolling Thunder Revue*

by Nick Hawthorne

When push comes to shove, *Hard Rain* is my favourite Bob Dylan album. It's the one I would rescue first in a fire (after my loved ones, family photographs etc naturally), the one I play most often, the one I have most affection for. I know that isn't a commonly held opinion, although people seem to take issue mainly with the structure of it and the sense of missed opportunity, rather than with the quality of the songs. I have never been one for missed opportunities.

I have never been that sort of completist either. I don't expect or need an exact replication of a live show in a live release. There can be too much worry about what is representative and not enough thought of 'bugger that, does it move you, thrill you, excite you?' *Hard Rain* does all these things for me, and it does them most of all because it is edgy, it takes risks, it has been created at a point of tension, both artistic and personal, and I can actually hear that in the recording. I know it isn't a fake and that is what I find totally captivating.

Live releases give the opportunity to not be representative. A truly representative 'Rolling Thunder' release would just take a single show and put it out on disc. All the performers, all the comings and goings - I mean that is how it actually happened. Many would love that, it takes the completist theory to the extreme and a lot of people would revel in it. I for one would not. I am partial to a bit of editing, meddling, retelling of the story where appropriate, creation of something other than a historical document. So go on... give us something exciting...

So here we have the next part of what will undoubtedly be an endless (dare I say never-ending) string of 'Bootleg' releases from the Dylan vaults. Hurrah I say! They've done the box set (perfectly excellent), they've done *Live 1966* (complete, sounds great, everyone happy, defining moment) and now they turn to the glorious 1975 first leg of the Rolling Thunder Revue. I was surprised that the hoards of cyber geeks (of which I am proudly one) seemed a bit put out by this news. There was a lot of 'Oh God, this has been bootlegged to death' and 'We've already got '76' and 'Why no NET? We need a NET release' etc. Most of these arguments seem totally invalid, except the point about the NET. We do need a NET release and I'm sure that will come (and then what year... what shows...) But I for one was more than happy. I want all the good stuff out officially, sounding great and I don't really care what order it comes in as long as it comes. Then came the speculation about what would actually be on it. As the news trickled out, and then when the track listing was announced, the cyber geeks picked over it like vultures picking at the carcass of some poor unfortunate animal. I watched my cyber geek pals going about their business on this one with mild amusement and waited to get *Live 1975* in my mitts and give it a whirl.

I hadn't plunged into a pit of despond about the songs that were missing, the versions that had been chosen, the sequencing of the tracks etc. But it seems no-one can tackle any Dylan release without dealing with what it is isn't rather than what it is, what isn't on it as opposed

to what is, so here goes. 'When I Paint My Masterpiece' is not here (and the geeks went no no no no no no!) No 'Masterpiece'? How? Why? It opened those '75 shows! It opened *Renaldo and Clara*. It was a great raggedy opener, signalling intent! Bloody Sony/Columbia bastards, messing with things again... but listen. Listen to the unhampered glory that is the opening song on the *Live '75* release and all those questions become immaterial. This is the song that opens this album, and thus becomes the de facto opening number. Not in fact, but in what we have here.

'Tonight I'll Be Staying Here With You' swears Bob. It's a promise I am desperate for him to keep and any thoughts of 'When I Paint My Masterpiece' are blown away. It becomes a total irrelevance. This is a Bob that hadn't been heard before. The voice is utterly new. Sure he shouted in 1974, but he doesn't shout here. He projects, he communicates. As Allen Ginsberg said '*He is the emperor of sound*'. There is nothing ragged about this performance. The song has been re-written and re-arranged and morphed into the most glorious concert opener I can imagine. I wouldn't have it any other way as it leaps from the speakers into my ears. It sounds like Rolling Thunder. To hear Bob confident, as confident in his own abilities as this, is truly a wonder. To hear Bob shout '*Get Ready!*' part way through the song is truly thrilling. It thrills me like the '66 Manchester performance. Like the recent performances of 'Accidentally Like a Martyr'. It is a performance that truly opens *Live 1975* up as an album. It sets out a stall, draws a line in the sand and dances on it.

The lyric changes have a great deal to do with the huge success that ‘Tonight’ is and why it succeeds so effectively as an opening salvo. From the opening vitriolic scream of ‘*Throw my ticket in the wiiiiiiii-innnd!!*’ this is a very different beast to the *Nashville Skyline* original version, and also to all those that have followed since 1975. I always found a great deal of eroticism (steady...) in both legs of the Rolling Thunder tour. I find both earthy, sexy, passionate, edgy, and that intent is signalled by Dylan in the next line :

*Throw my mattress out there too*

There is a real passion in this; it positively brims with energy. Dylan sounds supercharged. And what of the band? Oh what a band! What a sound! I have never heard a sound like this before or since. The clatter of the drums, that beautiful pedal steel, the wailing intertwining guitars, the grooving bass. Magic.

The bridge is driving, urgent, impatient:

*Is it really any wonder?*

*The changes we put on each other's heads*

*You came down on me like rolling thunder*

*I left my dreams on the river bed*

When Dylan deliciously sings ‘*rolling thunder*’ in that bridge you hear the swell of the crowd, cheering, whistling with glee, and again a shiver goes all over me, not for the first time, on only track one of disc one. Something is happening here... ‘*Get Ready!*’ he warned us. And we better do just that.

Dylan was at his creative and artistic peak between 1974 and 1983, but at this

time in particular. This was the heart and soul. I never really understand why there is any dispute about this. Of course the burst of creativity between 1962 and 1966 was remarkable. Dylan was unquestionably on a roll at that point, young, raw, brutal talent. Yet the period from the recording of *Blood on the Tracks*, his best studio album, and his best period of sustained writing, through the wonders of the Rolling Thunder Revue and everything it brought with it, had that brilliant sense of creative art about it.

Something else I don’t understand is the way collaboration is often devalued in art. Dylan followers are desperate for Dylan to stand alone as a single unquestioned genius. Which I believe he is, let’s not argue about that, a brilliant mind unquestioned. Yet often, when he has been at his most alive, his most challenging and challenged, it has been when he has been collaborating with others. There is an excitement that comes when artists meet and collaborate that is quite different to that which is created by an artist working totally alone. The collaborative effort tends to bring something wilder, something less controlled.

The 1966 shows came about through a collaboration between Dylan and The Band. There is no doubt that The Band pushed Dylan, made him more excited in what he was trying to achieve and even gave him added ideas and impetus and ultimately the freedom to achieve. Dylan has always been a control freak, but when he allows others into his thoughts, into his creative art, the possibilities are thrown wide open. The Rolling Thunder Revue of

1975 and 1976 took its lifeblood from that sort of collaboration. From all sorts of different artists coming together, and a hybrid emerging that was totally captivating. This is specifically what Dylan was trying to achieve. He always said that he accepted chaos, and chaos provides its own perverse energy. These are his people and he thrives in their company. As well as the actual musicians involved, and the guest artists that hooked up with the Revue for parts of the tour, there were the background figures such as Allen Ginsberg, adding to the sense of creation, of birth, that jumps out of these recordings. That's what really excites me, and that quality drips from *Live 1975*.

The set (as it is presented here, and that is how I'll deal with it) moves on through rave-up versions of two of Dylan's early classic compositions. 'It Ain't Me, Babe' is a pure delight, showing off the wonder of the band (more like an orchestra with Dylan as conductor). The verses are all stealth, with a clipped vocal that draws you in before the chorus explodes and you lose yourself in pure celebration. After the glorious opening song, this doesn't give you much time to draw breath, but it demonstrates the chops of the whole group, and shows how powerfully Dylan is singing. 'A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall' is similar but gives me mixed feelings. Let's face it, you can't fail to be moved by the rave-up stomp of this version, as the music grabs you and slaps you round the face. The images are like a whirlwind around your head as Dylan barks them out. A huge grin lights up my face every time I hear it, and my

mind flits to Allen Ginsberg's comments on this version :-

*The electric made rhythm is exact to actual American speech with no romantic distortion. It syncopates even more...*

I love the thought of the enthusiastic Ginsberg listening to this version of 'Hard Rain' with wild joy and celebration, his beard shaking as he slapped his thighs in time with pure delight. And it is that enjoyable, but I think 'Hard Rain' is one of those Dylan songs of such power that the original blueprint cannot be altered too much. It thrives off of what Ginsberg refers to as the '*romantic distortion*'. Far be it from me to disagree with Allen Ginsberg!! But I can hear the excitement in the sound and an appeal in Dylan's vocal, and yet... You need to hear, really hear the power of those words. Layer the emphasis on, drown the song in power and pathos because it never suffers. Witness the '94 Japan version with the orchestral backing. Potential for disaster huge, outcome, a masterpiece. Why? Because this is the one song that responds to the call for what might otherwise be considered an OTT arrangement, because it relishes the melodrama. Here the melodrama is replaced by a wild and enthralling stomp, OTT certainly, but you do forget what is actually being said and revel in the music.

Speaking of which, this tour was the most musically successful of Dylan's career. The Band tour of 1966 was amazing, but with the small number of electric songs performed, I think the 1975 tour must be considered musically more adventurous. 1974 suffered from many

things and the music became less interesting. Few risks were taken. Tours following Rolling Thunder have all had a distinct musical flavour. 1978 is not exactly to my tastes, and seemed a deliberate excursion by Dylan. Again you could say it was another 'act' but the Las Vegas style, the big band sound, the corny (yet tongue firmly in cheek) introductions all add to the sense that it wasn't from the heart. It was more of a conscious detour, whereas Rolling Thunder was something Dylan had to do. Essentially '78 was a fake and this isn't. The sound of Rolling Thunder I think is close to the sound that is truly in Dylan's heart and soul. This is his sound.

The backing could be thought of as orchestral, with all the different sounds going on and melding to such wonderful effect. When Scarlet Rivera's violin joins in you have that complete wonderful Rolling Thunder array of sound. The band was not a one trick pony. Neither was it a ragged drunk's choir, as has been suggested before. The band was on the money. Just listen for proof. They had subtleties within them, but melodrama was what they did best of all.

'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll' is devilishly dramatic. Dylan cast as prosecutor as he spins out the story to Judge and Jury. The band fall naturally in behind him, punctuating appropriately. They know just what is required here, and they make it perfect. The song has found its most powerful setting. And the drama is what makes it work, what makes this whole set work. As the bass and drums sound ominously, we are about to hang,

draw and quarter William Zanzinger. Dylan controls the vocal, puts you at the scene and then dramatically delivers the punchline. The payoff has never rung so true:

*Bury the rag deep in your face*

*Now is the time for your tears*

But we have just been warming up with these old songs. The next two performances are the core of both discs and highlight the reason for the success of this tour, and of the very concept of the Rolling Thunder Revue. It is the drama. This is a stage show on the road. A musical in many respects. Not of your Lloyd Webber variety of course, but it harks back to something from long ago. Don't lose sight of the original idea that sparked in Dylan's brain. To have a musical show, a troupe of performers, poets, musicians touring around the country, dropping in on places unannounced and publicising the Revue by word of mouth, building up the excitement in the town of who would be there and what would happen and then afterwards, bang! They were gone. The circus had left town and who knew where it would pop up next?

Of course, this wonderfully romantic vision of what it was all about was not the whole picture, and the usual technical and administrative respects when putting a big music tour together must have been prevalent. The business end of things had to be skulking somewhere. But that was the artistic vision. And it harked back to medicine shows, the feeling you get when you listened to albums by The Band. Of a bygone age of something you can't exactly explain but that you feel deep in your soul.

The tour saw Dylan able to live out fantasies of being an actor, a folk performer, a travelling storyteller. These performances were dramatic, and the next two songs, both newly written, both collaborations with another writer, Jacques Levy, contain the entire essence of the idea.

'Romance in Durango' and 'Isis' are totally unique compositions. They were only ever performed on the Rolling Thunder Revue and they are essentially stage pieces. They need to be played out, not just sung. They give free rein to every dramatic bone in Dylan's body. These are like two short one-act plays. Wild fantasies, mystical stories, casts of characters, it's all here. Yes, many other Dylan songs contain these things, but not like this. It is while listening to these two performances that it all hits you. If you need any further proof, just watch the DVD clip of Dylan performing 'Isis'. The face paint, the actions, the mad look in his eye. He is free, creating on the spot, acting the song out, communicating, truly communicating to the audience. When Dylan gets this passionate, and when he has the right people around him to go on the journey with, he creates truly unforgettable art. Like '66, like this, like the tours of '79 and '80, like 1988-90. Like the most recent tour of Autumn 2002.

'Durango' begins deceptively, the notes wafting around:

*This is called Romance in Durango.....remember Durango Larry?*

Dylan draws by way of an introduction. But then the band call a halt and Dylan sets the scene:

*Hot chilli peppers in the blistering sun*

From there we are taken on a roller coaster of theatrical invention, full of stage directions and brilliant asides:

*Oh can it be that I am slain?*

The whole band get caught up in the mood, take the lead from Dylan and begin to sort the roles out among themselves. Each chorus driving the story forward until the unexpected drawn out climax of the final line:

*We may not make it through the niiii-iiiiighhhhhhtttt*

When we started out Bob told us he was staying with us tonight. Now we learn it is a night we might not survive. The band crashes the curtain down and I am left in wonderment. That sense of excitement you get at the theatre when the first half has built to a really tense finish, and as the curtain comes down you can not only hear the buzz in the audience, you can feel a tangible excitement, almost danger in the air. It is that feeling I have as 'Romance in Durango' exits stage right.

Of course, that isn't the interval though, part two of this pivotal pairing enters stage left immediately and there is to be no let up for us here. 'Isis' matches 'Durango' and winds things even tighter. Everything I said for one applies to the other. (A quick nod to the completists, this version of 'Isis' is missing a verse and if you were to press me there may be a slightly better version elsewhere, but that really isn't the point.) During 'Isis' the drama gets so fervoured that during the often criticised 'She said', 'He said', sections (thought by many to be lazy writing) you long for actual actors to be



there to act this section out. In fact I long for the whole thing to be taken to the extreme, just imagine it:

A: *Where you been?*

B: *No place special*

A: *You look different*

B: *Well, I guess*

A: *You been gone...*

B: *That's only natural*

A: *You gonna stay?*

B: *If you want me to, yes*

At least I think this is what I want in a moment of joy, but Dylan's voice is the perfect tool to leap from character to character. These two songs show a certain aspect of Dylan as a creative artist that makes him so vital. They are the core of this album, and of what characterised these performances.

And then the next two songs flip you on your head. Disc one of this set ends with two solo acoustic performances and three duets with Joan Baez (Oh No!). The two acoustic songs are 'Mr. Tambourine Man' and 'Simple Twist of Fate'. They are two of the best solo acoustic performances of Dylan's career. The fact that these could be so memorable after all that has gone before is remarkable. This is a multi-talented Dylan here. He wasn't stretching himself too thin. Movie star, actor, singer, bandleader, witch doctor, he could do it all. In '66 the acoustic sets were in because they had to be. He gave the punters what they wanted before doing what he wanted. And it shows. He gets bored, he fiddles for the sake of fiddling. He can't wait for the second half of the show. Pre '66 there were many fine solo acoustic performances of course. But in terms of his own songs, these have such maturity, such

knowledge to them. This is a man on top of his game. That knows his strengths, knows what he is capable of, is respectful of the material. He is older, wiser, and just knocks you out.

'Tambourine Man' is a wonder. It moves me to tears, it is just put over so perfectly. The voice a little rough, totally captivating. The guitar just accompanies. You are suddenly reminded of the strength of Dylan alone, stripped of musical backing, of collaboration. He is making me contradict all I have said. It gives you everything. The lines cut straight to your heart and consciousness, none more so than:

*Oh to dance beneath the diamond skies  
with one hand waving free*

This performance is set with you lying in the gutter and looking at the stars.

'Simple Twist' is rewritten and recast and achieves a success that I think he never found again with subsequent versions. This is the one. The voice. This is why I think Dylan is the greatest singer that has ever lived. Oh you could argue with people into infinity about this, but I wouldn't want anyone else's voice to sing any song on earth. And this is why. He is simply at his peak. The song gnaws away, the feelings and situations so spot on, the voice somehow expressing it all at once.

*He woke up, she was gone  
He couldn't see nothing but the dawn  
Got out of bed and put his clothes back  
on  
Pushed back the blinds  
Found a note she'd left behind  
To which he could just could not relate  
All about a simple twist of fate*

The Baez numbers were an important part of the tour and they did work. 'Blowin' in the Wind', 'Mama You Been on My Mind' (in particular) and 'I Shall Be Released' are all successes. Because the relationship between the two is stripped of innocence, and because we have that smug knowledge of hindsight, it adds to the tension between the singers and thus found in the songs. The voices undoubtedly work well together, and 'Mama You Been on My Mind' is most effective in its jaunty stop-start, almost burlesque arrangement. Nostalgia be damned, this is great stuff!

I am in a daze. The 11 tracks on Disc One have knocked me over. '*Bobby will be back*', Joan dryly remarks at the end, and this would have made a perfect full stop. Eleven tracks of wonder. Like another 'Hard Rain'. People would have gone berserk of course. The naysayers would have all chimed in. 'Only 11 songs?! There is room for so much more!' That's the thing. I don't need more. Especially after what I have just listened to. I don't need huge representative sets. That's why *Hard Rain* works for me. One disc, you drop in and then fly out. No explanation, no setting of the scene. I know the bloody scene! *At Budokan* packs loads of songs into two CDs and is all the poorer for it. I can find not a single flaw with Disc One of *Live 1975*. I love it to bits and will play it over and over. It will become a staple of my collection that I actually play regularly. It is perfect. I cannot imagine that Disc Two will live up to it.

It doesn't.

I just don't need it. Simple as that! It does contain a great deal of enjoyable

things, especially at the start. The acoustic performances are again spellbinding. Career best versions of 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue' and 'Love Minus Zero/No Limit' and an excellent 'Tangled Up in Blue'. These three could have been added to the first disc maybe? They make me think I might have been wrong in my pre-judgement of Disc Two.

Then we get a slightly ragged, in the spirit of things duet with Baez on the traditional 'The Water is Wide'. This has always been a favourite of mine, but the context seems to be a little lost here. My mind is elsewhere. 'It Takes a Lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train To Cry' is another rave-up, and I have nothing against it really, but I love this slowed right down, such as the Woodstock '94 version, really slow grinding and smoking. I think a version like that would have suited the drama and erotic potent of Rolling Thunder. Disc Two needs some electric songs to match the power of its opening acoustic ones, and it is struggling.

The drawbacks with *Live 1975* as a two CD set then start to be uncovered. Things start to drag. 'Oh Sister' was not to find its feet until the following year, and I just don't need it. The version on *Hard Rain* cannot be surpassed and does not need to be. I have got that brilliant 1976 rendering and it is superfluous here.

'Hurricane' is a somewhat annoying Dylan song. It hasn't aged terribly well, as many songs don't that are attached to a particular thing. They can never escape being attached to that and thus they are not alive. They are stuck in the importance of the time in which they were

written. It is a historical piece and faintly embarrassing now; it was written for a purpose and it served that purpose. It comes across here as fake. It sounds tired. If you want to hear it, hear the recorded album version. That gives you all you need. It is simply replicated in an inferior manner and dragged out. It taints the collection and now I am shifting about, desperate to forget about this disc and put the first one back in the player and marvel once again.

Nothing happens to shift me out of this thinking, in fact everything I hear from this point on just confirms it. 'One More Cup of Coffee' is fine, again semi-dramatic, but lacks the magic that I found in the other songs. Maybe just by having the misfortune of being on Disc Two! That may be its 'crime'. Then again it has never been a favourite of mine. It just sounds a touch contrived, something I don't find in 'Isis', or 'Romance in Durango' or in that tragically neglected Desire masterpiece 'Black Diamond Bay' (sadly never performed live in concert).

'Sara' is next, again a little dated, the mood has shifted, things are becoming uncomfortable. This is always a song I find slightly awkward to listen to. These desperately autobiographical songs are never a huge success, and 'Sara' has always had that slight stench of 'Ballad in Plain D'.

'Just Like a Woman' and 'Heaven's Door' both had me singing along in the bath, both ok, but not career-topping versions. 'Woman' is too ragged, too overblown. There have been many better

versions of this song. 'Knockin' on Heavens Door' is 'Heaven's Door'. Its purpose should be as a marvellous macabre, dramatic finale to all that has gone before. Unfortunately it can't avoid the trapdoor in the middle of the stage marked 'weary sounding singalong'. It doesn't approach the version Dylan has been playing recently on the NET, which I think does provide a macabre finale, paired as it often is with 'All Along The Watchtower'. The Rolling Thunder sprawl of 'Heaven's Door' reminds me of the horrific singalongs at the end of the dire 30th Anniversary concert (oh the dark days...) and I don't need any reminder of that thank you very much!

And Disc Two then throws up another stone into my eye by fading out just as 'This Land is Your Land' is starting. Not that I really wanted to hear it, because I don't, but it automatically sets me with the completists and the replicators as I can't help but think 'Why on earth cut it off there? Sony/Columbia bastards...'

But I don't think that for long. This hasn't tainted things for me, how could it? I am too busy throwing Disc Two aside and putting the magic of part one back into my CD player. Ah, there it is.....everything is ok.

So why is this music so captivating? Why does listening to Disc One of *Live 1975* (and part of Disc Two) give me such feelings? Essentially because Dylan dared to fail with Rolling Thunder. He dares to fail often. He takes risks as an artist, as a live performer, writer and interpreter of song, and as the man said '*There's no success like failure*'.

This line has always captivated me, from the first time I heard it as a 13 year old boy it intrigued me. At first it just baffled me... No success like failure... well of course not! and failure's no success at all??? Well of course it isn't! (Welcome to Mastermind, tonight's contestant is Bob Dylan and his subject is the bleeding obvious... and apologies to John Cleese for stealing that line.)

Slowly it dawned on me and now it is one of my favourite lines. What is it to succeed or fail? Why is something considered one thing and one another? Are these obvious questions? Success in something is to achieve something totally, is it not? Or is it to do something extremely well? What is Bob getting at with this line?

To me the line says that success and failure are split by a fine line. The fine line is the actual act of trying in the first place. Like so many of Dylan's most captivating words, it appears to mean nothing, but it means everything. Just like *'To live outside the law you must be honest'*. Nonsense? More of the bleeding obvious? Well, yes, but the more you think about it, the more it unfolds and opens up to you. I think it was Homer who said something like :

*We have tried and failed my son. What is the lesson to be learned here? That's right.....never try.*

That's Homer Simpson of course. The old adage is *'it is better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all'*. Bollocks! people cry, but actually it happens to be true. Is there such thing as a noble failure? Dylan set out in 1975 with a vision in mind. He was not content, as he has not been throughout his perverse and brilliant career, to rest on his laurels. He has

consistently taken himself to places where it appears easier to fail than to succeed. He challenges the very notions of success and failure, stares them right in the eyes, flips the coin and is prepared to accept whichever side lands face up. He accepts chaos.

The Rolling Thunder Revue was a risk. The tour of 1974 was not. That is why one is more memorable than the other, and artistically so much more of an achievement (dare I say a success?) Dylan is not someone who benefits from having nothing to lose. He benefits from having everything to lose, and he knows it and it drives him on and on and on. The 1974 tour was dull for many. But it gave Dylan the impetus he needed for a huge creative surge.

True creation treads that fine line between success and failure. and what constitutes one or the other and in whose eyes? He took a troupe of performers on the road, with new songs, rearranged songs, to venues that were often half empty. Sure, you can argue that he built safeguards in. That Baez was only along to give people a nostalgia trip that would ensure some seats were sold and keep people coming along. But give in to romance. That is what *Live 1975* enables you to do. It challenges your own levels of romance and energy and creation. I have always been a romantic, so this music was made for me. Everything about this tour, and these songs, and *Renaldo and Clara* (the four-hour totally alienating film that emerged from the tour), had a huge amount of risk attached to it. Because creating new unprecedented art is a risk. How will it go down? Will people like it? What will the critics say?

It is a risk because the artist doesn't have total control. He has created a form of Frankenstein's Monster, which develops a life and energy force of its own. It is comparable to Marlon Brando, after he made *Last Tango in Paris*. He said that he would never take himself to that place again. To put so much of himself into his art to the extent that he felt violated. He stayed true to his word, and made very different types of films after this. Forgettable films. Dylan, in making *Blood on the Tracks* and then embarking on the two-year Rolling Thunder Revue and making *Renaldo and Clara*, was at a similar point to Brando. Dylan lost himself in his art, immersed himself totally, which is what makes this such an important and enthralling document. Take note all those that said it didn't need to come out! The luck we have with Dylan, in contrast to Brando, is that although he also retreated from these elements of his art for a while after 1976, he has dared to explore those depths again occasionally over the years. But never again in such an expansive, prolonged and dedicated way.

For me Sony got this one right. The packaging looks great, we get loads of nice photos and an excellent piece by Larry Sloman. We needed an official release to do justice to the '75 tour, and this does. I don't see any huge leap in quality that would have been achieved with more performances, or different performances. Everyone always has their favourites and will complain 'Oh no not the November 8th version of Sara? The November 14th version blew that one away' etc. (note these are not real dates...) It's not relevant here.

Larry 'Ratso' Sloman concludes his evocative liner notes by saying :

*Dylan never let me down on stage. In fact, he never failed to elevate me. It's easy to get blasé on a tour after the first few days and hang out in backstage hospitality suites during the show, but whenever it was time for Dylan to go onstage, there was a mass influx into the hall of fellow performers, film crew, techies and roadies, hangers-on and groupies – all anxious not to miss a single note. Dylan never let anybody down. And now, thanks to this two-CD set you have in your hands, he'll never let you down either.*

Dylan has never let us down. He has failed at times and he has succeeded at times, but he has never let us down. With the Rolling Thunder Revue, with these recordings that make up *Live 1975* not only has he not let us down, he has succeeded gloriously. He has thrilled us, moved us, excited us and presented us with something wild and new and alive. We can all argue the toss over details, dates, selections etc but the fact is that on these songs you can hear Dylan taking himself to a place he had to take himself to and taking a huge risk. He has always been a gambler, confronting failure head on and challenging success. Listen to *Live 1975* and you hear Bob Dylan gamble and win. It's bloody marvellous.

I would like to thank Peter Vincent, Ben Clayton and Andy Muir for all their support and inspiration. And of course my wife LaVerne, who put up with me while I was working night and day on this!

# 'You don't read women authors do you?'

by Elaine Jackson

*Dylan lifted Meggie onto the edge of the pool table. Then, stepping between her legs, he pulled her nearer, moulding her body against his naked chest. She was so warm and soft, he couldn't get enough of her. ...Meggie reached out and slipped her fingers beneath the waistband of his jeans...*

*'I'm not very good at this,' she murmured.*

*Dylan groaned. 'Honey, if you were any better, the game would already be over ...'*<sup>1</sup>

The above extract is from Kate Hoffmann's romance novel: *The Mighty Quinns: Dylan*, published by Mills & Boon (2002). The novel may not be to everyone's taste and is an unlikely one to be discussed in a Dylan 'fanzine'. However, it proves that Bob Dylan has no boundaries, borderlines or classification: his influence permeates through all aspects of popular culture, including the much-denigrated romance genre.

The novel's prologue introduces us to the Quinn family ('Dylan' being used as an Irish name here is obviously poetic licence) who eagerly await the return of their father bringing food. In this respect, drawing on the incidence of anticipation, the depiction is a somewhat feminized version of Bob Dylan's 'Quinn the Eskimo' whose ambiguous offerings are expected to transport everybody from 'despair' into 'joy' ('Quinn the Eskimo (The Mighty Quinn)'). Their father believes that once a 'Mighty Quinn' gave his heart away, his strength would leave him and he would become weak and pitiful (p10) but '[t]here's something about the Quinn boys. They're so tough on the outside, yet so... vulnerable' (p98) and the ensuing plot unfolds to prove just that.

There is a wonderful description of the heroine's plans for a 'retro' coffee shop like 'the fifties and sixties' in which she is '*going to have folk music and poetry readings in the evenings...*' with the narrator noting how the '*excitement in her eyes was enough to make even Dylan interested in folk music and poetry*' (p76). Without divulging too much of the plot it is safe to say that Dylan Quinn does learn to access his vulnerability (his feminine side) and fall in love without completely losing his masculinity, following the *modus operandi* of popular romance. Despite the obvious contemporary approach in the epigraph he also woos his woman in the time-honoured tradition by sending her flowers and buying her a diamond ring.

That romance authors should look to Bob Dylan for inspiration is not surprising because, in my view, Dylan and romance have always been closely associated. Setting aside his many love lyrics, 'Tomorrow is a Long Time' alone warrants him the accolade of grand master. Yet, he is usually conspicuously absent from the many anthology CDs flooding the market with titles such as *The Greatest Love Songs Ever* etc. On the other hand [Harlequin] Mills & Boon are long established publishers of love stories dating from the beginning of the twentieth century. It is therefore pertinent and understandable that at some point the two should meet. A closer examination would suggest that, very often, the protagonist in Dylan's lyrics personifies a romantic hero who would not be amiss on the pages of romance novels.

Dylan's entire oeuvre may be viewed as the ultimate discussion of male/female relationships. Listening to Bob is much more enjoyable and emotive than ploughing through the numerous self-help books offering advice on relationships and gender distinction. Where others need a whole book to describe the 'battle of the sexes', Dylan can summarize it in two succinct lines: '*We always did feel the same/We just saw it from a different point of view*' ('Tangled up in Blue'). Sometimes a single line can evoke emotion enough to render all romance novels inadequate: '*And if there is eternity I'd love you there again*' ('Wedding Song'); '*She still lives inside of me, we've never been apart*' ('If You See Her, Say Hello'), and the haunting, '*I'd give anything to be with you*' ('Love Sick'). Likewise, as someone so profoundly put it on a website commentary: '*Listening to Blood on the Tracks can make you feel a whole lot worse, but it can also in some strange way, make you feel a whole lot better.*' This is the stuff of romance.

Research has shown that reading romance novels is a positive exercise in which (predominantly) women escape from the mundane. It is not the prerogative of bored housewives or the lesser educated, as critics have suggested, nor do readers unwittingly believe that it is *real*.<sup>2</sup> However, in identifying with the problems encountered and ultimately surmounted by the protagonists, readers can feel reassured. Writers of romance novels openly acknowledge that their aim is to engage '*the emotion, not the intellect, of the reader*' in which '*there has to be a willing suspension of disbelief, [where] the analytical part*

of the brain has to be switched off.<sup>3</sup> I am not suggesting that this is the same approach that Bob Dylan has to his lyrics, although he is on record as saying: *'I don't think when I write. I just react and put it down on paper.'*<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt that his work is emotional, after all he asks: *'How does it feel?'* ('Like a Rolling Stone'). The reason that many people cannot read romance novels is that they cannot 'feel' or connect with the emotional content, which I would suggest is why many cannot appreciate Dylan: sometimes you have to listen with your *heart* and not your *head*.

To the same extent, *'the mystery of masculine motives... is central to most women's popular romances'*<sup>5</sup> so the depiction of the hero is fundamental. It is with this in mind that I suggest that authors in this genre need look no further than Dylan's lyrics for a romantic hero because, despite his various guises in a Pandora's box of characterization, real life observation, and experiences, he is instantly recognizable. Similarly, contrary to popular belief, the hero in romance is grounded in reality, evolving over time to correspond with women's changing fantasies of their ideal mate.<sup>6</sup>

The hero most celebrated in contemporary popular culture, who is 'feared as well as desired' by the heroine, otherwise known as 'alpha man', significantly made his first appearance in Mills & Boon novels in the 1960s, in a period of student riots, the civil rights movement, and demands for both sexual and women's liberation. As Jay Dixon points out, *'...as western society went through a period of unrest, romances portrayed a strong*

*authority figure to provide an element of certainty in an uncertain world.'*<sup>7</sup> Perhaps it is no coincidence, then, that at the same time, to use a well-worn cliché, Dylan emerged as the 'spokesperson' for the same generation. Not only does he offer a politically revolutionary stance but gives a male perspective on love and relationships in such an uncertain world. His heroes react against the traditional romantic role of husband/provider and openly acknowledge sexuality (desire), which hitherto in mainstream had been ignored. They also present a more openly vulnerable (caring) male in a society post the Second World War, with its emphasis on 'macho' soldier heroes.

Catherine Belsey argues that in Western culture there is a pronounced difference between the two sentiments of 'caring' and 'desire': relating respectively to the mind and the body.<sup>8</sup> In romance novels it is imperative to change *'fleeting male lust into a love that will endure...'*<sup>9</sup> therefore, these opposing emotions must be unified to create 'true love'. It is only through such love that the hero can enter into a more humane and democratic *feminine* value system.

At the outset, these distinctions are apparent in the romantic hero who:

*...is required to be gentle, caring, reliable, responsible and likely to prove monogamous, a condition which is conventionally summarized as being 'in love' with her. But desire constantly threatens to betray morality, to subject the heroine to the wrong man. The wrong man is all body: phallic, hard, [and] unromantic.*<sup>10</sup>



The heroine has the difficult task of helping the hero unravel his true feelings from his outer façade because *'although he appears indifferent, even ruthless, he is often at the mercy of a passion he is unable or unwilling to acknowledge.'* As a bonus, however, *'he is an exceptionally competent lover.'*<sup>11</sup>

Dylan's heroes, having all these attributes in turn, provide enough material to sustain romance authors for centuries to come. They can be vicious, sarcastic, indifferent, enigmatic, overwhelmingly loving, and both unrepentant and regretful. However, his narratives very rarely comply with formulaic romance that insists on closure, denouements of marriage and an assured 'happy ever after'. Dylan's heroes all appreciate 'the love of a good woman' but for some reason or other are unable to commit. At times, they get as far as the church, and are left *'still waitin' at the altar'* ('The Groom's Still Waiting at the Altar') or the marriage turns out to be a disappointment for either or both protagonists and one or other of them is deserted. Romance authors could have a wonderful, albeit difficult, time in trying to resolve these predicaments.

The anti-heroes in his 'alternative' love songs, may be perceived as 'phallic, hard, [and] unromantic'. The narrator of 'It Ain't Me, Babe', is dismissive, shying away from commitment and romance and, unlike the Mills & Boon 'Dylan', does not send flowers. Without wishing to enter into an argument as to whether Dylan is a feminist or not, the derogatory 'babe' suggests a lack of respect. However, as with all Dylan songs, in *performance* that

'babe' can vary between a tender apology for not living up to her expectations, and a biting rejection:

*You say you're looking for someone  
Who'll pick you up each time you fall,  
To gather flowers constantly  
An' to come each time you call,  
A lover for your life an' nothing more,  
But it ain't me, babe...*

In the more outspoken 'If You Gotta Go, Go Now', the narrator invites a sexually brief encounter employing all the tactics of feigned pathos and respect, and finally irony, to get the heroine into bed but has no time to waste:

*I am just a poor boy, baby,  
Lookin' to connect.  
But I certainly don't want you thinkin'  
That I ain't got any respect  
It ain't that I'm wantin'  
Anything you never gave before.  
It's just that I'll be sleepin' soon,  
It'll be too dark for you to find the door*

On occasion he is not so explicit, disguising his intentions in mocking what superficially appears to be a fashionable 'Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat', asking *'Honey, can I jump on it sometime?'* As a metaphor for her body/genitalia, her 'hat' becomes involved in a more powerful, aggressive dimension. At other times he is downright arrogant:

*You gonna need my help, sweetheart  
You can't make love all by yourself  
(Lonesome Day Blues).*

It is highly unlikely that this protagonist will be sending flowers either.

A more mature approach is directness with a touch of respect, inviting his 'lady' to *'lay across my big brass bed'*, adding the

pitiful, and most likely triumphant: *'his clothes are dirty but his hands are clean/And you're the best thing that he's ever seen'*. However, this is a 'two-way' process, she too can have her 'cake and eat it' but it is not clear whether this is just a one night stand or a pledge of eternal faithfulness:

*I long to see you in the morning light  
I long to reach for you in the night  
Stay, lady, stay, stay while the night is  
still ahead.*

(*Lay, Lady, Lay*)

In a contemporary post-feminist society perhaps the nearest we can get to the perfect romantic hero is one who is priapic but 'feminised' enough to write emotive poetry capable of making even a strong man weep, should we want it. He is a potential alpha man, but of course, in *performance*, he can easily vacillate between sincerity and irony:

*Jump into the wagon, love, throw your  
panties overboard  
I can write you poems, make a strong  
man lose his mind  
I'm no pig without a wig  
I hope you treat me kind.*

(*High Water (For Charley Patton)*)

A more enigmatic hero appears in 'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts'. We can never be sure whether Jack has the potential for a perfect mate because he doesn't stay around long enough for us to find out, and we never know whether he intends returning for Lily who is left only *'thinkin' about the Jack of Hearts'*. His indefinable presence tells us immediately that he will not sit comfortably in domesticity. From the moment that he steps into

*'the mirrored room'* we know that he is both feared and desired, a qualification for alpha man, but unfortunately he remains unreliable. At the denouement, when Rosemary is on the gallows, having killed his rival, he is *'the only person on the scene missin'*. Jack is representative of the romantic 'outlaw' hero who in many 'Westerns' simply tips his hat to the heroine and rides off into the sunset – alone. However, the ending may not be the whole story...

Belsey argues that by withholding closure narratives succeed in *'sustaining the desire of [their] central characters and of the audience simultaneously ... [giving an] endless indeterminacy which is also the condition of desire itself.'*<sup>12</sup> The Jack of Hearts may not be 'feminised' to a happy romantic conclusion because, like the elusive Dylan himself, he is on his own 'never ending tour'. Dylan's catalogue is littered with heroes constantly on the move: *'So I picked up my guitar/And began the next song'* (*'Eternal Circle'*); or *'But me, I'm still on the road/Headin' for another joint'* (*'Tangled up in Blue'*). This is perhaps why we keep following him, watching and listening, because we too are in a constant state of 'desire', never knowing what he is going to do next, yet knowing that, whatever it is, he will remain true to himself. Arguably Bob Dylan himself, is potentially a perfect romantic hero, but that is another story – perhaps *'a book that no one can write'* (*'Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)'*).

Alternatively, Dylan's heroes can be 'tough on the outside and vulnerable

underneath', even going as far as to ask: 'Please don't let on that you knew me when/I was hungry and it was your world' ('Just Like a Woman'). Nevertheless, it is not always so easy to hide such weaknesses. Within a single stanza a rejected lover can walk a 'lonesome road' and, with a shrug, merely blame his lover for wasting his time. Yet inadvertently he reveals his own susceptibility. He may carry on 'walkin'" but by refusing to say 'goodbye' he is keeping his options open, fooling no-one:

*I'm walkin' down that long, lonesome  
road, babe  
Where I'm bound, I can't tell  
But goodbye's too good a word, gal  
So I'll just say fare thee well  
I ain't sayin' you treated me unkind  
You could have done better but I don't  
mind  
You just kinda wasted my precious time  
But don't think twice, it's all right  
(Don't Think Twice, It's All Right')*

The tough hero, still on the road, may cling to rationality as a way of dealing with emotional upheaval, but as everyone knows emotions can take over unexpectedly:

*Most of the time  
I'm clear focused all around.  
Most of the time  
I can keep both feet on the ground,  
I can follow the path, I can read the  
signs,  
Stay right with it, when the road  
unwinds,  
I can handle whatever I stumble upon,  
I don't even notice she's gone,  
Most of the time  
(Most of the Time')*

However, not having happy endings may be more profoundly effective than the traditional marriage denouement of romance because, again as Belsey says, 'only unsatisfied love is truly heroic'.<sup>13</sup> In citing the many examples in literary history where lovers are dramatically separated, including *Tristan & Isolde* and the more recent 1940s films such as *Brief Encounter*, she argues that where 'desire and morality [are] in conflict morality triumphs, thus proving that the relationship between the protagonists was indeed true love...'<sup>14</sup>

From the sexual revolutionary times of the 60s, lovers no longer needed to choose between morality and desire but the separation, as a testimony of 'true love', remains an important motif. We need only think of the more recent film *Titanic*. On *Desire*, Dylan presents us with some of the most beautiful 'love stories' ever written: 'Romance in Durango', 'Isis', 'One More Cup of Coffee', and 'Sara', but in each there is the inevitable separation. In 'Romance in Durango' the narrator promises marriage:

*Then the padre will recite the prayers of  
old  
In the little church this side of town.  
I will wear new boots and an earring of  
gold.  
You'll shine with diamonds in your  
wedding gown.*

However, we are later warned that these lovers 'may not make it through the night'. With or without a gunshot wound, this is true of many of Dylan's lovers.

With 'Isis' we are given a glimmer of hope. He says 'I married Isis on the fifth day

of *May/But I could not hold on to her very long*, but it is he who leaves. Although he rides back to find her *'just to tell her I love her'*, at the end we are still not sure whether their relationship is sustainable. The printed version in *Lyrics: 1962 - 1985* states: *'She said, "You gonna stay?" I said, "Yeah, I jes might."* On the album he answers cautiously: *'if you want me to - yes'*. Yet another example of the hero leaving his options open. On other songs the parting is inevitable, just: *'one more cup of coffee 'fore I go'* or, in the outtake *'Abandoned Love'* a regretful: *'let me feel your love one more time before I abandon it'*.

On Dylan's most recent album, *"Love And Theft"* the hero manages to get as far as the wedding but realizes his mistake. He goads her into breaking his heart again *'for good luck'*, but nevertheless it is he again who is leaving and it is none of *her* business where he has come from or where he is going. Surviving the night is a recurrent thematic signifier:

*Yes, the wedding bells are ringing and  
the choir is beginning to sing  
What looks good in the day, at night is  
another thing  
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.'  
Where do you come from? Where do  
you go?  
Sorry that's nothin' you would need to  
know  
Well, my back has been to the wall for*

*so long, it seems like it's stuck  
Why don't you break my heart one  
more time just for good luck.*

...

*Well, I'm leaving in the morning as  
soon as the dark clouds lift.*

(Summer Days)

Occasionally we encounter a romantic hero who is prepared to admit his vulnerability. In *'Sara'* he asks: *'whatever made you want to change your mind?'* hoping for some kind of exoneration in pleading: *'you must forgive me my unworthiness'*, but sadly this is ineffective. The final plaintive line, *'don't ever leave me, don't ever go'* is enough to send most romance heroines beating a return path to his door. His lamentation: *'Lovin' you is the one thing I'll never regret'* is one of those Dylan lines that captures, not only the lover's emotion, but an entire history of heart-break.

The constantly moving hero in his more rational moments has little time for regret:

*The vows that we kept are now broken  
and swept  
'Neath the bed where we slept.  
Don't think of me and fantasize on  
what we never had,  
Be grateful for what we've shared  
together and be glad.*

(*'We Better Talk this Over'*)

The heroine has to accept what is on offer, that is, a place in his thoughts rather than his life: *'I will always be emotionally yours'* (*'Emotionally Yours'*). For this hero, pleasant memories are preferable to compromise:

*Though I'd never say  
That I done it the way  
That you'd have liked me to  
In the end,  
My dear sweet friend,  
I'll remember you.*

(‘I’ll Remember You’)

Occasionally, he offers to change, with her influence: ‘*I can change I swear, see what you can do*’ (‘You’re a Big Girl Now’). This is the hero that romance novels and ‘*such dreams are made on*’,<sup>15</sup> the one who willingly allows access to his ‘feminine side’ to consequently find ‘true love’. However, in performance recently Dylan changed the lyric from the official version: ‘*I know where I can find you.../In somebody’s room.*’ into a more acidic: ‘*I know where I can find you, but I ain’t gonna look!*’ (Birmingham, England, 2002). Similarly, in ‘The Man in Me’ he promises that he ‘*will do nearly any task*’ to keep his woman happy. His true self is hidden behind a façade from which only she can save him:

*The man in me will hide sometimes to  
keep from being seen  
But that’s just because he doesn’t want to  
turn into some machine  
Take a woman like you  
To get through to the man in me.*

However, the word ‘nearly’ is troublesome. He will do ‘*nearly any task*’. Does this mean that there is an element of doubt? Can she ‘save’ him? Does he actually want to be saved? The unpredictability of Dylan’s heroes can be infuriating and frustrating, yet at the same time it is this that makes them incessantly desirable.

The hero is constantly reminding us that he cannot/will not live up to any

woman’s expectations: ‘*I just could not be what she wanted me to be*’ (‘One More Night’), alternatively wondering ‘*if I ever became what you wanted me to be*’ (‘Shooting Star’). At other times he steadfastly remains true to himself, testing her love and commitment: ‘*Will you let me be myself/Or is your love in vain*’ (‘Is Your Love in Vain?’). It appears that if she is not willing to let him be himself then he can be quite dismissive and vicious:

*So I’ll make my stand  
And remain as I am  
And bid farewell and not give a damn  
(‘Restless Farewell’)*

This is reminiscent of another narrative in which audiences/readers are left in a state of unfulfilled ‘desire’, when in *Gone With The Wind*<sup>16</sup> Rhett Butler walks out on Scarlett O’Hara declaring: ‘*My dear, I don’t give a damn*’ (p1010). It is possible to imagine a more contemporary Rhett being just as savagely ironic, censuring his lover for expecting too much: ‘*I’d a-done anything for that woman if she didn’t make me feel so obligated*’ (‘The Groom’s Still Waiting at the Altar’).

There are times when Dylan’s hero, despite his potential, has to accept defeat, even losing out to a more convincing ‘alpha man’: ‘*They say that you’ve been seen with some other man/That he’s tall dark and handsome, and you’re holding his hand*’. (‘Tell Me That It Isn’t True’). Alternatively, the hero projects himself as alpha man, asking the heroine to forget his past indiscretions because, now reformed, he is the answer to all her prayers. He doesn’t bring flowers but the proffered (diamond-less) ring is a step in the right direction:

*Jack the Cowboy went up north  
He's buried in your past.  
The Lone Wolf went out drinking  
That was over pretty fast.  
Sweet Goddess  
Your perfect stranger's comin' in at last.*

*...I'd be grateful if this golden ring you  
would receive...  
I'm crestfallen  
The world of illusion is at my door,  
I ain't a haulin' any of my lambs to the  
marketplace anymore.  
The prison walls are crumblin', there is  
no end in sight,  
I've gained some recognition but I lost  
my appetite.  
Dark Beauty  
Meet me at the border late tonight  
(“Tough Mama”)*

Even when the hero is sure that he's found the right woman, he is still hesitant, even pessimistic, not knowing whether the relationship will last:

*...You're the one I've been looking for,  
You're the one that's got the key.  
But I can't figure out whether I'm too  
good for you  
Or you're too good for me.  
(“Tight Connection to My Heart (Has  
Anybody Seen My Love”)*

Clearly, the fundamental difference between the sexes has not changed historically as the phenomenal success of recent ‘chicklit’ novels, such as *Bridget Jones's Diary*<sup>17</sup> shows in alluding to the nineteenth-century *Pride & Prejudice*.<sup>18</sup> As an artist who is always avant garde, Dylan brings archetypal lovers up to date, intertextualising fairy tale and Shakespeare. In

‘Desolation Row’, Romeo is ‘in the wrong place’ because he mistakenly claims ‘Cinderella’ as his own, and more recently, he is rejected by his long-standing partner, Juliet. It proves that forty years (or even four hundred years) on, the romantic hero still hasn't worked out how to approach women:

*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.’*

(“Floater (Too Much To Ask)”)

Similarly, Desdemona, for centuries the victim of mistrust and misunderstanding, finally reeks her revenge:

*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.”*

(“Po' Boy”)

There is no doubt that Bob Dylan's influence on popular culture is immeasurable, venturing even into such areas as the romance genre. However, this should not be particularly surprising because throughout his career his songs have consistently denoted experiences of intense emotion, which is a prerequisite for these novels. His heroes, despite declaring love for the heroine, are often unable or unwilling to commit to a monogamous relationship; perfect specimens for romance. At times, the heroine is a fleeting sexual encounter; at others, she

endures within his emotional and rational memory. The inevitable separation and its ensuing pain is one with which we can readily identify and one which romance strives to encapsulate. Consequently, by not giving us closure Dylan often leaves us in a more profoundly emotional state of desire than we would expect or perhaps even want. This is a goldmine of material for romance authors.

However, this is not the whole story. Through Dylan's ability to change the lyrics at will or through a subtle voice inflection in performance, the elusive hero can appear in turn aggressive, reflexive, or disconsolate. If romance authors wished to employ any of Dylan's heroes then they would face the difficult task of first capturing, then keeping them 'on the scene' before they could begin assimilating their 'lustful' and 'caring' tendencies into the perfect mate. I have never said that it would be easy.

Alternatively, this arrangement may be reciprocal. The next time Dylan's narrator asks '*what was it you wanted, tell me again I forgot*' ('What Was it You Wanted?') he should perhaps reach for a romance novel to find the answer. After all, there are many women authors worth reading in addition to Erica Jong.

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# To Ramona

by Robert Forryan

Tears: *'The clear salty solution secreted by the lacrimal glands that lubricates and cleanses the surface of the eyeballs and inner surface of the eyelids'*

- Collins English Dictionary

'To Ramona' begins and ends in tears. It begins with the male character imploring Ramona to shut softly her watery eyes and ends in him speculating that one day he may come crying to her. It is a commonly-used device for a poem's ending to refer back to its beginning (as these oft-quoted lines from TS Eliot remind us: *'What we call the beginning is often the end, and to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from.'*) though not an artistic strategy often employed by Dylan.

Tears are the key to 'To Ramona'. They unlock the heart and the mind of the young man; thereby releasing from within him the sensibility to address Ramona's situation and, possibly, helping him to realise the extent to which he truly cares for her - whether as a lover or as a friend. Ramona's tears are the reason for the song's existence - this much is obvious, I know - and the source of the singer/speaker's search for the truths he offers for her comfort. Without those tears there would be no search, no truths and no song; for the whole song is a response to Ramona's grief - everything that happens in 'To Ramona' is a response to her watery eyes.

There are many reasons for the shedding of tears and it is no surprise that most of them occur at some time or other in Dylan's many songs. The emotions that provoke tears are (usually) so powerful that the experience of crying 'real tears' rarely fails to transform our way of seeing a situation or our feelings about it. They often force us to face up to some truth or other. Which may be why, in a much later song, Dylan takes us to that place *'where martyrs weep'* and which may also be the place that is:

*Far away where the soft winds blow,*

*Far away from it all*

*There is a place you go*

*Where teardrops fall*



At different times and in different places Michael Gray, Bert Cartwright and Paul Williams have all referred to an apparent religiosity in ‘Where Teardrops Fall’, especially in the verse:

*I've torn my clothes and I've drained  
the cup  
Strippin' away at it all,  
Thinking of you when the sun comes up  
Where teardrops fall*

I am more than content to accept the interpretation of tears as something that leads us to a place where we meet the truth, where the sun comes up or where we meet God. It seems obvious that we have to go to that place. This *Oh Mercy* track may be Dylan's most significant song about tears (arguably more important than ‘Tears of Rage’) and it echoes ‘Every Grain of Sand’:

*In the time of my confession  
In the hour of my deepest need,  
When the pool of tears beneath my feet  
Flood every newborn seed*

Though surely this 1980s performance is another instance of meeting God in and through grief, through tears of sorrow and repentance rather than through tears of rage? Both ‘Every Grain of Sand’ and ‘Where Teardrops Fall’ seem, on the surface, to be vital statements about the need for tears as doors of perception, openings upon the transcendent. But ‘To Ramona’ in a gentler, more understated and less prophetic manner, also emphasises the blessings that tears pour down upon both of the characters in the song.

Some 350 years ago an English poet also wrote about the ways in which tears open our eyes. Andrew Marvell's poem

‘Eyes And Tears’ has as much to say on the subject as Dylan:

*Yet happy they whom grief doth bless,  
That weep the more, and see the less;  
And, to preserve their sight more true,  
Bathe still their eyes in their own dew.*

Marvell invokes tears as the source of true vision. Where the eyes see only objective reality, tears open hearts and minds to deeper metaphysical truths. And ironically the power and truth of tears is never so evident to us as when we recoil from those who use tears deliberately to manipulate others. They seem the most deceitful of people which, of course, raises a question about the woman whose ‘real tears’ were the ‘best acting I saw anybody do’ in ‘Brownsville Girl’. The tears of an honest person force him or her to acknowledge emotional ties and realities and ensure integrity. In Marvell's words ‘*These tears, which better measure all*’ preserve our spiritual sight - they strip ‘*away at it all*’. That ‘*place you go, where teardrops fall*’ is where Marvell meets both Dylan and Ramona.

I don't wish to push this lachrymose theme too far. That tears have featured in Dylan's work since the early days is no surprise given their power to overwhelm us - as when we try to ‘*fight back the tears*’ but just ‘*can't keep from crying*’. Tears falling and the crying of tears and the act of crying are images which occur and recur throughout so many of the songs of Bob Dylan. Way back in 1961 he wrote a little song called ‘Poor Boy Blues’ which in its title and in this verse provides a fore-echo of “*Love And Theft*”:

*Mississippi River,  
You a-runnin' too fast for me  
Can't you hear me cryin'*

There seems little to be gained by running through all of the many instances where tears and crying appear or are used in Dylan's lyrics ( go and see for yourself) but they were significant right at the outset:

*How many ears must one man have  
Before he can hear people cry?*

So even way back then Dylan was insisting that our humanity demands that we hear and respond to the tears of others, the way the singer responds to Ramona's tears. Similarly, like the preacher in Ecclesiastes, Dylan knew in 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll' that there is a time to weep.

The need for, and the usefulness of, tears has never been lost on Dylan and it persists even down to "Love And Theft" and 'Cry A While'. Some 14 years after 'To Ramona', Dylan revisited similar themes in 'Baby, Stop Crying':

*If you're looking for assistance, babe,  
Or if you just want some company  
Or if you just want a friend you can talk  
to,  
Honey, come and see about me.*

'Baby, Stop Crying' has so much in common with 'To Ramona', though in some ways you feel that in the later song the singer is more involved - maybe because her crying is 'tearing up' his mind, which is a phrase that can sound unsympathetic but when you listen to the whole song, you know he's not. I have written elsewhere about the connections between 'All I Really Want to Do' and 'Is Your Love in Vain?', and I feel that *Another Side of Bob Dylan* has much in common with *Street-Legal*. Their similarities are even

there to be seen on the album covers, which both feature Dylan in urban street settings. Both albums have been criticised for their poor production quality and both preceded major shifts in Dylan's art - Electricity and Christianity. But this is about 'To Ramona'.

In some ways 'To Ramona' is an odd title for a song. It could so easily be just two words on an envelope, two words heralding an enclosed love-letter in handwriting familiar to the recipient. Instead this writing is of the moment, delivered by voice in the instant in which Dylan sings: '*Ramona, come closer...*' To help me begin thinking about this song I listened to *Another Side of Bob Dylan* and, in so doing, was subjected to a couple of surprises. I had long been accustomed to hearing '*the touch of your skin*', not '*strength*'; and to flowers that get deathlike '*at times*' rather than the '*sometimes*' we hear on the album. Interestingly, the words printed in *Lyrics 1962-1985* are the ones we have grown accustomed to in live performance. But for many years before that, from 1964 until I don't know when, the album lyrics are the ones I would know, since I had no access to live tapes or the printed lyrics. So for years they would have been my definitive version - strange, therefore, that I so easily forgot them in the 1990s. Picking up the official CD, I see again that familiar cover image of Dylan, so young, so cool, so bohemian, so 'arty'. It is a photo I have lived with for nearly 40 years and it still goes like a corkscrew to my heart.

The ageing process matters. Dylan wrote 'To Ramona' at the age of twenty-

three years. I don't think it is an earth-shattering revelation to say that this is a young man's song that is sung to a young woman. It seems self-evident. If you accept for a moment that this is a love song, it becomes apparent that it could not conceivably be sung by a middle-aged man to a middle-aged woman. As a song of love or as a song of friendship you could, just about, imagine it being sung by an older man to a younger woman. But even that interpretation is undermined by 'someday, maybe, who knows, baby' since an older man cannot afford to look that far down the highway that is no longer endless.

At the time of writing I have known Ramona for 38 years. As I have aged she has not. I can still see her now the way I first saw her in the autumn of 1964 - just as all lovers do still see each other the way they did when first they met. I see a beautiful, dark-haired, dark-eyed Spanish-American 20-year old innocent-naif. A physical twin to the gypsy girl of 'Spanish Harlem Incident', but in her psychological/moral experience she is the complete opposite. The Spanish Harlem girl knows it all; she is the archetypal male fantasy figure in need of no protection or advice. Ramona knows neither the world nor her way around in it. Her innocent physicality represents another male fantasy. I nearly said a purer fantasy but I am not sure that would strictly be true.

I always heard 'To Ramona' as a love song and so I believe that Paul Williams is in error when he claims (in *Performing Artist, Vol 1*) that 'To Ramona' is not a love song but 'clearly a song of friendship'.

It is true that the singer and Ramona may not be, may never be lovers - but it is still a love song. At 23 years you cannot create a girl-woman like Ramona without loving her, without being a little in love with her. Williams acknowledges the possibility of desire but not love. And 'your cracked country lips I still wish to kiss, as to be by the strength (touch) of your skin' probably fits as well with lust as with love. But the sheer tenderness that imbues this song, that is indicated by the wistfulness of the song's melody, that is apparent in the line: 'but it grieves my heart, love,' (the equivalent of 'tearing up my mind' in 'Baby, Stop Crying') undermines Williams's case. It simply is not believable that the singer didn't love Ramona. God, I love Ramona, I have loved her for years.

Why do I see Ramona as having Spanish origins? Partly the name, which is relatively rare among Anglo-Saxons, and partly the music, which Wilfrid Mellers (*A Darker Shade of Pale*) identifies as a 'Tex-Mex waltz' with an 'insidious' tune. It comforts me to see that he also links the song to 'Spanish Harlem Incident'. Spanish is the loving tongue, it seems.

Ramona is incontestably youthful. The male singer/author/lover portrays himself as older and wiser, but not exactly mature. To a degree he is a 'poseur'. More experienced, more urbane certainly, but one senses that he is not really all that street-wise himself. He has too much concern for her, expresses too great a sensitivity to her condition to be anything but vulnerable himself. This is what endears him to the listener - his fallibility, the risk that one day he'll 'come and be cryin'' to her.

Ah, yes. Those seeing tears. He tries to present himself as ‘so much older than’, seeks to impose a partly-falsified self-image upon Ramona and upon the listener. He fails and one senses that he wants to fail. The successful presentation of their relationship turns upon this deliberate failure, like which there is no success.

All of which begs the question: how then, if this is a young man’s song, is a singer in his sixties able to re-present ‘To Ramona’ and yet retain the integrity of the song and of the singer? Is he in fact able to do that or is he deceiving both himself and his audience? I am not sure that he really pulls it off with integrity, though he can, on a good night, still make ‘To Ramona’ sound wonderful. I think he deceives us, if not himself. It really isn’t a song for an ageing man to sing. But there are lines which have successfully aged and passed into the lengthy canon of oft-quoted ‘Dylanisms’:

*Magnetic movements*

*Worthless foam from the mouth*

*The finishing end*

*I’ve heard you say many times*

*That you’re better than no one*

*And no one is better than you*

*Everything passes*

*Everything changes*

These lines are archetypal early Dylan and I don’t believe you if you tell me that in another 30 years many people will be quoting lyrics from, say, *Time Out Of Mind* with such easy familiarity. But beyond the familiar lyrics lies the ‘Dylan-ness’ of the song’s philosophy, of its themes. On a first listening in 1964, on the

heels of *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* and *The Times They Are A-Changin’*, the following lines held no shock:

*There’s no use in tryin’*

*I’ deal with the dyin’*

*You know you got*

*Nothing to win and nothing to lose*

*Making you feel*

*That you gotta be just like them*

*Just do what you think you should do*

All lines which stress again and again the need to define and conserve one’s individuality, to stay true to oneself.

For what else is there to be true to? And the need to challenge and experience life. It’s a life-enhancing song. Which is another reason for seeing this as a young man’s song, for never again will the senses rise so freshly, so sweetly. Like the way it was sung on Hallowe’en 1964 by a man overflowing with the vibrancy of youth – a skylark throwing himself at the blue heights and willing to burst his lungs with the sheer joy of his performing art. A troubadour light-years away from the hooded raven eschewing the lights of the world’s stages in, when was it, 1989? Oh, he didn’t extemporise greatly back then, but when you’re so young and full of words, each one must seem so precious. You must have so much respect for what you have written that it must be near impossible to vary the sacred script.

Coming to the lyrics, and hearing them sung, one is struck by an essential visual-ness; they do make you see. The delicate mix of language and imagery resembles impressionist water-colours,

enabling you to see the girl, her tears, the city streets. I could swear I even catch the scent of flowers lingering in the air around me as I type these words, the song is so able to invade my senses. It's an example of how listening to a Dylan recording can become a multi-sensory experience.

In a way I can imagine this girl as delicate like the mirror, bowed by her sadness. What young man could remain unmoved by the sight of those tears? The intimacy of the body's dewy vapours, its moisture, its wetness, is always so personal. In another song on the same album Dylan sings of a mouth 'watery and wet', which evokes sensuality and sexiness. And though it is unmentioned you can taste the female sweat in 'Spanish Harlem Incident'. This was young Dylan in heat, burning with sexual ardour, senses pulsing. I was wondering what he meant by the lines:

*The pangs of your  
sadness  
Will pass as your  
senses will rise*

It didn't seem to make sense. Surely he meant spirits? But spirits don't rise independently if one is sad or depressed. Writing above of sexuality gave me the answer. For as senses are aroused, heightened - smell, touch, taste, especially - you pass through mere emotions such as sadness or

happiness into another world: the deathlike world of the passions. Suddenly it seems incontestable that this is a love song. Surely what he really wants, but dare not articulate, is to lift her out of her sadness by holding her close, kissing her eyelids, offering physical tenderness, tactile compassion, a shoulder to cry on? And once she is comforted, who knows?

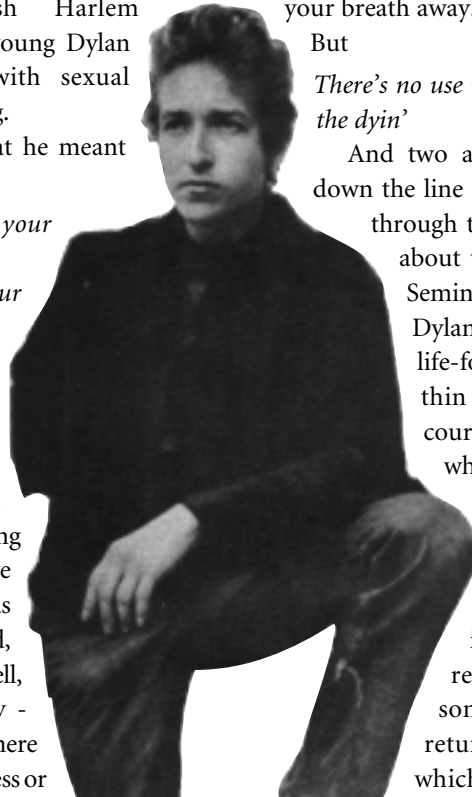
*The flowers of the city, though breath-  
like, get deathlike sometimes*

More impressionism. Turning life-giving breath to cold death. So rhythmic, so apt. The scent of flowers in claustrophobic city streets being both heavier and headier than in Monet's garden. And heavy scent is cloying, suffocating, taking your breath away. Such a sweet death.

But

*There's no use in tryin' t' deal with  
the dyin'*

And two albums and one year down the line Dylan would warn us through the person of Ophelia about the sin of lifelessness. Seminal themes. The young Dylan throbbing with the life-force, scornful of the thin men who lack the courage to seize the day, who don't even realise there is something to be seized. For Ramona, though she may not know it, death lies in stale relationships and in something worse: in returning to the South, which would mean



running away from life. There is no going back. Exile is forever. I pity the poor emigrant, but not as much as I do he who stays home. Dutch poet Leo Vroman once said: *'I'd rather be homesick than be home'*.

*Your cracked country lips,*

*I still wish to kiss*

*As to be by the strength of your skin*

Not a love song? *'Cracked country lips'* is such a fine phrase, the whole line almost suggesting that she no longer has cracked lips, or that he may no longer kiss them. It could be a hearkening back, a reminder to her from him of the aridity of the desert South. The dry cracked lips in opposition to her watery, truth-filled eyes (as well as to another girl's watery wet mouth). Moisture gives life, water is life and the city is a wet place, a watering-hole for the soul, and tears open our eyes to the truth. There is an erotic charge in the strength of her skin, even more in the touch of her skin, her magnetic movement. Water and electricity are such a dangerous combination.

Thinking of electricity, *'To Ramona'* always takes me back to the 1960s, to the days when listening to Dylan was such a fresh, vibrant experience. A few years ago there was a BBC radio programme about the 1966 Manchester concert. One of the interviewees said:

*It was almost worshipping. You were hanging on every word. People have asked now... when Dylan started a song which was well-known why there is no applauding... people didn't even applaud then because they didn't want to miss a word. It was cathedral-like. It was almost worshipping at a shrine.*

Exactly. That is how it was. It's how you hear it a year earlier on the delightful recording of *'To Ramona'* from Sheffield 1965. We heard the chimes of freedom in the wild cathedral evening, but now those days are gone. Now Dylan presents a rock concert and people holler and dance during the songs and something so very precious has been lost...

The sense of the end of the second verse merges with the beginning of the third verse (a verse usually omitted in live performance it seems). *Ramona* seems confused - mixed up in misunderstandings and vanities. Is locked out of a world she doesn't actually need to know: the self-creator of her woes. All is worthless foam. You don't need insight to understand this - there is nothing to reveal other than to remind ourselves of the sheer wonderfulness of *'To Ramona'*.

The fourth verse provides a multiple echo - future echoes of songs yet to be written. For in *'To Ramona'* can be heard both *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Highway 61 Revisited* at the unknown and unknowable moment of conception.

*I've heard you say many times*

*That you're better than no one*

*And no one is better than you.*

*If you really believe that,*

*You know you have*

*Nothing to win and nothing to lose.*

It is almost not an exaggeration to say that these words empowered me in my diffident, young-for-my-age late adolescence. Except no one talked of empowerment in those days, it was as if the word and the concept had not been invented. Having endured dutifully the drab

discipline of an English grammar school on the cusp of the sixties, I gratefully snatched these words as they fell from the lips of the prophet. They would be my passport to a better future. For the English education system was (is?) dedicated to the idea that some were better than most and the winners would be few. I can see that from the perspective of Blairite Man these lines may be perceived as negative and non-aspirational, but what happy-smiley people neither understand nor recall is how necessary this message was in 1964.

In his book *My Back Pages*, Andy Gill gets it wrong. Claiming that the song '*deals fairly directly with the basic issues behind Bob and Suze's split*' (where is his evidence?), he goes on to say that the lines quoted above represent a '*characterless position of stagnant ambition and minimal risk*'. This is a serious misjudgement. In fact the 'nothing to win, nothing to lose' attitude was hugely ambitious and aspirational when set in the context of the song's times and of Ramona's situation.

On a personal level the singer is saying to Ramona 'don't run away from this city, what have you got to lose? You're as good as them, as good as anyone'. But on a bigger level he was telling me and a million other 'strung-out ones an' worse' that we could be free, if we just had the confidence to do what we wanted to do. 'To Ramona' was a part of that revolution which blew away the 1950s Cold War conformity that still held Britain and America in its icy grip in 1964. Dylan showed us that there was no conflict between equality and freedom because this sort of equality – the knowledge

of an inherent and dignified personal equality unrelated to wealth, status or possessions - was what actually made you free, gave you self-respect. 'To Ramona' could become, if you wanted it to be, a personal/political existentialist manifesto to be waved in the face of duty and materialism, the twin gods of our parents' generation and, sadly, of later generations. The future echoes of this message were:

*There's no success like failure  
And failure's no success at all.*

*When you ain't got nothing  
You got nothing to lose.*

From fixtures and forces and friends, your sorrow does stem... The fixtures and forces are those same 1950s families and institutions. 'Friends' are something else. Friends and other strangers (and Dylan fans?) have as great a capacity for imposing conformity as any parent; more, probably. It was hard for me, at eighteen, to reveal my love for Dylan in the face of my friends' determined anti-intellectualism. But as a young man I maintained a morbid perception of myself as a loner, an outsider, and that helped. Had I then known of Sartre, I would have relished '*hell is other people*', though I now know that we all carry our own hell within us: '*that enemy within*' (*Street-Legal* again!). So it wasn't just Dylan's politics that appealed, it was his individualism. I'm sure I cannot have been the only person for whom 'To Ramona' offered a vision of freedom with equality, at the same time as confirming a suspicion of what friendships might do to you. A young man's song. Another future echo of 'To Ramona' is found in:

*I try my best to be just like I am  
But everybody wants you to be just like  
them.*

*Don't follow leaders*

So the singer's love for Ramona inspires his greatest gift to her: her individual no-need-to-conform-to-anyone-or-anything freedom. What other help can he bring?

Like Alice's Restaurant, you can find anything you want in 'To Ramona'. You can find the heat and pulse of the city where flowers get deathlike; and you can find the country in Ramona's cracked lips and her yearning for the South. There's religion in 'no use in tryin' to deal with the dyin'" and in 'the finishing end' which is ever at hand. There is politics: 'you're better than no one and no one is better than you'. There are friendships and aspirations and dreams and sex and heart-break and the pressures that people bring

to bear upon other people. And there's the knowledge that no matter how good or how bad it gets, 'everything passes, everything changes'... and it has a great melody. What more could you want from a song?

It is one of Dylan's finest songs and the many layers of meaning it contains make it sufficient in itself. It doesn't matter whether four of the title letters might signify the Tarot, or that, numerically, it is the central song of the first seven albums. To discuss it in such terms is to diminish and demean 'To Ramona'. It is so much greater than that and we find so much that we need and so much of ourselves reflected in the mirror of Ramona's tears.

*Thus let your streams o'erflow your  
springs,*

*Till eyes and tears be the same things.*

*And each the other's difference bears,*

*These weeping eyes, those seeing tears.*

- Andrew Marvell





Dear Andy,

It wasn't long after I started reading the letters page of Judas! #3 that I found myself feeling like raising a cheer for Toby Richards-Carpenter:

*'But whilst there has been raucous dismissal of 'The Never-Ending Tour' as a concept and an artistic reality... the articulate and coherent argument has yet to be heard.'*

Well said, Toby. All this stuff about Dylan 'treading water artistically' and so on is coming from people who, however valuable their insights might be about Dylan's art as it once was, are no longer properly engaging with his art as it is now. And Toby is right. As criticism such comments don't bear much inspection. I presume we're supposed to be persuaded by mere repetition - but persuaded of what? That our finest moments of artistic engagement while listening to a recent Dylan show are somehow invalid? That doesn't strike me as a very worthwhile exercise. Or is it that the truly fine performances are so few and far between that the whole Dylan touring endeavour is supposed to be an artistic waste of time? Well, let's take a look at that last idea.

Let me pluck a few performances out of the air - performances that I suspect take the art of the song close to the limits of what can be achieved; that provide a musical inspiration which can sustain you for years, to which you can return time and again (if you're lucky enough to have recordings) and still be bowled over by them:

'Joey', Brixton 31st March '95;

'Pretty Peggy-O', Albany 18th April '97;

'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue', Gothenburg 10th June '98;

'Tryin' To Get To Heaven', London 5th October '2000;

'Blind Willie McTell', Manchester 9th May '02.

I might add almost any performance of 'High Water' or 'Lonesome Day Blues', and already other performances are queuing up in my mind demanding to be included. But I'll limit myself to those, because this is a letter, not a list, and because everyone will be able to produce their own equivalent list of performances which they know are great. (They will know this, by the way, not because they've understood some kind of critical argument which has persuaded them, but because they've heard them, and felt them, and been changed by them, and returned to them again and again and found them an unending source of inspiration.)

## Judas!

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Now, how many such performances have there been during recent years? Twenty? A hundred? Several hundred? And how many such transcendent performances do you have to get before the Never Ending Tour can be declared worthwhile by those who think it is not? Twenty? A hundred? Several hundred? And finally, how many transcendent performances would we have had if there had been no Never Ending Tour? (Ah, that's a tough one.)

It's pretty obvious we can't do criticism by numbers. It's quite pointless wagging a critical finger at Bob Dylan and telling him to tour less and compose more (or whatever it is you want him to do). He's the artist. Only he can provide the appropriate setting for his greatest art to be produced. Dylan does it by incessant touring, and, quite simply, it works. The performances I've listed above are truly great works of performing art, and he goes on and on finding moments where he can lift his art to dizzying heights time and time again. I presume the weaker performances are just part of the road he has to tread to create situations where great performances can happen. That seems to be how he has to do it. Why is this treading water?

And surely we can get rid of this daft notion that nostalgia is stifling our critical faculties. None of my listening has anything to do with nostalgia. Primarily, I listen to Bob Dylan not because of what he once was, but because of what he is now; because of the incomparable and uplifting performances which, at his best, he is still capable of producing with breathtaking frequency.

Alan Davis  
Lancaster

Larry (Lambchop) once had a great line about comparing Bob albums. It was along the lines of 'I don't say which of my children I prefer so I don't pick between records'. It is true also about how I feel about Judas! I had the chance, finally, to read it over the weekend and, without saying issue 3 was better than the other two, I would say that the magazine is now in exactly the place a proper, critical, Dylan quarterly should be. I know John Bauldie always wanted to run such a magazine. The strength of your magazine is that you do not have to run news/set lists etc. but can concentrate solely on well written articles discussing the Art of Bob Dylan. There is no padding - no 'I have read this before', about it.

There was a wonderful variety in your magazine - Toby managed to make some fresh points about a much discussed period - and the "*Love And Theft*" piece made some fascinating new points. Alan Davis's comparison of Bob's harp playing with Blake's engraving was just wonderful - you have to be truly accomplished to pull off that degree of childlike apparent incompetence - but I am sure he is right - and Jim Brady's piece said new things about 'Lay Down Your Weary Tune' and even 'All Along The Watchtower'. The only problem is how you maintain that very high standard, but it is a joy to say that by issue 3 Judas! is exactly where it should be. Well done.

David Bristow  
London

Re. Judas, the infamous cry. (A fine third magazine, by the way...)

I know it's an ancient controversy, but as it's been alluded to again I can't resist a brief response. Ever since first hearing the vinyl 'Albert Hall' bootleg at University in the 70's, I've been certain - even more so once the official release at last happened - that the dialogue between Dylan and the audience goes as follows: first, someone yells, 'Judas!' Dylan fails/refuses to respond, and various cries and mutterings are heard from the audience, the longest of which is pretty indistinct but is certainly bitter in tone; it seems to me to end with something like '...and Dylan stole them!' (Maybe an outraged, sandals-wearing folkie struggling to say something about plagiarism?) This, I'm certain, is what Dylan replies to when he now says, 'I don't believe you. You're a liar.' This would be, after all, a logical response to the accusation, whereas to reply to the taunt, 'Judas!' in this way would be loosely inexact or lazy - something Dylan rarely is (a few slips in the Christian songs aside, 'an unknown hour' that 'no-one knew' for example...) Finally, by now exasperated, he mutters off-mic, 'You fucking liar!' I played the thing through again yesterday, and it still sounds like the above to friends and me; and "Love And Theft" still sounds wonderful following on from it...

Bob Jope  
London

I would like to congratulate Andy Muir and Keith Wootton on another excellent issue. Each issue seems to improve upon the last. I am writing in response (and in footnote) to the wonderful article by Richard Jobes that addressed "Love And Theft" and Blackface Minstrelsy. I would like to firstly address some issues and facts the article presents. I don't mean to seem critical of the article. I would never bother responding to an article I found spurious in the first place. It was a strong, erudite work by Mr. Jobes.

1) You wrote "Love And Theft" *wouldn't work if the shifts in style were entirely superficial.* Could anybody argue the opposite?

2) I don't agree that the 'panties' line was in tone just a 'flirtatious leer'. It was the narrator's (at least of those lines) extreme thick headedness and ego that is most prevalent in that line. It gives double meaning to the following line 'things are breaking up out there,' meaning both the flood water and the woman in question's reaction to him. She breaks up with him.

3) You listed the album's list of American classic figures 'with exceptions such as Shakespeare and Hemingway'. Well, Shakespeare isn't American. How is Fitzgerald an American classic and Hemingway isn't? They're peers, and Hemingway had the longer, more enduring and influential career.

4) You wrote of 'High Water's' 'rich harmony vocals'. There are no harmony vocals on that song.

I know this must look like nit-picking, but the article was so strong (especially the Shakespearean minstrel info!) that these little things distracted me no end. I have not yet

read Eric Lott's book *Love and Theft*. I don't know if it includes an artist named Emmett Miller; I'm guessing it does since he was a famous blackface minstrel. And I'm curious to know if Mr. Jobs has ever heard him. I bought his album last week on a fluke. Anyway, here it goes: Jimmie Rodgers stole Miller's singing style so much so that (in the liner note's words) *'it isn't funny'*. BTW, Rodgers also performed in blackface. Hank Williams stole Miller's 'Love Sick Blues' and his version is an exact copy of Miller's vocal phrasing. And we know how much Dylan loves Williams and Rodgers (there is so much love and theft here, it's great).

As far as I can tell Miller only has one available disc, on Columbia Legacy (came out in 1996). The first song on Miller's album is 'God's River' (à la 'Summer Days'). And another song called 'Sweet Mama' has the refrain *'Papa done got mad'* (à la 'Bye and Bye'). Leon Redbone and Merle Haggard are both big fans of Miller and the liner notes to the album include quotes from them. I wanted to write this info to the letters section of *Judas!* to reinforce Jobs' wonderful piece on L&T's minstrel heritage.

Keep up the superb work,

Lucas Stensland  
Los Angeles

### *'The Not-So-Wicked Messenger'*

Dear Andrew,

My name is Chris Bisciello and I subscribe to *Judas!* magazine. I just received issue #3 in the mail today and I must say that the article titled *Can't Let Go No More* by Markus Prieur really got my attention. I happen to be a fan of the Gospel period and I was so very happy to read this interesting, articulate and smart piece of writing. I share the belief that Bob has not abandoned the scruples he ingested at the time of his religious conversion. I do believe, however (in the true spirit of his art) that he has utilized more recognizable music to solidify and get those scruples across to the modern day audiences.

However, Bob still tips his hat to legendary sounds of faith and joy of the past by performing such songs such as 'A Voice From On High' and 'I Am The Man, Thomas'. In fact, Bob now seems to utilize a 'three-pronged attack' when performing these days, as he presents the songs that made him famous, lesser known songs such as those mentioned above, as well as his new material. I tell you, if we could prove that Bob meticulously and purposely sets up everything that has to do with every aspect of his performances, we'd all sleep much happier!

The article itself reminded me of the time when I was first turned on to Bob, as that instance retained its own flavor of faith and devotion. I was about 14 years old, a sophomore at a strict all-boy Catholic High School in Queens, New York, (where I hail from). I was, to say the least, quite apprehensive and wanted nothing more than to follow the rules and make all of my instructors happy.

Many members of the faculty were Marist Brothers, an order founded by a Frenchman in the 1800s. Many of the brothers were strict fellows, eager and determined to uphold the school's tradition of churning out young Christian soldiers. I generally liked these people, as they seemed genuine and true to their cause.

One brother in particular, Brother Ronald Marcelin, was just a bit different from the rest of his compadres and would eventually change my life forever. I can't quite place the exact day, but there was this one instance where I was sitting alone in the cafeteria when Brother Ron came walking on through. As he passed me, he waved hello and proceeded to exit the cafeteria into the school's parking lot. As he passed, I remember getting a whiff of mentholated cigarettes that seemed to follow him wherever he went. I was so shocked that among the holy minions lurked one who indulged in this earthly pleasure that was so outlawed in this Catholic institution.

That fact alone made me realize that this man retained a down to earth quality. Later on, a few of my friends joined me in the cafeteria and I began to ask them if they had heard anything about Brother Ron. My friends began to tell me that he was a really cool guy who ran the peer group at school where students got together to talk about their problems. I immediately decided that Brother Ron was worth checking out, so I was determined to get to know him.

The next day, I walked up to his classroom door. He saw me at the window and invited me in. The moment I entered the room, I immediately noticed the Dylan posters on the wall. The one that I remember the most was this HUGE poster advertising *Oh Mercy* that was actually used on some NY billboard somewhere. I was familiar with Bob but 'Like a Rolling Stone' was the only song that I had heard on the radio. We talked awhile and he invited me to join the peer group should I need to talk about anything in particular. I thanked him and went on my way. As I left the room and was making my way up the staircase, I heard what sounded like people cheering coming from the room that I had just been in. Little did I realize that I had just been exposed to my first 'field recording'. As the school year went on, Bro. Ron and I spent many afternoons together talking about music, especially Dylan. He explained to me that he had first become interested in Bob in 1977. Bro. Ron also told me that he had seen Bob many times since then and was a collector of Dylan's live performances. I immediately assumed that Bob had released many live albums. Bro. Ron explained to me that these were not the kind of live albums that were available in common record shops but were recordings that some of his friends had made at some of the performances that they had been to.

When I asked Bro. Ron if he'd let me hear some of these live performances, he was more than happy to oblige. The next day, Bro. Ron handed me a cassette which contained a 1975 Bob Dylan performance from Waterbury, Connecticut. The tape contained a slip of paper with the song titles neatly typed out, along with a list of the band members' names whom Bob had performed with that night. The backing band was something called The Rolling Thunder Revue... a name that I would soon never stop saying.

I soon realized that these tapes which Bro. Ron kept giving me were definitely not legitimate live albums put out by Dylan's record company! However, I was mesmerized by the material that each one contained - different phases of Dylan playing with different musicians, creating a different ambiance at each venue. The phase of Dylan which I liked most was The Rolling Thunder period. I told Bro. Ron that the 1976 leg of the tour conjured up images of Dylan being this mighty troubadour, rolling along like a steam train to capture and reclaim America. Bro. Ron got a kick out of my assessment and was glad that I liked the music so much. My friends were definitely getting bored with my Dylan stories as I seemed to endlessly ramble on about people like Rob Stoner, Steven Soles and Scarlet Rivera. I seemed out of touch with my contemporaries which could be detrimental to 15 year olds... but I didn't care. I had finally found my niche, my passion. I had also found a friend who gave me all this, a friend who chose a life of service and who truly cared for young people. Bro. Ron had become my true hero... next to Bob. Unfortunately, Bro. Ron had developed lung cancer and was unable to teach anymore. The student body was unable to visit him in the hospital because he was in the intensive care unit. I wrote letters to him and asked the other brothers whom he lived with to please deliver them to him. I never received any word back... until we all got the news that he had passed away. Needless to say, I was hit hard by his passing.

I decided to honor his life by turning as many people on to Dylan as I possibly could. So, I am happy to say that I now have many friends who are into Dylan not because of me... because of Bro. Ron Marcelin. I give him full credit for passing through me and giving me the power to enrich the lives of others by introducing them to Bob Dylan. I have also devoted my life to serving others, as I am now a special education teacher. I teach young children who were born with Down's Syndrome in a privately run program. There is not a day that goes by where I am not utilizing a Dylan lyric to either make them laugh or get a down-to-earth lesson across. I have once again found my niche thanks to two very special men. Thank you Bro. Ron... Thank You Bob

Chris Bisciello  
New York

by Manuel Vardavas

# 'Pretty Good Stuff'

## **Knoxville Grail** [Wild Wolf WW 2580]

Disc 1

1. Gotta Serve Somebody
2. I Believe In You
3. When You Gonna Wake Up?
4. When He Returns
5. Man Gave Names To All The Animals
6. Precious Angel
7. Slow Train
8. Covenant Woman
9. Gonna Change My Way Of Thinking
10. Do Right To Me Baby

Recorded at the Civic Auditorium, Knoxville TN 5-2-80 except tracks 8 to 10 on disc 2 which are from the Saturday Night Live TV show, NBC TV Studios, New York NY 20-10-79.

Disc 2

1. Solid Rock
2. Saving Grace
3. Saved
4. What Can I Do For You?
5. In The Garden
6. Blessed Is The Name Of The Lord
7. Pressing On
8. Gotta Serve Somebody
9. I Believe In You
10. When You Gonna Wake Up?

## **Seeking Salvation** [Doberman DBM 306/307]

Disc 1

1. Gotta Serve Somebody
2. I Believe In You
3. When You Gonna Wake Up?
4. When He Returns
5. Man Gave Names To All The Animals
6. Precious Angel
7. Slow Train
8. Covenant Woman
9. Gonna Change My Way Of Thinking
10. Do Right To Me Baby
11. Solid Rock
12. Saving Grace
13. Saved

Recorded at the Paramount Theatre, Portland OR 16-1-80 except tracks 6 to 11 on disc two which are from the Rainbow Music Hall, Denver CO 22-1-80.

Disc 2

1. What Can I Do For You?
2. In The Garden
3. Band introductions
4. Blessed Is The Name Of The Lord
5. Pressing On
6. When He Returns
7. Man Gave Names To All The Animals
8. Precious Angel
9. Gonna Change My Way Of Thinking
10. Do Right To Me Baby
11. Solid Rock

On 7th December 1979, Dylan was interviewed by Bruce Heiman on KNEX radio in Tucson. Heiman's first question began as follows. *'We got a press release from the Tucson chapter of the American Atheists and they said in response to your recent embrace of the born-again Christian movement they plan to leaflet your upcoming concert. They say they recognise the need to inform those in the audience that the new Dylan cause-célèbre is a repressive and reactionary ideology and that members intend to draw attention to the contradictions between the previous content of your art form and the message which your songs now expound.'* Dylan, misunderstood once again, responded, *'I still don't quite grasp what you're saying or who's saying it.'*

In 1965 they objected when they thought 'the message' was being lost in the sound, even though they'd missed that said message had already moved on. This time the objections were directed at the new message itself, even though it wasn't exactly new. Also in common with '65 was that the new sound was not exactly a bolt out of the blue. Although fans and media alike were not privy at the time to Dylan's 'born-again experience' - the cross that was thrown on-stage in San Diego (17-11-78) and later the vision while stuck in a Tucson hotel room - the debut performance of 'Do Right To Me Baby' at the last show of the 1978 marathon provided a not-exactly-subtle pointer of things to come. As usual, very few were paying attention.

One might have expected that the release of the *Slow Train Coming* album,

to generally positive reviews, would have smoothed the way for the live shows which were to follow three months later. I remember, upon the album's release, being nonplussed by its lyrical content, while at the same time blown away by the music; not something most artists could have achieved. Putting the sonic shambles of *Desire* and *Street-Legal* behind him, this was the album that proved again that Dylan could still cut it in the studio, and still preserve the emotional content of the music throughout the entire album-making process. This led Jann Wenner in his *Rolling Stone* review to call the new album *'probably Dylan's finest record'*, concluding that *'more than his ability with words, and more than his insight, his voice is God's greatest gift to him.'* In short, even those who took exception to Dylan's new (sic) direction could not fail to hear Dylan's commitment to the material. The intensity of the performances made that unavoidable. The *Saturday Night Live* TV appearance merely confirmed all the evidence.

It is clear to us now that the shock value of the Warfield shows arose out of Dylan's bold and truly courageous decision to excise all the old songs from the live show. All those good reviews for the album counted for naught when confronted with a posse of reviewers with freebie tickets who suddenly believed they would never hear 'Blowin' in the Wind' again. In *Behind The Shades* Clinton Heylin highlights two important early reviews of the shows. Philip Elwood of the *Examiner* found it to be a *'a pretty gruelling experience'*, while Joel Selvin of



the *Chronicle*, having unequivocally established an unsympathetic attitude to the gig, went on to state that ‘*cat-calls and boos echoed throughout the ornate hall.*’

Fortunately, the Dylan taping fraternity was well established by the end of 1979, which gives us an opportunity to assess the accuracy of those press reports. The audio evidence of the tour proves that the Warfield audiences were by no means unresponsive to the intensity of what they witnessed, and thankfully these initial shows have been well preserved for posterity by bootleg CD releases. The opening show on November 1st can be found on *New Found Faith* (Wanted Man WMM 058/059), the final night of the residency on the 16th is contained on *Contract With The Lord* (Silver Rarities SIRA 12/13), while the Santa Monica show on the 21st, where the crowd were openly in sync with the performer, can be heard on *Preaching To The Converted* (Doberman DBM 164/165).

With his belief in the content of the shows still intact, Dylan chose not to respond to any of the media criticism. If anything, he upped the stakes, and the performances moved up a gear. The core of the band (Spooner Oldham, Tim Drummond, Jim Keltner and Fred Tackett), who were still coming to terms with the arrangements the previous November, now clicked like a well-oiled machine. Given their credentials and ability maybe this should be no surprise, but they certainly rewarded the faith shown by their employer. Equally at home with the sparse and subtle textures of ‘Man Gave Names to All the Animals’ and

the sonic blast of ‘Solid Rock’, these musicians of the highest pedigree created a platform for Dylan’s singing, the quality of which he has never succeeded in recapturing.

In addition, audiences for the first leg of the tour had been witness to more between-song banter from Dylan in a month and a half than in his entire previous career. Some of this was not



merely the product of Dylan’s desire to communicate. At the Tempe shows, where the crowd were as hostile as any time on the tour, it seems obvious that he decided to fight fire with fire. When the tour reconvened in January these raps were kept to a minimum and, although they would reappear with a vengeance for the final leg of shows, their temporary absence seems to have had a beneficial effect on Dylan and his ability to project. With the preaching quotient kept under control, the more personal songs like ‘Precious Angel’, ‘Gonna Change My Way of Thinking’ and ‘I Believe in You’ are able to

grow in stature, no longer being merely the light relief before the fire and damnation of 'When You Gonna Wake Up' or 'Slow Train'. Moreover, with fewer distractions Dylan is able to put all his effort into singing the songs and, with the solid bedrock provided by the band, we are treated to some of his best ever vocal performances. During this period he would consistently achieve heights rarely heard since the 1966 tour.

This second leg of the tour, one of the true peaks of Dylan's career as a live artist, has been unjustly ignored until now by the bootleggers. To paraphrase the old London bus expression: you wait in vain for ages, and then two come along together. Doberman's *Seeking Salvation* [DBM 306/307] offers the delights of the show at the Paramount Theatre in Portland on January 16th 1980 with the partial soundboard from Denver 22-1-80 as its filler; though the fragmentary state of 'Slow Train' and 'Saving Grace' necessitated their exclusion from the (now speed-corrected) Denver tape. *Knoxville Grail* from the Wild Wolf label [WW 2580] serves up the show from February 5th, with the *Saturday Night Live* tracks as the coda.

These releases both deserve your patronage. The clarity of the Portland tape is quite remarkable, especially given that many tapes of the period do not match this standard. The same taper also did a fine job of preserving the Seattle gig two days before, but the Portland tape just has the edge, and the stellar performance that night no doubt ensured its selection as the centrepiece of Doberman's two disc set.



The Knoxville set is not far behind. It is almost as impressive a recording as Portland; stating a preference would be picky. If the Portland tape did not exist we would be more than grateful for the existence of the one from Knoxville, and the coincidental timing of both releases so close to each other is unfortunate.

We seem to be in an era when labels are misguidedly obsessed with offering the latest in the never-ending series of bootlegs documenting the never-ending tour. With the Crystal Cat label leading the way, most releases are purely intent on cashing in on the 'live souvenir' market. The effect is merely to produce bootlegs which are even more tedious than some of the shows. It doesn't take a genius to work out that either *Knoxville Grail* or *Seeking Salvation* will provide a far greater source of enjoyment and inspiration for many years to come.

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# 'lies that life is black and white'

## Bob Dylan and the reality of protest

### part 2: songs in detail

# 'Flesh On The Bone'

*'Never Create Anything – It Will Be Misinterpreted'*

Bob Dylan 1964

by Toby Richards-Carpenter

#### **'John Brown'**

Dylan has always been at pains to deny that he is anti-war. He is not and never was a pacifist, and has always recognised and respected the necessity of conflict. He has also never been shy of confronting the issues of warfare, and that remains true to this day. The folk audience interpreted several of his early songs to be protests against conflict, and 'John Brown' is one of them. It is easy to see why.

The 'story' of this song is fairly straightforward; a young lad goes off to fight in a war and his mother, proud of this, brags to her neighbours about the fact. However, upon her son's return from war he is so badly mutilated that she didn't recognise him. As a poignant final gesture as to the futility of war, the son gives his medals to his mother, as though to emphasise that any such material reward is worthless in the face of such horror. Therefore, as widely interpreted by Dylan's audience, Dylan was saying war was bad, as it does horrible things to people. What's more, Dylan knew the song would be interpreted in this way. A similar pattern can be seen in much of his early writing. He would tell a story with a straightforward logical interpretation that satisfied his folk-music audience that he knew was growing all the time. However, in public he could happily deny that his songs were 'about' anything in particular, or that he was a spokesperson for anyone, because his own personal targets within the song were far subtler.

In 'John Brown' there are two principal characters, the mother and the son. The mother is set up as a naïve figure. She is enthused about the prospect of her son going off to fight; indeed the first two verses are virtually a description of a mother sending her son off to his first day at school, rather than a war. While the son is off fighting, we don't have descriptions of the battlefield; instead we listen to the mother crowing to her neighbours about her son's involvement, smiling as she goes. Therefore, when the reality of war is brought home to her, she is made to look selfish and stupid by her attitude to the whole affair. Dylan here is mocking the chattering middle classes, the sheltered housewives who use their children as a means of gaining social prestige by exaggerating their achievements.

John Brown's mother is so competitive that she will happily send off her son to do battle if it means she can have some medals to decorate the home afterwards. She is simply ignorant as to what war entails. Nowhere in the song does Dylan comment on the nature or validity of war itself. By using war as an example, he knew that his audience would take it as implicit that he was being condemnatory of it. However, I suspect it was no accident that the rhetoric of the opening verses could be applied to a scenario of a mother sending a child off to school for the first time. It is more commonplace for this, rather than conscription, to be used as a source of misplaced pride amongst middle-class parents, ignorant of the years of misery they will be sentencing their offspring to by packing them off to boarding school,

but boastful of their ability to do so. Perhaps my interpretation is itself typically British middle-class and a Jewish boy of twenty-one from Minnesota could have no notion of the perils of the British boarding school.

Nevertheless, as a condemnation of the chattering classes, 'John Brown' can be shown to work across cultures. As an anti-war song, it doesn't sustain scrutiny, partly because on that level the dialogue is tedious and one-dimensional, but principally because Dylan refrains from making any comment or judgement on war as a concept. Dylan suggests just enough to make condemnation of war implicit for those who wanted to hear such rhetoric. Dylan's own brief, however, was far wider.

In a recent interview Dylan was asked about America's involvement in Afghanistan following the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, and he made the following comment: *'Those people in charge, I'm sure they've read Sun-Tzu, who wrote The Art Of War in the sixth century. In there he says, "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself and not your enemy, for every victory gained you will suffer a defeat."* And he goes on to say, *"If you know neither the enemy or yourself, you will succumb in every battle"* (2001)<sup>1</sup>. This insight helps our understanding of 'John Brown'. The mother sent off her son to fight with no conception of the implications of this; she knew not the enemy. When her son returned, he was so disfigured that she didn't recognise him, her own flesh and blood, either. In knowing neither the

enemy nor herself, she, symbolic of those who only regard themselves through the eyes of others, will lose every battle. However, the son, when away fighting, realises his enemy's *'face looked just like mine'*. He knew his own self, and was able to recognise himself and his own predicament in his enemy; we don't imagine an enemy literally the spitting image of John Brown, but we do see the same expressions of terror on their faces.

John Brown was honest enough not to blindly envisage his enemy as an evil force, but to see him as another human being. The son knew both his enemy and himself, because he experienced the conflict first-hand, and was able to see good in another person, even in a position of adversity. He needn't fear the result of a hundred battles, for he had a developed sense of what his involvement was worth. He felt it was worth lives, his mother thought it was worth medals. As further evidence that Dylan sold out nothing when he left behind his folk audience, Dylan wrote 'John Brown' almost forty years before quoting that enlightening and strikingly relevant passage from Sun-Tzu. He is nothing if not consistent.

### **'Percy's Song'**

Dylan has long defended the underdog. Davey Moore, Hattie Carroll, George Jackson, Rubin Carter, Lenny Bruce... Dylan's empathy with the outsider has been a consistently visible thread. What is more unusual is for Dylan to highlight the plight of the underdog from an assumed viewpoint, reserving his own judgement. And so it is with 'Percy's

Song'; we encounter an underdog presented without Dylan's prejudice. This is not the only aspect to the song that doesn't initially seem to fall in with expectations.

It is presented to the listener with a structure typical some of Dylan's most famous 'finger-pointing' songs; that is, we have a confrontational monologue, a story with a beginning, a middle and an end. Why, then, are we presented with such a journey of apparent injustice and human tragedy, yet denied a clear resolution? Why does the narrator stutter and stumble in his conviction of his friend's innocence, then walk away without getting to the heart of the matter? Does the song even make sense? If so, what do we gain from learning of such a feeble protest? Why is Dylan telling us this story? If 'Percy's Song' does not seem to satisfy the listener to the same degree that a bold, determined narrative such as 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll' does, it is because Dylan has deceived the listener into looking for the wrong kind of message.

'Percy's Song' was written in 1963. Set alongside Dylan's protest works of this period, works that dealt with boxers killed in the ring, soldiers killed at war, ruthless warlords, judges blackmailing young girls, aristocrats getting away with murder and so on, a song that addresses a man unjustly sentenced to ninety-nine years in jail for his part in a car accident may seem to fit the mould. At the very least, the subject matter of 'Percy's Song' suggests that it aspires to sit alongside the other lengthy denunciations of evil judges and war villains.

After all, if Dylan were trying to capture an idea unrelated to injustice, why would he muddy the waters by setting that idea in the context of an apparent injustice similar to those he has focused on and denounced so often? The delicate subtlety of 'Percy's Song' can be obscured beneath all the shouting and slamming of doors, but it remains true to Dylan's dominant concern for the traumatised individual. All 'Percy's Song' does is to portray the raw and emotional reaction of a simple, confused man after he hears that a close friend is in trouble with the law. Unlike a protest song, the nature of the crime, or even whether a crime has been committed, let alone whether it has been fairly dealt with, are of scant relevance. However, the superficial presence of these elements in a Dylan song of this vintage can deceive the listener as to the song's essence. The 'protest' factor is a red herring.

Dylan is not present in 'Percy's Song', distinguishing it from the majority of his writing at this time, where his presence is implicit if not explicit. The only place where he could have fitted in such a structure would be as the narrator, yet the narrator is clearly devoid of the reflective and perceptive qualities Dylan tended to assume and project when inhabiting a first-person narrative in this period. If it were Dylan narrating, the irony of him claiming to '(write) *the best words I could write*' would be banal and unnecessary, and would probably irritate to the extent that it would dissolve any tension created by the song at an early stage. The narrator is sincere in his need to write as well as he

can; he is acting impulsively, panicking out of fright for what may happen to his friend.

There is no sense of perspective here, no sense of Dylan looking over the guy's shoulder and telling him how to work the system. The narrator does the only thing he can think of, which is to inform the judge of his imminent arrival and set out to find him. We don't know what he hopes to achieve by doing so, and it soon becomes clear that he doesn't know either. All we have is a sense of a loyal friend. His loyalty is blind, since the narrator's desperation derives from the knowledge that 'a friend of mine' could be sentenced to jail, as though he believes his friend to be incapable of doing wrong. This sense is strengthened as the narrator claims his friend '*wouldn't harm a life that belonged to someone else*'. The phrase is desperately clumsy, yet is being delivered by the narrator with absolute earnestness. It confirms the narrator's inarticulacy, and that he is floundering out of his depth in trying to confront a judge.

Indeed, the judge is rather patient in the face of this ignorant barrage, listening wearily as his accuser tries to convince him that his guilty friend deserves a more lenient sentence. It is only after the desperate final outburst from the narrator that his friend '*ain't no criminal and his crime it is none*' that the judge decides he has had enough. As the narrator is dismissed from the judge's office, like a disruptive pupil scolded by a headmaster, he laments that he '*did not understand*'. We feel sympathy; he clearly doesn't understand. He doesn't want to believe or

accept the truth. Never mind the guy who got ninety-nine years; never mind the 'four persons killed'; this tragedy belongs to the narrator. Dylan shows his intuitive grasp of the human issues involved in such a case through his sensitive portrayal of the victim whom everyone forgets.

The purpose of 'Percy's Song' is to focus solely on the injustice felt by the narrator. Since there is no 'Percy' mentioned within the lyric, it seems possible that Dylan may at least be implicitly present in the song's title. Having constructed this song entirely from the perspective of the narrator, he may have chosen to dedicate the song to the narrator, calling him Percy. This is, after all, the narrator's tragedy, so why not his song also? On the other hand, if the narrator did provide the title as well, what could be more appropriate than to dedicate it simply to his convicted friend, Percy? That there is no answer to the riddle of the title does not matter. (Tellingly, the title is not loaded in any way, in the manner of, for example, 'The Lonesome Death of', or 'Who Killed?'). The title is charming, sincere and unpretentious, as is Dylan's technique in this song.

Those looking for a protest are thrown off the scent early in 'Percy's Song'. There is a narrative complaint that can be followed if that is what we are interested in, and indeed the truth of the song exists within that superficial 'protest' framework. However, Dylan makes us search. That 'Percy's Song' does not work very well within the narrow criteria that we impose upon it in expectation of a 'protest

song', should be a clue that Dylan was having his listeners on. In this tale of courtroom struggle, he was neither in pursuit of justice, nor striving to score political points. He was simply empathising with the underdog.

### 'Masters of War'

From *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, this is one of Dylan's most famous 'protest' songs, and also one of his most durable from that era. Dylan has sung it with consistent conviction at different junctures of his career, frequently when international conflict has been a topical issue. Memorably powerful performances were delivered at Nuremberg on July 1st 1978, at the Grammy Awards in 1991 when America was deeply involved in the Gulf War, and consistently during the tour of the United States of October and November 2001, while the conflict in Afghanistan was raging.

Given the dramatic contexts in which this song has been allowed to breathe, it is unsurprising that people have accepted the directness of the lyric to be a no-holds-barred denouncement of war and those that incite war. Dylan himself denies this; *'I've said before that song's got nothing to do with being anti-war. It has more to do with the military-industrial complex that Eisenhower was talking about'* (2001)<sup>2</sup>.

The narrative of the song is written, and invariably delivered, with such incivility that it can be read simply as the rant of an angry young man decrying as cowards the warlords who *'put a gun in my hand'* and *'hide behind desks'*. There is an assumption, in this case, that Dylan is the

narrator of the piece. In 1963, dressed scruffily in check work shirt and jeans, guitar slung round his neck, looking every inch the left-wing folkie, you could have made a convincing case for this being a straightforward 'protest song'. But what of Eisenhower's military-industrial complex that Dylan refers to?

In his final speech as President, in January 1961, broadcast on television, Eisenhower warned of the dangers of the complexities of America's military industry growing too greatly. He was worried about a situation that he himself had played a large part in bringing about, that the military was taking up too large a part of the annual budget in such a way that the nation did not benefit. The industry had grown so big that it needed a huge amount of money every year to sustain itself, even though its sustenance on such a scale did America no good. It did America no good, felt Eisenhower, because of the dangers that went hand in hand with acquiring 'unwarranted influence'<sup>3</sup> in widespread places; he warned 'the potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist'. He concluded his speech by hoping that, in time, 'all people will come to live together in a peace guaranteed by the binding force of mutual respect and love'. Given that Dylan will, when pressed, deny that he is anti-war, it is possible to imagine him pouring scorn upon Eisenhower's vision, and being motivated to write a song that in some ways satirises his views.

'Masters of War' has been criticised for being simplistic in its agenda and its approach, which amounts to little more

than a diatribe against the warlords. In the light of Dylan's revelation that he was reflecting on Eisenhower's military-industrial complex, 'Masters of War' is rather effective in highlighting the impracticalities, the hypocrisy, the ludicrousness even of what Eisenhower was saying. If it were Dylan speaking from the heart then, for an alleged pacifist to declare of his adversaries, 'I hope that you die', and 'I'll stand o'er your grave 'til I'm sure that you're dead', is indeed to operate a double standard.

Therefore, rather than view this passage of the song as being incompetent writing, it is more realistic to view it as Dylan singling out an individual, Eisenhower, with fuzzy moral standards. It is arguable that a President who institutionalised the Cold War as a global confrontation<sup>4</sup>, but who then wishes for everybody to live in loving harmony, is himself a hypocrite. There is also much talk of money in the song; 'You hide in your mansion', declares the narrator, though 'all the money you made will never buy back your soul'. Eisenhower was indeed concerned that many people were making too much money from the defence budget. The very fact that 'Masters of War' is so ideologically committed, yet relatively vacant intellectually, suggests that Dylan did not write it as a straight condemnation. Rather, to a certain extent, it was intended as parody, whether of Eisenhower, of the 'protest song' form or of some other fleeting thought that dissolved before the ink had dried on his notepad.



It is therefore possible to make sense of Dylan's claim as to the origins of 'Masters of War', but it would be a distortion not to acknowledge the power and venom that can be infused into this lyric when Dylan locks onto it as a pure put-down of those in command. Whilst 'Masters of War' makes a weak poem either as an anti-war statement or as a send-up of those who maintain such views, as a song it has frequently been interpreted devastatingly to either effect.

### 'A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall'

In 'Blowin' in the Wind', Dylan responds to a sequence of nine questions of integrity with the evasive, timeless solution that *'the answer is blowin' in the wind'*. If, however, Dylan were to challenge himself to walk down the roads necessary to call himself a man, what would he see on these roads? What would a white dove encounter as she sails the seas? If a man had sufficient ears to hear others cry, what might they be crying about? These are some of the countless thoughts that sweep through the listener's conscience as we hear Dylan's transcendent folk anthem. And if we were ever to search for the answers in Dylan's songs, the chilling reality of 'A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall' perhaps comes closest to fulfilling our curiosities.

The relentless apocalyptic insistence of the imagery in 'Hard Rain' brings to mind the uneasy political climate of the Cold War period in which it was written. However, regardless of whether the initial catalyst for the song was political, it goes far beyond what could be expected of a

conventional 'protest' work. For 'Hard Rain' does not politicise, it looks life squarely in the eyes. As a result, the song is not tied to a particular moment or incident in history, but it takes on a life of its own. The structural idea of the song is a simple one: the narrator tells us where he has been, what he has seen, what he has heard, who he has met and what he is doing next. Death and renewal are everywhere, piled upon one another in a never-ending heap. Take the fourth verse:

*'I met a young child beside a dead pony'*

Is this cause for optimism? Has the child nursed the pony or killed it? Before we can contemplate, another image:

*'I met a white man who walked a black dog'*

Does this signify racial harmony? Or do white men think of black men as dogs?

*'I met a young woman whose body was burning'*

We are horrified.

*'I met a young girl, she gave me a rainbow'*

What a shining, colourful, joyous image filled with pleasure and light.

*'I met one man who was wounded in love'*

*'I met another man who was wounded with hatred'*

Forget the innocent girl with the rainbow; suddenly we are confronted with two men in agony, separated only by the implicit thin line between love and hate.

*'And it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard'*

*It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall'.*

In the face of this final analysis, all degrees of humanity are equalised. The

significance of gestures - the colour of a dog, the gift of a rainbow; the poignancy of circumstance - a child by a dead pony, men wounded alike by love and hatred - all face the prospect of oblivion to come.

And yet, there is a sense that we can find meaning in life on earth in spite of its fleeting nature. We can find meaning in the tragic beauty of nature, in the '*sad forests*', in the empty '*highway of diamonds*'. Dylan is showing us that the reason we feel sadness at the neglect of that highway, or at the poisoned water, the reason we regret the ten thousand whispering with nobody listening, is because these concepts have inherent value and meaning. If it simply didn't matter that people were starving, or that children were wielding weapons, or that executioners hid their faces, or that peoples' homes were like prisons, then there would be no point, no need to draw attention to the fact. In spite of the hard rain that will cover us all at some point, in spite of the doomed nature of existence, it is important to derive meaning while we can. Hence the defiant, God-like escalation of the final verse, in which Dylan resolves the decay of the opening verse:

*I'll tell it and think it and speak it and  
breathe it  
And reflect from the mountains so all  
souls can see it  
Then I'll stand on the ocean until I start  
sinkin'  
But I'll know my song well before I start  
singin'  
And it's a hard...'*

In the first verse Dylan stumbled on the misty mountains, and stood in front of

a dozen dead oceans. He overcomes this, by the song's conclusion, to find redemption in adversity. The spiritual strength of this message, together with the momentum built up by such a stream of shocking, visual, pungent images, give the song a power unequalled by any other in the Dylan canon at the time. In terms of the layered approach of the imagery, as well as the delayed release of the refrain in the final verse for heightened suspense, 'A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall' anticipates the swirling psychedelic majesty of Dylan's writing from 1965-66. In every sense, therefore, it is a song that speaks not only of its time, but also exists before its time, and endures for the future.

1. 'Bob Dylan by Mikal Gilmore', Rolling Stone no.882, p.694.
2. Rolling Stone 882 p.63
3. Tindall and Shi, 'America - A Narrative History', Norton 1999, pp 1498-9
4. Tindall and Shi, p.1498

**'lies that life is black and white'  
Bob Dylan and the reality of protest**

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# A Tale of Two Questions

compiled by Mick Gold



As the NET trundled towards these shores in 2002, two reviews caught my eye. In Sweden, Michael Gray seemed to suffer a nervous breakdown. Gray explained, in *The Daily Telegraph*, that he was appalled by Dylan's stage mannerisms, appalled by the seedy Stockholm suburb he found himself in, and perhaps appalled by his own life on the trail of Bob. More than anyone in this country, Michael has personified Dylan fanaticism at its most intelligent. His 900 page *Song & Dance Man III* is an awesome labour of intellectual love. When Michael Gray despairs of Dylan's antics, can Doomsday be far behind? In *The Observer*, Sean O'Hagan was equally miserable in Docklands.

*'A question in your nerves is lit  
Yet you know there is no answer fit to satisfy  
Ensure you not to quit'*

The weird thing was that I wasn't surprised by their despair. Love of Dylan and despair of Dylan are closely linked - as the very title of this journal reminds us. Dylan's most faithful fans have been quick to disown him and denounce him throughout his career. In *The New Yorker*, Alex Ross published a fine essay on Dylan (*The Wanderer*, 10 May 1999) which began with the words: *'If you look through what has been written about Dylan in the past thirty years, you notice a desire for him to die off, so that his younger self can assume its mythic place. When he had his famous motorcycle mishap in 1966 at the age of twenty-five, it was assumed his career had come to a sudden end: rumors had him killed like James Dean, or maimed like Montgomery Clift. In 1978, after the fiasco of Renaldo & Clara, Mark Jacobson wrote in The Village Voice, "I wish Bob Dylan died. Then Channel 5 would piece together an instant documentary of his life and times. Just the immutable facts."*

By staying alive, by staying on the road, by re-inventing his back catalogue every night, Dylan challenges all our assumptions about him. He tests his own career to the point of destruction. He rewards us while simultaneously trying the patience of his greatest fans. Michael Gray's moment of doubt made me want to ask every Dylan fan and critic these two questions:

- 1. Why does Bob Dylan keep touring?**
- 2. Why do we keep going to see him?**

I've e-mailed a lot of people, and I'm truly grateful to everyone who responded. Michael Gray and Clinton Heylin were not in the mood to contribute. But they've already had their say. Right now - 'Let a hundred flowers blossom, let a thousand Dylanologists contend.' - as Chairman Mao used to say. In one sense, the answers to these questions are very obvious. But in another sense, they're as elusive and as Protean as Dylan's career - as elusive as life itself.

### **Derek Barker**

#### **1. Why does Bob Dylan keep touring?**

The first question is extremely straightforward and can be answered in five, rather than 500 words. Bob Dylan keeps touring because 'that is what he does.' It really is that simple. I broached the subject in the introduction to *ISIS - A Bob Dylan Anthology* -

*Many of us who have witnessed Dylan's performance art over the last four decades have only recently begun to see what Dylan has always known, that he is first and fore-*

*most, a performance artist. When in 1965, he told one perplexed interviewer that he was just a 'song and dance man,' it seems he wasn't kidding!*<sup>1</sup>

Over the past decade a number of writers have found the need to explore this question further and have come up with a variety of reasons for Dylan continuing to perform live. Before we go any further - no, he doesn't need the money!

At the commencement of what has now become known as the Never Ending Tour, Dylan told one interviewer: '*Muddy Waters was still performing into his sixties and I guess I will be too.*'

In fact, Muddy Waters performed live almost uninterrupted until two years before his death. He died quietly in his sleep on April 30, 1983. He was aged 68. During his final year of touring (1981) Waters undertook his usual circa 130 dates, which was something he'd done without a break since 1973. Some years, 1980 for instance, he played over 150 dates. Interestingly, Waters almost never took time off from the road, preferring instead to play 12 months out of 12.

*'If you like what you're doing, keep on doing it long as you can,'* said 83-year old Pete Seeger in a recent interview. *'I don't have much voice left, but I keep on singing.'*<sup>2</sup> At 61, Dylan's one-time lover Joan Baez still regularly tours the world. Most of the old time blues artists that Dylan admired played until they died. True, many of those guys needed the money, but like Muddy Waters, most would have continued gigging for the love of performing, whether or not they needed the money.

Therefore, when it comes to performing live at 60, Bob is far from unique. In fact, as I was jotting down a few notes for this piece, the Elton John Story came on the Biography Channel. Elton, who is clearly not short of a bob or two, was asked the same question: ‘*Why do you keep touring?*’ To which he answered (and I paraphrase), ‘*Because that’s what I do. I love performing.*’ He went on to talk about ‘the buzz’ and ‘rush’ he gets when he walks out in front of his audience.

Bob has wanted (even needed) to perform, to play music and sing in front of an audience since his school days. Most of us never manage to realise our childhood dreams, Bob did, and while he continues to enjoy performing and his health allows him to do so, why should he stop?

## **2. Why do we keep going to see him?**

The second question, ‘Why do we keep going to see him?’ probably has as many answers as there are Dylan fans! If I had been asked the question: ‘Why do I keep going to see Bob Dylan,’ I might have stood a chance, but for me to answer on behalf of other people...

Some of us, dare I say it, continue to attend his concerts out of habit! I hope, however, that most of us go and see Bob live because we still believe he has much to give. I’ll refer again to my introduction to the *ISIS Anthology* -

*‘In concert, Dylan is unlike almost any other popular musician - outside perhaps the world of jazz - in that his performance art changes nightly. The object of his concert performances is not to faithfully reproduce his recorded works, but to continually reinvent them. Sometimes these new interpretations*

*fall short of the mark, but if you are fortunate enough to be in attendance on a night when all the component parts come together, you will witness an unparalleled creative genius.’<sup>1</sup>*

As Paul Williams once stated and I have reiterated: ‘*We are most fortunate to be living at the same time as the artist.*’ Future generations will be able to hear the recordings, but we have the opportunity to witness his performance art live. Therefore, while Bob Dylan continues to perform, I will continue to attend.

1 ‘*ISIS – A Bob Dylan Anthology*’ edited by Derek Barker, published by Helter Skelter Publishing, 2001

2 ‘Old folk singers keep on playing, whether or not they can afford to retire.’ By Michael Virtanen.

## **Jon Blishen**

### **1. Why does Bob Dylan keep touring?**

I asked Danny, my 17-year-old son. He said, I think Dylan is one of those people, if he didn’t keep on playing, he’d just crack up.

I think it was Joni Mitchell who complained that a singer/songwriter has constantly to present and re-present their songs in public. She compared this, ruefully, to a painter who only has to paint a picture once. Maybe. Dylan has a huge catalogue, and he has remade and reinvented his songs on tour. Maybe this aspect of performing - in the sense both of singing songs and of acting a part - is one that enables Dylan to keep on keeping on.

I’m a lifelong Dylan fan, I love books and I love art - but there was NO WAY I was going to buy that book of Dylan’s art that came out a while back. So - Song ‘n Dance Man it is, then...

Some people say he keeps touring to pay the bills. I don’t know.

My favourite Dylan song is 'Angelina'. Not 'Farewell Angelina', made saccharine by Joan Baez, but plain 'Angelina'. There may be a clue in the opening lines:

*Well, it's always been my nature*

*To take chances*

*My right hand drawing back*

*While my left hand advances*

(A song, I am told by Dylan anoraks, that he's never performed live.)

Why keep touring when you're over 60? Why not? No one commented on the fact that some of the black bluesmen were still on the road in their eighties. When Robbie Robertson, in *The Last Waltz*, said The Band had been on the road for nearly 20 years, time for a rest, I heard a ghostly chuckle...

Dylan has said that he doesn't like the phrase 'The Never-Ending Tour'. Obviously everything must finish. That which ties everyone together and makes everyone equal is our mortality. Everything must come to an end. But until then...

Dylan tried the settling-down thing, like he's tried so many things. Have a bunch of kids that call me Pa, That must be what it's all about. Join the Tru-Flux Klan. It didn't work. Or, rather, it had a certain shelf-life. I suspect he likes the male camaraderie of a tight, working band, being surrounded by men who can make a musical safety net when he looks like falling, or give their younger voices in a sustaining chorus when his voice lets him down.

He knows that he can fill any stadium anywhere. Okay, there are some crazy people out there, but he feels a lot of love,

acceptance, even joy when he's up there playing. That must be nice. Hell, I wish I had an audience cheer me every time I write a half-decent sentence!

As we all know, there's a Dylan quote for every occasion. Some of the simpler ones also hit the spot. How about this one?

*(You) Do What You Must Do, And (Ya) Do It Well.*

## **2. Why do we keep going to see him?**

Danny again. Well, he said, because most people who are Dylan fans can AFFORD to go see him. Did he misunderstand the question? Or has he spent too long doing exams?

We have invested a lot of ourselves in Dylan. That's why people get so upset and use words like 'betrayal' and 'traitor' and 'sell out'. I find that kind of humourless. I didn't like Dylan's 'Christian' phase, but I didn't feel betrayed. I just did something else for a while.

Of course, some people may go to a Dylan concert in the hopes that they will see him fall, or jump from that high ledge. But Dylan understands that himself. He's written about that.

I still go to see Dylan - okay, Dan, because I can AFFORD the ticket - because he's a wonderful performer. I've come away from a concert feeling disappointed, but that's because my high expectations have been created by other Dylan concerts. I've never come away feeling cheated. Those harmonica breaks speak to me - most of the time - and I've played the harp myself for 35 years. I can still remember the anger I felt when, as a teenager, I heard someone describe Dylan

as 'a second-rate harmonica player'. And I love the variety he still manages to achieve - driving rock that could take the top of your head off; poignant love songs, made MORE poignant (for me) by the failing voice; those lines that are drawn out impossibly long, when a sudden emphasis gives a whole new angle on the meaning; that heady mix of anguish, sarcasm, irony, yearning, anger, pleading ...

But he keeps forgetting the words of his own songs! He sang the same verse twice! Hey - that guy has a lot of words inside his head. And they are HIS words. I'm ten years younger than Dylan, but I find already that words are increasingly slippery customers. I mean, recently, I spent 24 hours searching for the word 'invoice' - and when I found it, I thought - I spent a whole day looking for THAT?!

And of course we go to see Dylan so that we are part of a community of people that go to see Dylan. When he sings - *'But even the President of the United States sometimes must have to stand naked'*, we know that we will cheer, as we always cheer, because that line has a resonance, and has always had a resonance, through the Presidencies of Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush Junior... I'm not talking 'Spokesman for a generation' here. That's a bullshit phrase for the mouths of politicians and hack journalists. I'm talking the same delight I feel when I list the American Presidents that have come and gone while Castro remained in power in Cuba. They all wished Castro ill, and they all came and went. As you suspect they all, probably, might have wished Dylan ill, except the

two whose names begin with 'C'.

Finally: none of us wants  
*To get caught without a ticket*  
*And be discovered beneath a truck.*

### **Ben Clayton**

#### **1. Why does Bob Dylan keep touring?**

Bob Dylan keeps touring because he wants to. If he didn't want to, he would stop. Simple as that. Like most of us, he's a creature of habit and he likes doing what he likes doing. Unlike most of us, he gets a chance to do it all the time. What do you enjoy in life? Fishing? Sex? Picking your nose? If someone gave you the opportunity to get paid loads of money for doing it whenever you liked, would you?

Anybody who tries to intellectualise their response to this question along the lines of 'he's searching for artistic expression/satisfaction' etc. is missing the point by a country mile. I don't even think it's about the money (although let's face it, Dylan is no modern day Robin Hood). No, he likes to sing stuff on stage to an audience who clap and cheer him. He gets a buzz out of it that is greater than all the shit he has to put up with to achieve that buzz. That's all I can say. Really, only Bob himself can answer this one in any more meaningful detail. And even then you wouldn't understand him.

#### **2. Why do we keep going to see him?**

- a) Because we want to
- b) Because we want to stop, but can't
- c) Because we're all dysfunctional autistic anoraks
- d) Because he used to be good
- e) Because one day he might be good again

- f) Or at least cast a shadow that resembles his former glory
- g) Because he's never been better
- h) Because we like freak shows
- i) Because we don't get out much
- j) Because it's easier than facing the empty void in our souls
- k) Because we can't be Bob Dylan, but we can be near to him
- l) Because we fancy Charlie/Larry Tony/Bob
- m) Because we like George's drumming
- n) Because we like to put obstacles in the way of romance
- o) All of the above
- p) None of the above

### Alan Davis

#### 1. Why does Bob Dylan keep touring?

Some time ago I was sitting in a pub talking with some friends, and the conversation turned to 'epiphanies' - those moments of revelation which change us in some important way. One of these friends is an actor, and his description of his most significant epiphany has given me much to think about ever since. He described how he'd been playing a part in a stage production many years before; and how, during this performance, he realised that for the first time in his life he was 'thoroughly living in the present'. From that moment, he said, he knew what he wanted to do.

This existential problem of how to engage fully with the present moment is one that confronts us all, and perhaps many of us will spend our lives seeking a solution without finding one. But Bob Dylan seems to have experienced something like a

solution in 1988, on stage, explaining that it was almost as if he heard a voice: *'I'm determined to stand, whether God will deliver me or not... I've got to go out and play these songs. That's just what I must do.'* And didn't he comment in an interview somewhere not so long ago, that on stage was the only place where he could be the person he truly wanted to be?

It's obvious that there is no single snappy answer to either of these questions, but it seems likely that, somehow, touring goes some way towards solving Dylan's existential problem. Performing enables him to engage more fully with the present for more of the time. It also gives him the opportunity to explore the significance of his astounding back catalogue of songs, but that's part of my answer to the second question.

#### 2. Why do we keep going to see him?

I don't know why 'we' might. But I know why I will.

Suppose I'm looking at a painting, or reading a poem, or listening to music, thoroughly engrossed in the art. Suppose that someone then asks: *'Are you enjoying this?'* I will of course find that I no longer am. The enjoyment of the art is an activity requiring my complete attention, and the moment I withdraw my attention from the art in order to contemplate my enjoyment, there's no longer an enjoyment to contemplate. All I have left to examine is the memory of the enjoyment. But what is particularly striking about the act of enjoying art is the fact that during moments of deep engagement the very question 'are you enjoying this?' seems superfluous. My enjoyment is self-evident. It's something I



'know' (in the deepest sense, in the *connaître* rather than *savoir* sense); it isn't something I can sensibly rationalise. These moments of enjoyment of art at this deep level are some of the most important in my life.

So now here is Bob Dylan, endlessly touring, endlessly trying to rediscover his own songs. Because of the instinctive nature of his performance, he doesn't know whether this song, here and now, will yield up some new insight, some new significant aspect, but he can't find out until he tries (and neither can we). If you're going to find a casket full of gold in a tomb, you have to keep visiting tombs even though many of the caskets may turn out to be empty. When you find one that isn't, it easily makes up for all the others. And so when you listen to a Bob Dylan show there's a fair chance that not all the performances will be outstanding; but there's also a good chance that somewhere in that show there will be a magical moment of discovery, where Dylan has reached into the casket and come up with gold. There may even be several such moments. And if I'm there, and if I'm attentive, and if I'm open to what's happening, I can share in that. I can become so engrossed in the artistic moment that I don't need to ask whether or not I'm enjoying this performance.

Why will I keep going to see Bob Dylan? To enjoy those moments that are so transcendent that they are their own answer to the question; moments that make the question superfluous.

### **Peter Doggett**

#### ***1. Why does Bob Dylan keep touring?***

Not because he loves us, and by us I mean the fans, and particularly the British fans. I've been close enough to the front to see the contempt in his eyes.

Not because he enjoys it; as he's said before, what does pleasure have to do with his life? He might enjoy it when Charlie Sexton throws a lick from an old Bill Monroe tune into a solo, or the band rock out for the 930th consecutive night on 'Drifter's Escape' or 'Wicked Messenger', but that's not why he's there.

Not because he feels fulfilled, although that can happen sometimes too, and not always at the same moments as we (the contemptible British fans) get our full filled. Is it fulfilling to play 'Watchtower' third in the set every night for years? Or to mumble through 'Tambourine Man' as he did in the UK last spring? Or to sing every line on the same note, with a pathetic jump up an octave on the last syllable? Or to screw up guitar solos quite so spectacularly? Not unless he hates us so much that he finds his fulfilment that way. Which, now I come to think of it...

Not because he needs the money, which of course doesn't talk but swear. It says, 'Fucking hell, Bob, they'll pay you \$250,000 for two hours' work', which probably makes him feel mildly pleased for a few seconds, but doesn't appear to make him happy (see enjoying it, above). Anyway, what does Dylan spend his money on, apart from cowboy suits and hats? Certainly not guitar lessons.

Not because he's an artist and he don't look back, because he's done it when he

wasn't an artist (any volunteers for a return trip to Hammersmith 1991?). And he's always looking back. I love this current band, but often they approach a new 'old' tune by trying to recreate the original arrangement, and it's only the winds of time and Dylan's mercurial attitude to time-keeping that changes things.

Not because he's seeking perfection, because when he achieves it, he can't preserve that moment, but has to mess with it, to see how it would look if he just shifted that chord there and that line there, and suddenly it's not perfect anymore, and anyway, wouldn't it be boring if it was, every night?

So why does Bob Dylan keep on touring (you thought I'd never ask)? Because, in a rare exhibition of Bob Zen, it's what he does. It's how he defines himself - not to others, because he'd never be so crass, but to himself. He wakes up in the morning, and thinks about the next show. Maybe he dreads it. Maybe it bores him rigid (us too, sometimes). Maybe it pulls him out of bed with a spring in his step. But the same way that a postman gets up and delivers the mail, Dylan gets up and plays a concert. Sometimes he sounds like a postman, too. Other times he sings the way Pablo Picasso painted, erratically but with the certainty of genius.

He's 61 years old, and he's always respected his elders who did exactly that - Willie Nelson and B.B. King, before them Bill Monroe and Muddy Waters, before them the men whose names we don't remember. And as long as that's who Bob thinks he is, he'll do it. I believe him when he says that one day, he'll wake up, and it

will all be over. Then we'll be the ones facing the question: what do we do with our lives?

### *2. Why do we keep going to see him?*

Because we have to. Because anyone strange enough to be reading (let alone writing for) this magazine has a compulsive disorder, which would make us dangerous to the community at large if some nagging need in our souls wasn't satisfied by finding out what Dylan is doing, and imagining being there, and then being there, and then talking about being there, and then imagining being there again. (Sometimes, as at the end of the last UK tour, it's even a pleasure to imagine not having to be there for a while - until August becomes October, and you start to see the set-lists. Now I want to be there again.)

Because I accept chaos, even though I know it doesn't accept me. Cue the old fogey's rant: rock music isn't what it was, it isn't as spontaneous, or as exciting, or as unpredictable, or as strange, or as eager to flirt with the borders of triumph or disaster. But Dylan's rock music is. In a world where everything from Tony Blair's policies to TV schedules stuffed with makeover shows (spot the difference) is constructed around the finding of focus groups, Dylan concerts remain the last bastion of the utterly unknowable. What is going through his head while he plays? What is he doing? (That question asked several dozen times during D's guitar solos in May.) What is he going to do next? What the hell is he doing now?

Because no-one else dares to do what he does on stage, good and bad.

Because I could listen to Charlie Sexton play instrumentals all night, and still be fulfilled. Though of course I'd still go if Charlie wasn't there.

Because I feel more fulfilled by seeing Dylan play than I am by anything else which I'm not actually doing myself.

Because I'd kick myself if I wasn't there, and he did 'She's Your Lover Now'. I know he won't - but then I knew he wouldn't ever perform 'Blind Willie McTell' and 'If Dogs Run Free' either.

Because he can connect with his muse(ic) the way nobody else can, even if he doesn't do it as often as we'd like.

Because there's nowhere else I'd rather pay to be.

Because he's the funniest man in show business, especially when he's not trying to be.

Because he won't be there forever, and neither will we.

### **Michelle Engert**

#### ***1. Why does Bob Dylan keep touring?***

It has been 17 years since Bob has taken a break from performing live, causing some to question why he keeps on touring. The simple answer just might be that Bob keeps on touring because he makes his living as a songwriter, singer, guitar player, and concert performer. Maybe all there is to it is that at 61 years old, Bob is not yet ready to retire from the stage for a new career in the movies. But, the reason that Bob keeps touring is probably not that simple. It is my opinion that Bob is not ready to retreat from the stage in an era when his fans and the press finally appreciate him for what he is doing in the

present, and not just for what he has symbolized to them in the past.

Bob started this 'Never Ending Tour', or whatever you want to call it, in the 1980's when he was nearly 50 years old. A few years into the tour, Bob had essentially lost the positive attention of the popular press. The number of people willing to pay for an evening of Bob Dylan live in concert was small compared with his earlier tours. American audiences rarely saw Bob in arenas, city theatres, or sheds, but instead at Midwestern colleges, state fairs, and various small town venues. Many shows were performed to sparsely filled halls. Some nights Bob sang clear and strong, and other nights he mumbled and could not seem to find the mike. He often appeared as if he had some other place he would rather be. Bob's performances were inconsistent and began to generate bad reviews in the press. In 1991, Bob was awarded a lifetime achievement award at the Grammys. He performed a sloppy, unintelligible 'Masters of War' at the televised ceremony, after which Bob was all but written off by the press and the public as a washed-up old legend. But still Bob continued to tour, despite the fact that fewer and fewer people cared about going to see him.

And then, around 1995, things changed. That year, Bob started attracting a younger, different American audience composed of displaced young people looking for a place to experience music after the death of Jerry Garcia. I believe that this new crowd brought fresh energy to the concerts that resulted in a positive change in Bob's attitude towards

performing and made Bob once again realize his potential as a performer and start to live up to it. Shortly after the arrival of the new audience, the average overall quality of the shows went from fair to great. This was in large part due to Bob finding a reason in his newly attentive audience to become more conscious of his singing and more adventurous in his playing. For the first time since the mid-eighties, the audience was not comprised of a majority of people who came to sit stone-faced, still within their seats, to observe 'The Legend' while he was still alive. Instead the people came looking for a good time; they came to listen to the music and they came without predetermined expectations about what Bob Dylan should be.

With this new crowd at the shows, more than just a handful of stray fans in the front rows got up to dance with the music. The enthusiasm was contagious: it spread though the audience and up to Bob on the stage. At a string of shows, the young fans jumped up on stage by the dozens to be close to Bob. Shockingly, Bob seemed to enjoy the attention, and until his management put a stop to it, Bob allowed his fans to join him on the stage while he performed. He grinned while young girls ran up and kissed him, and his fans surrounded him until he became invisible to the rest of the audience. The fans both on and off the stage were dancing and jumping to the music, excited to be there, having a good time.

The animation of these new American audiences gave Bob a reason to resume caring about delivering a consistently

good performance. Bob began taking a greater role as a guitar player and started showing up regularly to rehearse with the band before the show, something that he rarely did before 1995. Consequently, the band improved though learning how to step back and allow Bob a greater role as a guitar player. Consistently better shows lead to good reviews. The good press, combined with the word of mouth praise for the shows amongst fans through the new Internet medium, ushered in a new era for Bob Dylan tours. The shows were well received, ticket sales began to increase, the venues improved. Bob responded to the applause by focusing on delivering great rock and roll shows every time.

In 1997, Bob released *Time Out of Mind*, a collection of songs that he said were for the young people who needed their own Bob Dylan songs. Bob was the darling of the press and the music industry and he could do no wrong. He won three Grammy awards in that year and performed 'Love Sick' live on national television surrounded by a crowd of young dancers. This time he sang clear and strong, and the critics raved. In 2000, Bob won the Oscar for 'Things Have Changed' which he also performed on the live broadcast. In 2001, "*Love And Theft*" was released to critical acclaim, winning Bob yet another Grammy award. Since 1997, Bob has been, and still remains, strongly on top.

Riding this consistent high, Bob probably keeps touring because of the positive response of the audiences who keep going to see him. When these people go to the

show, they go less to see a 'legend' from the past, and more to see what Bob Dylan is doing now. They dance, they enjoy and are familiar with the new songs, and they applaud Bob's efforts. As long as the crowds and the critics continue to applaud him and not view him as a relic of history, Bob continues to be willing to keep touring.

## **2. Why do we keep going to see him?**

Myself, I thank God that Bob keeps touring. I cannot imagine a world where all of the Bob Dylan concerts had taken place sometime in the past. However, some people argue that it is time for him to stop, that the shows have become predictable, that Bob has proved himself as a live performer and now he is just repeating himself. But I think that Bob has more to do live. So as long as Bob keeps on touring, I will continue going to see him in concert because it is fun, because it is magical, because I love rock and roll and Bob makes it better than anyone who is doing it today.

The joy that comes from listening to live recordings and studio productions does not compare to the thrill of being part of a present moment in which Bob is bringing the songs to life. No matter how many times I see the show I still feel the thrill of hearing the music while it is being created. This is especially true in a time where so many experiences, both in life and in music, are disconnected, removed, and distant. We watch concerts on the Internet or on television by ourselves. We communicate with others through a keyboard more often than we do in person. But at Bob's concert, communication and experience are alive

and real. It takes us the audience and Bob the performer to make the sound happen live. What comes out of the interaction can't be manufactured inside a studio. Instead the songs take on their own life from the feedback between Bob and the audience.

Those who argue that Bob should take a break or quit tend to be fans or critics who have seen Bob multiple times in concert. But just because they are familiar with the shows does not mean that Bob should not perform them. What about all of the people who have not had the chance to see Bob yet? Just because some have had the chance to experience Bob's concerts in the past, does not make what he is doing now less relevant or important. After going to the shows multiple times, the pattern of the show does get familiar. Someone who has seen the show more than a few times will know when a song will be acoustic or electric, when the encores will begin and end, and what instruments will be played on a given song. But surely nobody expects Bob to reinvent the wheel at each and every show. Likewise, it would be unrealistic to expect Bob to mould the shows around those who have seen him play over and over again.

However, being familiar with the show and its patterns makes being there even more special than if we are seeing Bob for the first time. It allows us to quickly recognize those moments when Bob is deviating from the usual course of a song. We can see the full range of Bob's abilities and pinpoint and appreciate better than anyone the high moments when Bob is performing at the

pinnacle of his talent. In the times when Bob sings and plays at his best, a joyful feeling pulses through my body, my insides tingle, and I believe in the greatness and possibilities of human potential.

After we have seen Bob a few times we can recognize when Bob is taking a risk and trying something new. Unlike other shows, Bob's shows are not rehearsed and choreographed to the point where you feel as if you have just been to a rock and roll Broadway show. Bob uses the stage to experiment and take risks with his sound and with the songs he likes to play. There are few shows where artists can successfully take the risks that come with improvisation and experimentation on stage the way that Bob does. The improvisation makes it interesting. And, because Bob generally does not perform a song the same way twice, the curiosity of how he might perform the songs he chooses on a given night keeps us going back.

And it is worth the expense of traveling to towns you would have never otherwise heard of or seen. It is worth the time spent jockeying for tickets, and the hours of standing outside in all weather just to be close to the stage. It is an addicting rush, the one that comes through the veins when Bob emerges from the shadows to the shouts of the fans that are filled with the anticipation of seeing him. And while Bob goes to strap on his guitar, and the whole show is still a future event, I know that I cannot help but to hope that at this show I am going to be lucky enough to hear a song for my first time, or hear one of my favourite songs again, or hear the debut of a song that Bob has not played

live before. And while it is true that Bob dedicates a good part of the show to his classic songs from the past like 'Tangled Up in Blue', 'Blowin' in the Wind' and 'It Ain't Me Babe', watching Bob perform those songs keeps them fresh to me. It gives me a reason to contemplate what the words mean to me. I just cannot hear those songs with fresh ears by putting on the old dated records.

But Bob does dedicate a lot of the show to his newer material from *Time Out of Mind* and "*Love And Theft*". Since the songs are still new to Bob and have not been in his head for 10, 20, 35 years, he is experimenting with how they are supposed to sound outside of the studio. Neither Bob nor the audience has a mental roadmap of where they are supposed to go yet. Not knowing where the songs are going makes it fun for the audience and I would imagine for Bob. When Bob is having fun, he changes from being a musician into a performer. Bob the performer, dressed in his Nashville suits and Hank Williams hats, busts out his rock star moves and funny little dances reminiscent of Chuck Berry. When his formality falls away, Bob becomes an endearing person who likes to have fun just like the rest of us.

So after 17 years Bob is still on the road, heading for another show. He keeps on keeping on the road because his audiences want him there. Bob's audiences want to go and see him because he gets us to dance, to think, to relate, to release, to rock, to get outside of ourselves, and to have a good time. What more could we ask of him?

## Mick Gold

### 1. Why does Bob Dylan keep touring?

In the pages of *Judas!*, Gavin Martin asked Paul McCartney why Dylan was still on the road and was rewarded with Sir Paul's brand of domestic wisdom: *'Lack of a good woman. That's the only reason for staying on the road at our age.'* That's Paul's perspective. Here are three more:

Version 1: The godhead made flesh moves amongst his people, acknowledges their devotion, yet remains untouched by them.

Version 2: The veteran blues and country singer practises his craft on the road because that's his job. Like B.B. King, like Willie Nelson, he plays over 100 shows a year. What's the problem? Who ever questioned B.B. King's motives?

Version 3: The ageing superstar endlessly circles the globe in his own ego bubble. He can only be Bob Dylan on stage, singing Bob Dylan's songs. As his shabby vocal equipment continues to deteriorate, *'the only thing he knew how to do was to keep on keeping on'*. He had no other home.

These are three possible ways of characterising Bob Dylan on his Never Ending Tour. I must admit I've experienced the first two, but never the third.

During Dylan's autumn tour of 2000, there was a moment at the end when Bob and his band acknowledged the tumultuous applause of the audience. For some reason this was called 'The Formation'. Bob and the band stared straight back at the audience, not smiling, not bowing, deadpan. I watched 'The Formation' twice through my binoculars. It seemed to me

that only Dylan had got it right. The rest of the band seemed slightly embarrassed by this moment. They wanted to wave or to walk off. To stand blankly returning the audience's applause felt like a denial of every performer's instincts. Only Bob Dylan could blandly out-stare both his audience and infinity. What did it tell us? He was there but not there. He heard our applause but seemed to be beyond it. His endless touring makes him seem ubiquitous yet he remains mythologically remote. Each and every fan fantasises about a chance meeting with Dylan. What would I say?

The story of Bob's visit to Crouch End is often told. Attempting to visit Dave Stewart, Dylan finds himself at a subtly different address, where a man named Dave also lives. Dave's wife welcomes Dylan into her home and sits him down with a cup of tea. When the other Dave - the ordinary Dave, the everyman Dave - returns home, he is told by his wife, *'Bob Dylan is here to see you.'*

What form does this story resemble? A parable. The parable tells us that Bob is on this Earth, he walks the same streets of North London as the rest of us. But when He comes a-calling, what can any of us say? Nothing. Except a sheepish grin and a sense of having been touched by the hand of Bob.

Clearly, Dylan's career has been shaped by a powerful will. In Bob Shelton's biography, a four year old Bob Dylan imperiously stamps his foot at a social event and announces, *'If everybody in this room will keep quiet, I will sing for my grandmother. I'm going to sing "Some*

*Sunday Morning*.” A room full of Hibbing grandmothers go wild at the end of his performance. He follows up his triumph with ‘Accentuate the Positive’.

The anecdotes pile up but the basic story remains consistent. In high school he formed one band after another. Audience feedback was not always positive. His girlfriend Echo Helstrom told Clinton Heylin, ‘*Bob was sort of oblivious to the whole fact that people were not turned on by his music. There was this cat, playing like they were clapping, when they were really booing.*’

Dylan and the Band played their way round the world in 1966, enduring a hurricane of abuse and booing to create their greatest ever live music. We’re left with the sense that he would do his show if a handful of people watched or if the whole world watched. Bob has always been driven - by his ambition and by his vision - both of them huge. Now, as he prepares to publish his autobiography, *Chronicles*, and simultaneously makes another idiosyncratic stab at the more complex, more compromised world of movie making with *Masked And Anonymous*, neither his stamina nor his ambition show signs of abating.

One of the recurring themes in Dylan’s work is the way that his songs celebrate freedom, while being haunted by an undercurrent of determinism.

*My friends from the prison, they ask  
unto me,  
‘How good, how good does it feel to be  
free?’  
And I answer them most mysteriously,*

*‘Are birds free from the chains of the  
skyway?’*

Is Bob free from the chains of the highway? As he hurtles down the road for the 15th year of his NET, along the borderline between triumph and treadmill, between accessibility and self-immolation, we scratch out heads and ask ‘Who was that man?’

As usual, Bob has the best answer. As his blank face stared back at his audience’s adulation during ‘The Formation’, some lines from ‘Not Dark Yet’ went through my mind:

*I was born here and I’ll die here  
Against my will  
Although it looks like I’m moving  
I’m standing still*

## **2. Why do we keep going to see him?**

Lone Ranger: ‘*Gee, Tonto, there must be more than a thousand Indians out there. It looks like we’re surrounded.*’

Tonto: ‘*What do you mean by we?*’

In the beginning were the Deadheads. But after the Grateful Dead died, the Deadheads became Bobheads. They surrounded me at Docklands in May 2002, their eyes filled with vacuous enthusiasm, their heads nodding obsessively to the rhythm, their fists punching the air with random shouts of ‘Bob!’ Slight exaggeration - but anyone who has attended a Dylan concert in the last 10 years will recognise the picture. You find yourself in a mobile devotional group in search of a sacrament. A tribe looking for a ritual.

As a Dylan concert-goer, I’m a



neophyte. I didn't see him live until 1978 at Earl's Court. I was entranced, even by the subtly Las Vegas aura that surrounded Bob's stage attire and some of the band's arrangements. I turned up three years later to see him again in the same venue and was appalled. The concert seemed leaden, weighed down by a sense of born-again self-righteousness. I vowed I would not go see him again for at least nine years.

At the Odeon Hammersmith, he was brilliant in 1990. He was bluesman, journeyman, travelling salesman of metaphysical truth with a lovely stripped-down sound. A year later I went back to the same venue to be horrified by his rasping, tuneless voice and a band that had lost all coherence, with no direction home. Another nine year period of abstinence seemed like a good idea.

I enjoyed the autumn of 2000 at Wembley Arena, even as 'The Formation'

reminded me that this was no ordinary concert. I was back again for Docklands in May of this year. It was a good show but there was one not-so-small problem - his voice. The only way I can rationalise it to friends and acquaintances is to compare it to a great, ruined Gothic cathedral. The cracks and fissures and rubble somehow enhance one's sense of how much beauty and majesty were once there. Each time I've heard him, another bit of buttressing seems to have dropped off his vocal range.

Some of my friends persuaded their teenage children to accompany them. The most charitable verdict I heard from them was '*Bob's songs are great but his singing is awful.*' I guess that's what my own parents might have said 40 years ago as we listened to the sarcastic bleat of 'Oxford Town'. I still enjoyed the shows. The band were wonderful and the visionary grandeur of 'A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall' and the



visceral kick of 'Wicked Messenger' were the reasons that I'll be back for more.

During the turbulent mid 60s years - captured in the trilogy of *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited*, and *Blonde on Blonde* - Dylan's work was a world of iconoclasm, of idols being cheerfully chopped to pieces, of accepting chaos and then setting it to music. Now, in his senior citizen years, his work embodies the values of an older world - a world of studying your craft and sticking to it, a way of honouring the men and women who preceded him along the road.

Are we living through the Final Days? How many more years will Bob be back to haunt us like a friendly yet still unsettling ghost? He still tours with his Never Ending Repertory - hundreds of songs for all occasions. He has become the curator of his own museum. The pleasure of Dylan's cover versions - from the up-beat sorrow of 'Searching For A Soldier's Grave' to the gloriously doomy 'Dark As A Dungeon' - are one of the chief justifications of his NET. The recently released *Covers Collection* of bootlegs managed to bring together 162 traditional and contemporary songs that Dylan has performed live since 1988. He's fusing his own work - the greatest body of contemporary song-writing - with his encyclopædic sense of America's history in song. So maybe there is no mystery. He's keeping alive the tradition that first inspired him, from Elvis to Ralph Stanley, from Woody Guthrie to Jimi Hendrix, and he's turning his own back catalogue into his monument. And that voice? It's not dark yet, but it's getting there.

### CP Lee

#### 1. Why does Bob Dylan keep touring?

It's a question that Dylan alone knows the answer to, but curiosity has me attempting to throw a bit of light on why he stays on the road like he does.

There's a scene in the movie *Performance* when gangster on the run James Fox says to rock star recluse Mick Jagger, 'You're gonna look a right comical little geezer when you're fifty'. As he speaks he is eyeing Jagger's slim, longhaired, finery-bedecked appearance. Oh how I laughed, along with everyone else in the cinema, when I first saw the movie in 1970. The very idea of being fifty, let alone being around and alive at fifty, seemed like a totally remote non-event. We were young and alive - not dead to the world like the fifty-year-olds we occasionally came across in our Utopian world. How could anyone possibly imagine that Jagger could ever be fifty? The idea was preposterous. Even the Rolling Stones' front man seemed a little taken aback by Fox's observation.

Sticking on a Stones' theme for a second longer, I recall an interview, in the early 1970s I think it was, when Keith Richards was asked when he and the rest of the group would retire from performing. After all, the interviewer remarked, wasn't rock music for young people? Richards regarded him coolly for a moment and then replied that blues musicians and jazz musicians didn't appear to be retiring yet, so why did the journalist think he, Richards, would ever want to give up? The interviewer looked as sceptical as James Fox when Richards gave

his reply, and it was then that my reaction turned to one of recognition and contemplation. Up to that point I hadn't considered the idea much - and as a gigging musician I started to think, when should musicians give up flinging themselves around on stage and 'cavorting', as James Fox would have put it? The world of Rock 'n' Roll was still very young, sixteen or seventeen years old really. The Beatles, though now disbanded, well, you couldn't imagine them not being around. Elvis Presley had made his leather-clad comeback, and as for The Who... well, Roger Daltrey was still singing *'I hope I die before I get old'* with a certain amount of conviction, and managing to get away without sounding too stupid. No, rock was still young, but with growing maturity and the passing of time, it had become an interesting question.

In the hermetic world of the rock fan (and performer) there was no yardstick, or guidelines to go by. There were, or so it seemed, no precedents we could look towards for a pointer. Of course, Richards had mentioned the jazz and blues players in his comment, but they seemed to be from another age, another time. In Britain (and, I know in America too, but I'm using where I come from as my example), you could extend the arena to include folk musicians, such as Ewan McColl, Bert Lloyd and The Copper Family. They were all past their marketable prime in rock terms yet managed to carry on a working life within their medium. It was only as we, the musicians and the audience grew older and the seventies gave way to the eighties and nineties, and then the new

millennium, that the idea of rock, in particular, being perceived as strictly a young person's game began to seem ageist and divisive. Mind you, that's not to say that there aren't a lot of musicians I wish had retired gracefully to their mansions in Surrey, Switzerland, or wherever - and some of them aren't even thirty yet!

I believe that the key to Richards' observation had more to do with the primacy of performance as opposed to recording than anything else. For many of the people mentioned, the jazz, blues and folk musicians, it was their trade. You wouldn't expect a plumber or a nurse to give up working at a specifically young age. For want of a better analogy, these musicians were skilled practitioners in their art. Over the last few decades we have seen the rise of a group of musicians, and I use the term loosely, who viewed 'stardom' as the pinnacle of their career trajectory. In a way The Beatles were to blame for this. When they began to spend weeks and then months in the studio at the expense of touring and playing live, and emerge at the other end with a hit record, other lesser-gifted musicians felt they had the right to dwell in the half-light of the 24-track studio. Many other people followed over the years who saw no point in 'paying their dues' by playing in front of live audiences on a regular basis. And herein lies the distinction or difference between artists such as Dylan and Neil Young and Hearsay.

My principal point evolves around the concept that there exists a group of artists who view performance as the *raison d'être* for their working life. I can state with personal certainty that performance is a

drug that keeps you coming back for more and more. There is nothing in the world to equal the interaction an artist gets from performing in front of an audience. Quite simply, it can induce a transcendental rush. You don't get it all the time, but once you've been there, there's always the feeling that you'll get it again. As regards Mr Dylan's career, just look at the titles of two of the best selling books about him - *Performing Artist* and *Song & Dance Man*. As far as I'm concerned both sum up Dylan perfectly (even though Michael Gray's book deals with Dylan's recorded work!). The phrase itself came from Dylan's mouth many, many years ago when he was asked to describe himself. Although it may have been a flippant and throwaway response at the time he uttered his reply, I feel that it adequately encapsulates what Dylan is all about.

I would seriously argue that, even when he was a Golden Chord and going by the name of Zimmerman, it was the rush of live performance that thrilled him rather than the thought of reaching number one in the charts. To have wandered into the world of folk, which at the time he picked up an acoustic guitar had about the same commercial potential as concertina polka playing, demonstrates that performance was what it was all about, not dreams of stardom.

Consequently, even now, past the age of sixty, Bob Dylan does what he's always done - plays music in front of people and sings his songs. The reasons for doing it are fairly simple - It's his job - It's his craft - It's his skill - It's all he's ever done for his entire adult life and he sees no reason to

stop doing it yet. Maybe one day he'll decide he's done it enough, but 'til then, it's a privilege to be able to see live and in-person one of the greatest artists this world has ever known.

### **2. *Why do we keep going to see him?***

I'll have to be equally careful in how I answer this one. Because I'm not 'we', whoever 'we' may be, I can only speak for myself and make vague suggestions about other people, but here goes.

This Easter (2002) I was ushered into the attic of a house in Philadelphia. It was a bit like being Howard Carter entering Tutankhamun's tomb. Floor to ceiling, every wall was covered in shelves. The shelves were groaning under the weight of vinyl albums, cassette tapes and CDs. There were box files all over the floor. There were tabletops covered in manila jiffy bags, bursting at the seams with CDRs. There were sacks of mail, bags full of CDRs, tapes and 'things' covering the floor. It was, of course, the attic of a 'Dylan Freak'. Not all the recordings were Dylan of course, but I'd wager the majority were. Sadly, my American host informed me, he couldn't keep up with the Dylan material he kept getting. Finally, at last, there was simply too much to listen to. We talked about 'the good old days' when news of a new bootleg recording came down the grapevine. The excitement and thrill of the search for a rare 1966 out-takes collection. The advent of cassettes and the swapping, the dealing and manoeuvring to get hold of that elusive gig in Spain or wherever. The problem now, we concluded, was the sheer volume of it all. Technology meant that we could

get a reasonable recording of a gig within a few days of it happening, and the major problem was that every gig was now recorded, often in several versions. Ergo - a lot of recordings are available. And possibly all of them were in his attic!

But what's this got to do with 'why do we keep going to see Dylan?' Well, I don't know but I've been told that there are some people who go to every gig. Yes, that's right, every gig that Dylan does. Now I can't quite believe that's possible, but I've heard stories about the Italian girl who was certainly following Dylan and the band around for some years in the 1990s. You may even have seen her - the girl with the sign begging for a ticket. There are, I know, people who plan their vacations around Dylan tours. I once heard tell of an Irish gardener who decided to have a go at seeing how long he could follow the NET for, living off a rapidly diminishing credit card and his wits. Even he had to stop at a certain point, possibly in order to appear before a bankruptcy hearing, so the only person I can think of who's been to every Bob Dylan gig is Dylan himself, and after Newport this year it's arguable that Tony Clifton took his place for that one (see *Man In The Moon*).

Personally, I can see how it might be fun to, let's say, follow the European leg of a tour. Maybe once in your lifetime. If I didn't have to work and had limitless amounts of money it might be an interesting way of seeing America, following the big black bus across the plains and up the mountain roads and down the dusty highways, but what if I liked somewhere and wanted to see more of it than just

overnight? Go back some other time I guess?

But why do people keep going? It's not as if each leg of the tour pulls off some sort of spectacular visual surprise à la Pink Floyd. In terms of new or rare material, it can be a bit hit and miss, no pun intended. Dylan does pull out surprises, and when he does they can indeed be quite remarkable. The problem is that an awful lot of the sets seem designed for a broader-based audience consensus, more 'greatest hits' than bold experimentation. When we look at the venues, however, his choice of material makes a lot of sense. He tends to play in the kind of places where the 'average' fan would like to hear 'Mr. Tambourine Man', or 'Times', because they haven't heard them live before.

Personally though, as I've said I don't have the time, money, or in present circumstances even the inclination to follow an entire UK tour, though I would have to make sure I see at least one show. I admire those of my friends and colleagues who do, however, and I would never dream of mocking them with the kind of 'get a life mentality' that Dylan himself implied in the Rome interview recently. In the same way that I like to collect one or two examples of recordings from each leg of the NET, ones where he has pulled out a particular surprise number or new arrangement, I find that one gig per jaunt is enough for me.

As I said about performing, the artist can get an indescribable buzz and the same can be said for audience emotions. At a good concert, there's a transcendental moment of ego dissolution when you

become one with the thousands of people around you and live an experience of that one moment. All surroundings disappear, all internal dialogue ceases. I guess that's why people keep going back, but for me, after being part of the spectacle of 1966, nothing could ever match that incendiary evening at the Free Trade Hall, even though a few of the Dylan concerts I've seen recently have come close in terms of engaging my heart and soul. Engagement is the drug, we're the junkies, Dylan's the pusher.

As I finish off this piece, I could give into temptation and assert that people keep going to see Dylan because they're anally retentive, anorak-wearing trainspotters, with too much time and too much money. Well, it might appear like that to outsiders, but knowing many people who do go to every gig I can state without fear of hypocrisy on my part that not all of them have too much money.

I thankyew!!!

### **Greil Marcus**

#### ***1. Why does Bob Dylan keep touring?***

I assume Dylan keeps touring because he doesn't like hanging around his house with nothing to do. The road is unpleasant, no matter how cosseted and insulated anybody is. Nobody can like it for itself. Beyond that it's all psychological speculation. Is Dylan paying a debt to the great (and even not great) blues and country performers, or acting in kinship or solidarity with them, by living as the economics of their lives forced them to do? Does his music come alive on stage in a way that it is not alive for him anywhere else? Is there someone he saw

once forty years ago and never since and still hopes might turn up at a show? Maybe he'll tell us when his book comes out.

#### ***2. Why do we keep going to see him?***

I don't know why anyone else goes to see him. I go, now, because since at least 1995 Dylan as a performer has been at the very top of his game (and he was on the 1991 Grammys, too - that firestorm of a performance, that Sphinx's riddle of a speech). You can get lost in the rhythm, or fly on it, or just follow its stroll. In years before, curiosity. Morbidity. Masochism. But now anything can happen.

### **Andrew Muir**

#### ***1. Why does Bob Dylan keep touring?***

I suspect that it is not good etiquette to quote oneself, but I have no choice in paraphrasing the concluding chapter of *Razor's Edge*, as it already contains my thoughts on this question. For those who cannot remember or for those who have never read it (naughty, naughty people), there I considered some of the theories that had been put forward in answer and postulated rather obvious reasons why they did not seem plausible. They were - still are - mostly negative theories, propounded by people who either don't like Dylan or don't like him doing what he thinks he should be doing, rather than what they want him to do.

Dylan has been abundantly - and more than adequately - clear on his reasons for doing it. With a tellingly uncharacteristic consistency he responds with the same thoughts throughout the years - that performing live is his job, his trade. Simply put, it is what he does:

*'A lot of people don't like the road,' he says, 'but it's as natural to me as breathing. I do it because I'm driven to do it, and I either hate it or love it. I'm mortified to be on the stage, but then again, it's the only place where I'm happy. It's the only place you can be who you want to be. You can't be who you want to be in daily life. I don't care who you are, you're going to be disappointed in daily life. But the cure-all for all that is to get on the stage, and that's why performers do it. But in saying that, I don't want to put on the mask of celebrity. I'd rather just do my work and see it as a trade.'*

That was to Jon Pareles in 1997. It is one of a number of interviews where he refers to touring as his 'trade'. It's a trade he continues working at because he likes it, as he also said in 1997:

*'There's a certain part of you that becomes addicted to a live audience. I wouldn't keep doing it if I was tired of it.'*

In the book, I turned the question around and asked: *'why shouldn't he'?* Or to follow on from the above, why on earth should he tire of it? I wanted to put a fake job advert in that bit of *Razor's Edge* - just think of it:

Situation Vacant:

Tour the world, working evenings only; you decide how you spend the day and night. You only work about one evening in three and you pick and choose when and where you want to work. Accommodation? Luxury bus or best hotels, your choice. Want to dine out? A different top class restaurant every night if you want. Only work at what you enjoy doing. Have loads of parties, lots of acclaim no

matter how you are doing, young women desperate to meet you everywhere you go, always people on hand to carry out your every wish. Fantastic pay and as many holidays as you want.

Not such a bad sounding life, is it? Yet still people wonder why he does it or even scorn him for living it. Not that they often propose an alternative, it's as if they just want him to disappear for some reason - and this group of naysayers includes people who think of themselves as Dylan fans!

I mentioned 'fantastic pay', and that can't hurt either. Of course, I am not at all subscribing to the theory that he needs the money - even if he did it hardly stretches one's imagination to come up with a plethora of ways in which he could make lots. Still, it is a very well paid 'trade' as well as being the one he enjoys. Work it out yourself: at somewhere between \$20 - 50K per show at circa 110 shows per year for 15 years. Pretty impressive, eh? Throw in a few million more for the Woodstock 2, the Papal gig, the Japanese businessmen and so forth - it's even more impressive. You may recall from days of *The Telegraph* the story of Dylan trying to avoid playing Hammersmith in February 1991 but being told by his advisors the money being offered was far too much to turn down. So money may be important though far from the sole or driving motivation.

Let's see, so far I have said - it's what he does, it's what he likes doing, it's a great life and he gets paid squidloads for doing it. That seems enough to be going on with.

## ***2. Why do we keep going to see him?***

In case he starts playing the keyboards and peppers his set with exquisite tribute songs

like 'Accidentally Like A Martyr', 'Mutineer' and 'Something' and marvelous covers like 'Brown Sugar'... OK, I added this bit after I had written the rest of it. Here's what I really answered:

Why do we keep going. Well I can only answer for myself, though by extension that may cover a number of reasons for my age group, and those even older; those of us who began going in the 70s or 60s. One reason is it's a lot easier than it used to be, if you've been working for a long time you are likely to have the money necessary to travel and international trips are much easier and more common than they used to be. Less pragmatic reasons cover a wide range:

It is a good way of keeping up with far-flung friends; again to refer to *Razor's Edge* I speak there of friendships made and sustained on the road, for example with my German friends, Chris, Stephan and 'Dangerous' Daniel. This results in me usually taking in a few German dates; I realise that such reasons are frowned upon by many but it is an added delight to me in the business of touring. Naturally this has transpired out of Dylan's willingness to tour so often. It is not that I am taking him for granted, but he has toured so regularly for so many years that one can build other pleasures around the central one of seeing him live.

You are seeing one of the best and most important artists of your lifetime. That is a good reason too. Less exalted perhaps but also relevant is that we are used to it. Bob tours, we go and see him – it has become a bit of a habit; and it is one I wouldn't consider breaking.

It is much more than just a pleasant habit though, and I do still get a frisson of excitement at the thought of seeing him, though maybe - and of necessity - only a fraction of the electric shock of anticipation that preceded his appearance each night in 1978 at Earl's Court (this was when and where I 'lost my Dylan cherry' as C.P. Lee once put it); but it's still there, and often repaid in more than full.

As we all know, there's a special thrill in being in the same hall as him when he reaches into a song and transcends it, himself and everything else in the universe except you, his voice and the song he is singing. It happened to me in Berlin last, at a show last year when 'Boots of Spanish Leather' was the song in question.

The next night in Leipzig was thoroughly enjoyable throughout. If lacking quite such a peak as the night before it was more consistently enjoyable. 'Enjoyable' – yes; Dylan likes playing live and I like being in the audience.

### **Paul Williams**

1. Why does Bob Dylan keep touring?  
*'Being on the road to me is just as natural as breathing. It's rewarding to thrill the crowd. That's all I can tell you about it.'* (Bob Dylan, 1997) And: *'My motivation is to go out and thrill people night after night. The songs I play are proven to be true and strong. Otherwise I couldn't sing them night after night.'* (still BD 1997) And: *'What I do is more of an immediate thing: to stand up on stage and sing - you get it back immediately. It's not like writing a book or even making a record...*



*What I do is so immediate it changes the nature, the concept, of art to me.* (Bob Dylan, 1981)

Dylan has answered question #1 many times, and always the same way (although sometimes he might say something like: *‘Why don’t you ask, “Why does B.B. King keep touring?” or “Why did Muddy Waters keep touring?”*” If it’s a way of life that has endlessly motivated and appealed to his heroes, his models, why should his own choice of the road life, of performing show after show, as a personal and aesthetic purpose, be a mystery to anyone? He enjoys it. It fulfils him. It’s ‘rewarding’. It makes him happy.

**2. Why do we keep going to see him?**

Many readers of this magazine have been fortunate enough to have both these questions answered for them in a single moment, when they’ve seen the spontaneous joy in Bob Dylan’s face while singing or playing with his band on stage, a radiant expression of happiness and fulfilment, clearly in response to his deep

satisfaction at what he and his band and, in a sense, his audience (the people he senses being ‘thrilled’) are creating now, right here, at this moment.

Such joy is contagious. Standing in the audience, close enough to see the singer’s face, one is delighted to be hearing such excellent music and to have this opportunity to be part of it, by being present at and participating in the creation of this marvellous work of art and equally marvellous experience. Why do we keep going to see him? Same reason he keeps touring: because something happens to us and to him at moments during the shows that one can’t get enough of, something that is worth chasing after.

*‘Standing by God’s river, my soul is beginnin’ to shake!’*

Indeed, standing in it, and feeling oneself part of it. River of music. River of human (and holy) creative energy. *‘It changes the nature, the concept, of art, to me.’* Yeah, and to me too. Where’s the next show?



Berkeley 2002 - Anonymous

# Witnesses and Mutineers

**Bob Dylan and Warren Zevon  
in October 2002**

**by Stephen Scobie**

Friday October 4th, in Seattle, was the first concert on the latest leg of Bob Dylan's Never-Ending Tour. There was no reason to expect any very startling changes. I had seen Dylan in two concerts scarcely a month before, in Edmonton and Calgary. Both had been decent shows, with Calgary the more interesting setlist, the more engaged performance. The band was playing up a storm, with 'Summer Days' especially providing an opportunity for Larry Campbell and Charlie Sexton to cut loose. In the interim, there had been reports - at first asserted, later denied - that Charlie was planning to leave the band. And advance rumours contended that, in any event, this fall '02 stretch would be the last leg of the Never-Ending Tour as we'd known it. Next year, the reports said, Bob would be cutting back, playing fewer and shorter gigs. These last few weeks of 2002 would simply be a rounding out of what had gone before. So there was no reason to suppose that Seattle would produce anything out of the ordinary, anything fundamentally different from what we had seen in Alberta a month before.

Boy, were we wrong!

My friend Renée always likes to rush the stage, and find a place in the front row, literally at Bob's feet. In Seattle she got a head-start on the crowd, and was into the venue ahead of anyone else; so she was making a bee-line for her favourite spot, front row centre, when, half-way across the floor of the Key Arena, she stopped dead.

What the fuck?

There, in the middle of the stage, where Bob ought to be, was an electric keyboard.

What was going on? Was Larry moving to centre stage? Where was Bob's mike? Surely he couldn't be playing keyboards? Was there a new band member? Should she move to the left or the right? Was she even in the right place on the right night?

For a long moment Renée stood there, trapped in an existential dilemma only a truly fanatical Dylan follower can appreciate. Then the rest of the crowd appeared behind her and pushed her forward, and yes, she held her line, ended up front centre, at the foot of whoever it was who was going to be playing keyboards.

Which turned out to be Bob.

We were all amazed.

Any Dylan fan knows that Bob does sometimes play keyboards, and always has - right back to those legendary performances at Hibbing High School, when, imitating Little Richard, he broke the pedals on the school's grand piano.

Over the years, there had been occasional piano flourishes, such as the brilliant 1966 *Eat the Document* out-take of 'Ballad of a Thin Man', or on albums like *New Morning*, and in one or two scattered concerts where he had wandered over to the side of the stage and played on piano a single song like 'Disease of Conceit'. But for the keyboard to be front and centre on the stage, for him to stand at it (and dance away from it) for two thirds of a total concert - this was revolutionary, unheard of.

As the setlist spread over the Internet that evening, the amazement grew. All over the Internet Dylan world there was a collective thud as jaws hit the floor. Over the next few nights of the tour, it quickly became accepted. Ho-hum, Bob's on piano. But that first night, that night in the Key Arena at Seattle, we were all like Mister Jones: something was happening, but we had no idea what it was.

So we absorbed the shock of the keyboards - somewhat aided by the fact that, on that first night in Seattle, at least where I was sitting, they were fairly low down in the mix. It wasn't until a couple of nights later, in Red Bluff, that the sound crew really had enough confidence in Bob's playing to push the piano forward in the soundscape.

Meanwhile, we had other shocks to cope with. 'Solid Rock', as an opener, was a wonderful surprise, but only later did we realise that the operative word was 'rock', and that the choice was less theological than musicological. Moving away from the bluegrass/rockabilly sound of recent shows, this new leg of the tour was immediately declaring itself as rock. Solid.

There followed a recognisable 'Lay Lady Lay', then an unexpected but enjoyable 'Tombstone Blues'. Bob still playing keyboards. Already it was clear that the setlist had been drastically revamped. And then this fourth song: what was it?

It sounded like a Dylan song, but none we'd ever heard before. Or was it a cover? Gradually, the word spread through the crowd. 'It's a Warren Zevon song.' 'He's singing a Warren Zevon song.' With a title straight out of Dylan's mid-1960s fondness

for adverbs: 'Queen Jane Approximately'. 'Obviously Five Believers'. 'Absolutely Sweet Marie'. 'Accidentally Like A Martyr'.

How many in the crowd knew about Warren Zevon? I remembered him fondly, but mostly for his work in the 1970s. Like many people, I'd written him off in the 1980s, and hadn't caught up with his recent revival. I'd read, of course, the September press releases about his imminent death from lung cancer, and the superb black humour of his public responses. *'I'll be really pissed off if I don't get to see the next James Bond movie.'* I'd envisioned the producers of the next James Bond movie rushing a rough-cut print to him. But it had never occurred to me that Bob Dylan would be singing one of his songs in concert -

- not even a song which, as 'Accidentally Like A Martyr' does, contains two essential Dylan phrases: 'Abandoned love', and 'Time out of mind'.

A moment's respite with 'I'll Be Your Baby Tonight', then Bob and the band are launched on something even more unexpected. Hey, if I didn't know any better, I'd swear this was the Rolling Stones' 'Brown Sugar'. Sure sounds like it. Have I come to the wrong concert after all? Holy shit, it is 'Brown Sugar'! That's Bob Dylan up there, singing *'I ain't no schoolboy, but I know what I like'*! And suddenly all the stories from the late 70s and early 80s about his liaisons with the black women backup singers come into focus. 'Brown sugar' indeed! And how come Larry and Charlie suddenly sound exactly like Ronnie and Keith, only better?

Still staggering from these revelations, it's hard to notice that 'It's Alright Ma' has a sensational new, piano blues arrangement. It'll take the tapes, especially from Red Bluff, to push this point home. The audience is already deep in shock when -

- what is this? Another Warren Zevon song? *'Hurry home early, hurry on home/ Boom Boom Mancini's fighting Bobby Chacon.'* A great boxing song. Who cares if it directly and explicitly refutes 'Who Killed Davey Moore'?

We're still lost. The old setlist, with its fairly regular alternations between acoustic and electric sets, has been thrown out the window. What is 'To Ramona' doing at slot #14, after 'Honest With Me'? Every song now is a crap-shoot. The pocket notebook in which I normally keep my setlist annotations has degenerated into a scrawl of question marks. There's a magnificent new arrangement of 'High Water (for Charley Patton)'. Then -

- then there's yet another Warren Zevon song. 'Mutineer', incandescently beautiful. Followed by the oddity of 'Floater', and the barn-burning, roof-lifting, eardrum-scraping rave-up of 'Summer Days'. It's a relief when we hit the encores, something familiar, 'Like a Rolling Stone' where we might expect it; even the bizarre use of the theme music from Exodus as an introduction to 'All Along the Watchtower' now seems comfortingly ordinary.

Seattle, October 4th 2002, may not have been the best Dylan concert I've ever attended (to judge from the tapes, Red Bluff a couple of nights later was a much more accomplished show), but it was

certainly the most unusual, the most astounding, the most (as it were) disconcerting.

Three Warren Zevon songs! And Eugene the next night added a fourth - 'Lawyers, Guns and Money'. This song was played at several other concerts, though 'Boom Boom Mancini' proved to be a one-off. 'Accidentally Like a Martyr' appeared fairly regularly in slot #4 for the next few weeks, and 'Mutineer', immediately after 'High Water', remained a constant point of beauty throughout the rest of the fall tour. 'Brown Sugar' has also stuck, as a permanent part of the repertoire, and Neil Young's 'Old Man' is regularly featured. Don Henley's 'End of the Innocence' has also repeated, as has Van Morrison's 'Carrying a Torch'. But if you were to characterise October's song selection in terms of any one reference point, it would have to be Warren Zevon. Why?

There's the obvious explanation that the songs constitute a tribute to a fellow singer-songwriter who is, with considerable humour and immense dignity, living out the last weeks of his life. On the other hand, as several people have pointed out, George Harrison was dying of cancer for months, and Dylan wasn't out there doing two or three Harrison songs each night.

Harrison, however, scarcely needed the publicity. How many Dylan fans, over the past few weeks, have been turned on to Warren Zevon? Or how many (like me) had once known him well, more recently lost him, and been urged to return? If nothing else, Dylan's song selection in October has brought back to notice one of the great talents of our time. Internet

Dylan newsgroups for a while turned into Warren Zevon fan clubs. Which is altogether a Good Thing.

What I remember best of WZ is the eponymous (always love to use that word) album *Warren Zevon*, issued in 1976. Outside of Dylan and perhaps the Stones and Joni Mitchell, it's clearly the best album of that decade. (Indeed, part of my difficulty in keeping up with later Zevon was simply that no single album he's ever released has quite measured up to this one.)

I love every song on this album - the mythic/anti-mythic 'Frank and Jesse James'; the hard cynicism of 'I'll Sleep When I'm Dead'; the urban anti-romanticism of the nevertheless very romantic 'Carmelita' - but what I love most is 'Desperadoes Under the Eaves'. It starts out with such sophisticated verbal play - as in the splendid internal rhyme '*If California slides into the ocean/Like the mystics and statistics say it will*' - but it ends up by abandoning verbal wit altogether, surrendering the words of the song to pure musical sound. '*I was sitting in the Hollywood Hawaiian Hotel/I was listening to the air conditioner hum/It went...*' And then the song (which is scarcely half way through its running time) abandons words to the non-verbal humming, '*Mmm mmm mm mm mm, mm, mm, mm mm, mm, m*' for, apparently, the rest of its length. Words do reappear, suggesting themselves in the background - '*Look away down, down your avenue*' - but in effect it is the air conditioner which sings the remainder of the song. A supreme verbal artist has realised that songs are

not, ultimately, about their words. Sound alone reigns supreme.

Listening to a lot of Warren Zevon in the days and weeks after Seattle, I realised that of course, as should have been obvious all along, the main thing is that he's a piano player. When he appeared on the David Letterman show, two out of the three songs he played were on piano. All of the songs which Dylan has chosen to cover feature, in the original recordings, Zevon on piano. So of course Dylan had to use keyboards.

The question that remains: did Bob choose to play Warren's songs because he wanted the chance to play piano? Or did he play piano because he wanted to cover Warren's songs?

And then there was that day in Paris, must have been in 1984. I'd spent the afternoon in the Marais, at the Picasso Museum, and was heading back towards my hotel on the Left Bank. I came out of the Métro at Odéon and there, on the carrefour, was a young woman busking, voice and guitar, singing a song I didn't quite recognise. It sounded so familiar, but her arrangement was very strange and, though she was singing in English, her accent was

so thick that at first I couldn't make out the words. Suddenly I caught a couple of phrases and realised what she was singing: Warren Zevon's 'Mohammed's Radio'.

Later that night the two experiences fused for me into a poem called 'Picasso's Radio'. It was the rhythm that determined the title ('Mohammed' and 'Picasso' having the same stress pattern), and it was the title that generated the rest of the poem. But I don't think I've ever acknowledged before how much the poem is indebted to Warren Zevon's song.

### ***Picasso's Radio***

*Picasso's radio played music  
that no one else had even heard yet.  
Sitting in Paris in 1911  
he was already listening to Bob Dylan.  
He knew The Rolling Stones by heart.  
He would say to Georges Braque, 'Georges,  
there's this really neat group called The Eagles,'  
but Braque was busy playing Bach  
on classical clarinet. 'Gertrude,' Pablo would say,  
'you'd love this record called Blonde on Blonde,'  
but Stein would give him a stony stare  
and turn a deaf ear. So Picasso would go  
back to his studio there in the Bateau Lavoir  
and turn up Beggars' Banquet loud, until Juan Gris  
banged on the ceiling. Alas, when he moved  
to bourgeois quarters in Montparnasse,  
Picasso left his radio behind. He always wanted  
to find it again, to tune in to Tina Turner,  
but some unscrupulous second-hand dealer  
has hoarded it away in his basement  
where every night he listens to paintings  
the world will never see.*

Zevon has always courted, with a minimum of irony, the fine edge in his songs between deploring and celebrating violence, between acute realism and sheer exploitation. His exquisite, classically-trained musicianship has uneasily co-existed with his love of guns. 'Excitable Boy' tips the balance from sociological jargon to crime-sheet pathology: 'Well, he took little Suze to the Junior Prom/ Excitable boy, they all said/And he raped her and killed her, then he took her home /Excitable boy, they all said.' Or, in another song, he took the problematic figure of the military mercenary, fighting colonial wars in Africa, and turned him, first, into a victim of CIA conspiracy, and then, second, into a Gothic horror avenging ghost: 'Roland the Headless Thompson Gunner'. But just when you thought that Roland had been safely contained in surreal fantasy, he abruptly turns into Patty Hearst, and the ghost story becomes real once more.

(Ironically, this may well be the last song that Warren Zevon ever performs live. On his stunning appearance on David Letterman's Late Night Show, Wednesday October 30th 2002, 'Roland' is the last song he sings. Letterman says that he 'begged' Zevon to perform this song, and band-leader Paul Shaffer provides an enthusiastic backup vocal on the title phrase: 'Roland the Headless Thompson Gunner'. Zevon, however, had originally planned to finish his set with 'Mutineer', which would have provided a much more satisfactory closure.)

Zevon's fascination with guns and violence always gave his songs an edge of

uneasiness. You might want to read irony into them, but you were never sure how much.

In the notes to his 1996 compilation, *I'll Sleep When I'm Dead* (another title which has become unbearably ironic), Zevon said of 'Mutineer': 'I intended this song as a gesture of appreciation and affection to my fans, none of whom bought the record.' Mea culpa: I didn't buy the original record either, but now - thanks to Dylan's performance - it's become my favourite Warren Zevon song. It inhabits my head. And it makes a lot of sense to think of the 'you' of this song, the addressee, as being, quite literally, 'my fans,' the audience.

The song is built upon the binary of 'witness' and 'mutineer.' While there is always the possibility of 'bearing false witness', a 'witness' is usually presumed to be true: acting as a witness is a fundamental assertion of social fidelity, one of the keystones of our civic life. If you are my witness, you will vouch for my truth; your testimony will affirm my place in the social collectivity. On the other hand, to be a 'mutineer' is to deny social cohesion; it is to place one's own act of rebellion above all communal values; it is to affirm an irresponsible gesture of individuality as a value, as an end in itself.

In other writings, I have suggested that the whole of Bob Dylan's career can be seen as a dialogue between the two positions of prophet and trickster; or, in his own words, love and theft; or, in Warren Zevon's words, witness and mutineer.

The bridge passage in 'Mutineer' reads, in the official lyrics:

*Long ago we laughed at shadows  
Lightning flashed and thunder followed us  
It could never find us here*

Even in Zevon's singing, the 'us' at the end of the second line barely registers; Dylan seems to swallow it entirely, so that 'followed' becomes as much intransitive as transitive. In the Berkeley performance preserved on [bobdylan.com](http://bobdylan.com), Dylan in fact transforms the line entirely: *'Thunder rolled and lightning followed'*. Apart from reversing the normal cause and effect of lightning and thunder, this version for a moment assimilates the song, twenty-six years retrospectively, into Dylan's own history. Rolling Thunder, time out of mind.

Zevon also pulls reverses. In his extraordinary, beautiful, heartbreaking, sublime performance on the Letterman show, he sings not only *'You're my witness/I'm your mutineer'*, but also *'I'm your witness/You're my mutineer'*. If Zevon's song is indeed addressed to his audience, then, in the context of his imminent death from lung cancer, this reading affirms his own fidelity to his listeners, and encourages them, in turn, to make something new out of every changing occasion of hearing it - whether it is sung by him, or, as it is now every night, by Bob Dylan.

In a deeply moving and beautifully written account of Zevon's appearance on Letterman, Howard Mirowitz wrote: *'I watched Warren Zevon tonight and I saw a dead man busy being born. Or busy trying. I'm now his witness. And now he'll always be my mutineer.'*

The Letterman appearance is already a legend, and deserves to be so. The physical toll is apparent in every step Zevon takes, in the stoop of his body, in the gravel of his voice. This body is dying, by degrees, in front of you. Yet the words he speaks are full of wit, good humour, black humour, wisdom and acceptance, dignity and grace.

I write as someone who has, as a witness, been through this experience. My deeply loved wife, Maureen, died of cancer a year ago. I have been a witness to the process in which the body turns mutineer against itself. I could watch Zevon in that interview, and marvel both at the candidness of his answers, and at the profound simplicity and friendship with which Letterman phrased his questions. Then when Zevon sang 'Mutineer', and his voice, on the word 'witness', reached beyond its new limits and broke, I wept. At the tragedy, to be sure, but also at the profound comfort and beauty of this song.

The month had begun for me on October 4th, in Seattle, with astonishment, delight, and renewal. It ended, on network TV on the 30th, with the same feelings - deeper, darker, sadder - but the same feelings, with the same song.

*You're my witness,  
I'm your mutineer.*